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ARTICLE

Theorising the Phallocene: Reconceptualising the Anthropocene through Gendered Power Structures

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Abstract

The term Anthropocene needs a re-evaluation for recognising and encompassing gendered factors that propelled Earth to transition into the current geological epoch. An exploration of the triad theoretical framework of phallocentrism, phallosphere, and phallocene unveils the gendered power structures behind environmental collapse. While phallocentrism is the philosophical foundation that maintains the masculine domination over nature, phallosphere represents an interconnected system of male-dominated and extractive machinery governed by phallocentric ideologies. These two concepts together necessitate a reconfiguration of "Anthropocene" as "phallocene," that is, an epoch shaped by the phallosphere's stratigraphic imprint on Earth. Therefore, (re)naming of the "Anthropocene" as "phallocene" addresses the gendered blind spot in geohumanities, simultaneously offering an alternative lens to diagnose the phallic roots of ecological crisis.

Keywords: Anthropocene; ecofeminism; masculine hegemony; phallocene; phallocentrism; phallosphere

To unmask the gendered imperative of epochal transformation, two questions are crucial: First, who are the true drivers of the Anthropocene epoch? And second, what if the architects of this epoch are not the universal "humans" as argued, but rather a historically dominant and fundamentally masculine mode of being?

The Anthropocene epoch, as proposed by (Crutzen and Stoermer), has profoundly reshaped our understanding of humanity as an active geological force.[1] Their arguments have made visible the embedded interrelations between "human" actions and the climate crisis, and specifically pinpointed the ways in which the "land surface has been transformed by human action," through centuries of extraction, settlement, and industrial growth.[2] Dipesh Chakrabarty, in "The Climate of History: Four Theses," further reaffirms these claims, radically declaring that "humans now wield a geological force," marking the "beginning of a new geological era, one in which humans act as a main determinant of the environment of the

[1] Crutzen and Stoermer 2000.
[2] Crutzen and Stoermer 2000, 17–18.

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planet."[3] Casting "humans" as an active geological agent capable of impacting Earth's geology, creating new stratigraphic layers, was indeed a revolutionary and timely intervention in the academic thoroughfare. However, the fundamental limitation of the term Anthropocene lies in its attribution of the responsibility to a universal "humanity." By positioning "human" as the central protagonist in the act of plundering the planet, the framework of Anthropocene envelops the hidden inequalities, power imbalances, and gendered ideologies that have led to this epochal diversion through ecocidal progress. The false neutrality of the term Anthropocene actively obscures the too often eclipsed fact that not "all humans" or anthropos bear equal responsibility for climate destabilisation, biodiversity loss, and planetary precarity. This debate over prevailing nomenclature thus necessitates a radical reconceptualisation. Theoretical alternatives like capitalocene, plantationocene, technocene, thanatocene, necrocene, followed by reparative countermeasures like chthulucene or symbiocene, have already challenged the universality of the generic "Anthropos." Similarly, phallocene reframes Anthropocene by investigating the gendered factors responsible for the plummeting ecological homeostasis and alteration of Earth's geobiochemical cycles.

By expounding on the interlinked concepts of phallocentrism and phallosphere, this era can alternatively be termed as phallocene. Phallocentrism is the philosophical and ideological foundation that has historically privileged symbolic masculine power. Again, the concept of phallosphere refers to the all-encompassing economic, political, and cultural systems, networked across the planetary surface. It is an enclosed chamber shaped by phallocentrism or phallic domination. Pertaining to these frameworks and by drawing on the material ecofeminism and feminist political ecology, the epochal transformation can be theorised as the phallocene. This re(con)figuration reframes environmental degradation as a process perpetrated by the closed loop of masculine hegemony and resultant gendered power structure.

1. Situating the phallocene

Ecofeminist thinkers have long mapped how systems of masculinity, capitalism, colonialism, and ecological degradation are interwoven. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva asserted that "the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature ... and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women ... prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones."[4] While Shiva blatantly argues that "the violation of nature is linked [with] the violation and marginalisation of women," Plumwood highlights that this inherent othering is deeply rooted in Western philosophy's overreliance on rationalism that tends to distinguish reason from emotion, human from nonhuman, and man from women.[5] Positioning "man as central," Plumwood critiques this structural embedding of masculine norms within modern rationality itself, which "exclude[s] women ... exclude[s] non-humans, ensuring that they don't get their fair share of the earth."[6] She calls it androcentrism.

In lieu of this, anthropocene feminism "highlight[s] the ways in which feminism ... might offer alternatives" to mitigate the Anthropocene and asks "how can feminism help us to

[3] Chakraborty 2009, 206–9.
[4] Mies and Shiva 2014, 3.
[5] Plumwood 1993, 47; Shiva 1988, 41.
[6] Plumwood 2002, 32.

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historicize, challenge, or refine the current understanding of the Anthropocene?"[7] Similarly, (M)Anthropocene, conceptualised by Giovanna Di Chiro, presents a key feminist intervention into Anthropocene discourse. The phallocene finds its precursor in Di Chiro's concept (M)Anthropocene, which also critiques the false neutrality of the term "Anthropocene" and holds "Northern" "white, upper class men" accountable for the current ecological precarity.[8] Both (M)Anthropocene and phallocene refute the conceptualisation of Anthropocene as a species-wide failure. However, while Di Chiro positions the identity of the Western white man as the default factor, the phallocene goes beyond this by identifying the Phallosphere, the global infrastructure materially erected by the phallic domination of nature, but not essentially by a specific kind of male population.

The term "phallocene" was first coined by David R. Cole in 2022 to define a "hyper sexualised" social world shaped by circulating phallic desire.[9] Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Cole identifies "phallic imaginary as a drive" that leads to major changes in human civilisation: from early state religions, monotheism, and industrial capitalism to digital technologies of the current age, arguing that this evolving structure of male desire underpins the Anthropocene.[10] Deviating from Cole's conceptualisation, phallocene can also be perceived as an epoch materially authored by male-dominated philosophies and institutions whose decisions have left measurable geological traces: oil spills, atmospheric carbon, plastic residues, and hydrological disruption. Therefore, the phallocene is not merely a hyper-sexualised milieu but a stratigraphically layered geological demarcation shaped by institutional masculinity governing extractive economies and ecological decision-making.

2. On phallocentrism, the phallosphere, and phallocene

Phallocentrism denotes the ideological and philosophical foundation that historically privileges the phallus, not as a biological male reproductive organ but as the symbolic locus of masculine power, authority, legitimacy, and subjectivity. For Luce Irigaray, the phallus is not simply the biological male organ but a "master signifier whose law of functioning erases, rejects, denies the surging up ... of a heterogeneity capable of reworking the principle of its authority."[11] Likewise, Clara Thompson reframes Freud's theorisation of "penis envy" as social envy, underscoring that women and the disenfranchised groups envy not the phallus but the social autonomy, recognition, and freedom that it embodies.[12] Phallocentrism is not merely a theoretical formulation, as Irigaray locates its lingering inscriptions "throughout the history of philosophy" (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, and Freud).[13] These exclusionary epistemologies have conditioned a phallocentric mindset that categorically extends beyond mastery over the feminine to the systemic exclusion of enslaved people, colonised Indigenous subjectivities, as well as nature. Rosi Braidotti equates phallocentrism with anthropocentric values, and thus the phallocentric othering has enabled a plundering of nature alongside the exploitation of human groups, each reduced to their utility value: as

[7] Grusin 2017, x.
[8] Di Chiro 2017, 488.
[9] Cole 2022, 61.
[10] Cole 2022, 63.
[11] Irigaray 1985, 50.
[12] Thompson 1943, 124–25.
[13] Irigaray 1985, 18.

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resources, labour, or land.[14] This phallic hegemony has also shaped contemporary worldviews, epistemologies, and social systems, which can be identified as Phallocentrism.

Against this backdrop, the concept of phallosphere captures the totality of those global institutions, discourses, and material infrastructures erected by the aforediscussed phallocentric values, philosophies, and ideologies. Phallosphere is not merely a cluster of institutions but a tangible and visible manifestation of Phallocentrism. Studies in evolutionary psychology and behavioural science have observed that, across history, men have disproportionately been the architects of high-risk, high-reward pursuits like excavation, anthroturbation, terraformation, geoengineering, and aggressive technologisation from early empire-building to current fossil capitalism.[15] Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature* (1980) evocatively showcases how the language of science, which is inherently sculpted by a masculine undercurrent, is itself saturated with "bold sexual imagery" that "legitimates the exploitation and 'rape' of nature for human good."[16] In this context, the infamous neofascist political chant that has resurfaced in 2025–2026 with growing popularity of far right ideologies: *drill, baby, drill* is not just a chest-thumping theatrics; rather, a crystallisation of a phallic logic of the scientific revolution, in which nature/Earth is rendered an inert, feminine object worth restraining, dissecting, penetrating, and ravaging which resonates closely with the symbolic role of the phallus as an instrument of male domination and assertive claim over the female body.[17] Phallosphere is therefore not merely domination over nature and environment, but rather it is the material scaffolding of an entire planetary order erected by phallocentric values. Vernadsky's concept of "noosphere" imagines a layer of human intellect encircling the Earth; similarly, the phallosphere is a visible layer materially and ideologically sculpted by masculinist systems of production, infrastructures, energy policies, and waste management.[18]

Finally, the phallocene is not a generic "Epoch of Human" but is the era characterised by planetary-scale transformations rooted in Phallocentric ideals and resulting from the institutions of phallosphere, leaving a discernible stratigraphic signature on geological strata. As a sedimented record, phallocene arises from the extraction, conquest, and infrastructural violence perpetrated by "hegemonic masculinity," registering a detectable layer on a planetary scale.[19] In the proposed "Anthropocene" epoch, plastic pollution, hydrocarbon residues, climate change, and rising atmospheric carbon are among the most widely cited stratigraphic markers. These factors are the chief, if not the only, determinants of the phallocene. It is worth noting how the production, distribution, and disposal of materials, shaping these stratigraphic markers, are inherently patriarchal and exclude women's participation, knowledge, and leadership.

IEA's report demonstrates that the representation of women in senior management roles at energy firms is "stubbornly low."[20] Moreover, the OECD/IEA suggests that in "2,500 firms classified in energy-related sectors, women make up just under 14% of senior managers."[21] This becomes even lower when we look at "chair of the board, CEO, president" positions,

[14] Braidotti 2013.
[15] Pawlowski, Atwal, and Dunbar 2008; Su, Rounds, and Armstrong 2009, 859.
[16] Merchant 1980, 170.
[17] Shiva 1988, 39.
[18] Vernadsky 1945, 10.
[19] Cornell 1995, 77.
[20] Pilgrim et al. 2021.
[21] Pilgrim et al. 2021.

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where the representation is "less than 5%," largely owing to the glass ceiling created by masculine hegemony.[22] Studies suggest that only "18% of plastics industry executives are women."[23] Paradoxically, the World Economic Forum's report (2021) on Ghana's plastic industry demonstrates that women comprise 74 percent of the workforce "in areas such as production support, washing, sorting and packaging" (hazardous and prone to poisoning); however, "only about 7% of women are in decision-making positions."[24] Contrary to this, studies show only a 1 percent increase in the global gender gap index can result in a "reduction of 0.14 metric tons of CO_2 per capita."[25] Again, female executives, board members, and municipality mayors are also linked to higher investments in environmental conservation and lower corporate greenhouse gas emissions.[26] However, as Salamon asserts, "Although women tend to be more environmental, left-leaning, and risk-averse than men, environments of high corruption restrain, tokenise, and marginalise women representatives, thereby limiting the impact they may have on environmental governance."[27] Despite holding frontline knowledge for climate adaptation and risk reduction, women's expertise remains underutilised and yet women are more exposed to climate change impacts due to their higher rates of poverty and reliance on natural resources for survival.[28] Interestingly, even when non-masculine genders hold positions that facilitate ecocide, they often operate as agents of the phallosphere. Therefore, the precarious outcome of the masculine power structure that silences half of humanity while plundering the planet is not accidental but a "man"ufactured catastrophe. If the Anthropocene was named without the consent of the feminine, the *phallocene* is named in an act of defiance.[29]

3. Agendas for post-phallocene futures

The theorisation of the phallocene does not negate other intersecting hegemonic factors (racism, classism, capitalism, etc.) nor does it suggest that all men are equally responsible, or that gender operates on independent grounds, but that it is phallic domination of masculinity that has historically led to the disenfranchisement of non-masculine genders as well as nature.

Combating phallocene necessitates alternative epistemic frameworks. United Nations' push for gender equality in climate negotiations gestures towards inclusivity.[30] However, the transformative efforts it calls for are still substantially absent from most of the decision-making outcomes. Promoting gender-equal community initiatives, where policy decisions rest directly with those affected by environmental degradation, can meaningfully counteract Phallocene's conquest. Alternative gender-equal, eco-pedagogical curriculum reforms are indispensable to de-romanticise and annihilate symbols of phallic domination: extraction, terraformation, anthropoturbation, geoengineering, drilling, mining, excavation, and so forth. The revolutionary act of recognising *Pachamama*/Mother Earth as a legal entity in Ecuador's constitution is a crucial initiative that allows citizens to sue on nature's behalf, bringing the Indigenous ethics of care and kinship directly into legislation.[31] The proposed

[22] Pilgrim et al. 2021.
[23] Wifitalents 2025.
[24] Odonkor and Gilchrist 2021.
[25] Sanchez-Olmedo, Ortiz-Yepez, and Faytong-Haro 2025.
[26] Berniell et al. 2025.
[27] Salamon 2025, 55.
[28] UN Women Watch 2009.
[29] Raworth 2014.
[30] UN Women 2024.
[31] República del Ecuador 2008, Article 71.

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framework of the phallocene works as an epistemological insurgency and invokes interrogation to test its premises, its validity across disciplines. It proposes to bring forth the invisible matrix of domination and advances novel ways of being, becoming, and co-surviving in the current epoch.

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