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Welcome to the Gynocene

Contribution to GTI Forum [Interrogating the Anthropocene: Truth and Fallacy](#)

Martha Van Der Bly

Eras in human history—like phases in our own individual lives—often only gain meaning in hindsight. Similarly, the introduction of the Anthropocene as a paradigm for understanding the relationship between Humanity and Earth might as well mean that we are at the end of an epoch—and that the drumbeats of the terrible ending are heralding new beginnings. Paul Raskin’s thoughtful and inspiring [essay](#) urged me to revisit my 2006 essay *Pananthropoi – Towards a Society of All Humanity*, in which I argued that “unless communications techniques collapse or natural disaster catastrophically strikes, one all-encompassing society will emerge, resembling what I call the ‘Pananthropoi’ – in analogy with the geological Pangaea (All-Earth) and Panthalassa (All-Sea).”¹

Paul Raskin identifies the essential fallacy of the paradigm of the Anthropocene: “By indicting a homogeneous ‘we,’ rather than a spent stage of history, the Anthropocene conceals a contested social system from scrutiny and shields it from culpability.” There is a satirical website called *The Man Who Has It All* that sells a T-shirt with the text: “*Womankind, noun. A gender-neutral term referring to both women and men.*” The Anthropocene paradigm is used in a similar way. When writing about the “Pananthropoi,” I noted that whereas the Greek plural “anthropoi” refers to humanity, the singular “anthropos,” when referring to a specific individual, is always male: “There has been no greater exclusion than the millennia-long exclusion and marginalisation of women, that is, half the human race in the intellectual creation of our world. This has fostered a world deeply out of balance – as our times demonstrate. It is time to restore the balance.”

Whatever we agree on as a presumed starting date of the Anthropocene, the truth remains that over half of the world’s population has had very little opportunity to steer its direction. The

Anthropocene was never shaped by women as political leaders, as scientists or business owners, as artists or intellectuals. Female talent and potential were sacrificed on the altar of Anthropos's seemingly unstoppable urge to dominate and to procreate, to be fruitful and to multiply.

Are there really just two leading protagonists in this epic tragedy: "the Promethean creature Anthropos and the bountiful planet Earth," as Raskin so eloquently writes? Isn't there a playwright too? A playwright who has set up the drama, writing the beginning with the ending in mind, which, for all we know, might still be a happy ending, *Hollywood-style*? After all, this epic drama is not set up with a written script, but—extraordinarily—the playwright has given the protagonists free choice to perform the play, improvisation-style, within some general stage instructions as formulated in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." And thus Anthropos did, dutifully executing the will of the gods, the gods who set in motion what would ultimately be Anthropos's path of self-destruction.

But we must give Anthropos more credit. Amidst the process of plundering bountiful Earth, extraordinary things have been achieved! The distance between continents magically closed through daily image projection and voice transmission: through Skype (founded in 2003), Facebook (founded in 2004), WhatsApp (founded in 2009), and Instagram (founded in 2010). Anthropos created his masterpiece: the Pananthropoi, reversing the break-up of Pangea with unparalleled global connection. We do live in the future. And yes, Earth suffered in the process, her resources depleted, her strength plundered, but look at what Anthropos achieved! If not morally or culturally, then most definitely technologically. It is not all bad!

While "planet" in many languages is a masculine noun, earth is in almost all cultures and languages feminine: Mother Earth, the feminine principle of creation. Our planetary phase is, I would suggest, better thought of as a terrestrial phase. After all, there are many planets. But there is only one Earth. The Great Transition on which we seek to embark is a redefinition of our relationship with Earth and as such with the feminine principle, or indeed with womanity (noun, gender-specific, referring to over half of the world's population). The whisper of the Earth is equally the whisper of millions of women that are globally ravaged and plundered. Healing the

Earth cannot be achieved without healing the unequal relationship between men and women globally. After all, while men and women are the same in many ways, the respective male and female experience in the creation of new life are of course fundamentally different. There is no reason not to expect that a society founded on and guided by feminine values would be radically different from the Anthropocene and offer new opportunities for the development of a new relationship with Mother Earth.

Reckless Anthropos has come to a standstill. Will reflection and silence create space for transformative progress? Finally, Anthropos has time to look back, to observe the land that he successfully explored and dominated. He raised a building, depleting all resources in the process. The earth is black and scorched. He planted a flag on top, perhaps an expression of hope for the completion of the structure or some sort of blessing for the building and its future inhabitants. Green and Blue. The Earth flag. Now what? The construction workers are not necessarily those best equipped to make sure the house is decorated and livable for all.

Perhaps a new chapter of the grand narrative of humanity is about to begin. A chapter that shows a new perspective on the relationship with our significant other, Earth. Perhaps in this new storyline Anthropos is no longer the protagonist, but merely a supporting character. Though we must not expect that Anthropos will leave quietly: he will not give up what he owns. He will never surrender. He will not hand over the land, his land to the earth, he will not hand over the nation-state, his nation-state to the globalists. The exit might not be peaceful. The transition, the Great Transition, will never be smooth. But there is something greater and bigger to which we have to surrender: *"It's the land that is our wisdom. It is the land that shines us through. It's the land that feeds our children. It's the land. You cannot own the land, the land owns you,"* as the Irish folksinger Dolores Keane sings. You cannot own the land, the land owns you. The playwright keeps on writing: a new chapter with new values, cultivating, what we have explored and nurturing instead of dominating. With new goals, new leaders, new protagonists. Paul Raskin suggests, "We have met the solution, and she is us." The Great Transition that we are witnessing, that we are feeling and observing, is probably the most radical time in the grand narrative of humanity and her relationship with Earth. I propose it is the beginning of a new epoch: the Gynocene.

About the Author



Martha Van Der Bly is a sociologist, actress, and independent filmmaker. Her company, Rose Rebel Productions, produces films that explore themes of common humanity and shared human destiny. Previously, she was Research Fellow at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics, and Honorary Visiting Fellow of City University London. Her research has won awards from the Royal Irish Academy, the World Society Foundation in Zurich, and the Boekman Foundation in Amsterdam. She holds a PhD in sociology from Trinity College Dublin.

About the Publication

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