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# An ecofeminist position in critical practice: Challenging corporate truth in the Anthropocene

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## Abstract

Drawing on selected discourses of non-essentialist ecofeminism, this article proposes and substantiates an ecofeminist position. This distinct position is shown to bring with it a capacity to challenge widely uncontested, corporate-produced truths regarding the benefits and the legitimacy of certain commercial activities. Three historical cases inform the discussion: the fights led by Rachel Carson against dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, by Erin Brockovich against hexavalent chromium, and by Vandana Shiva against genetically modified organisms. Distinguishing characteristics of this emblematically individual and critical activist practice include that it is aimed at fighting environmental degradations; it originates from outrage; it is sustained by dedication and courage; and it combines pedagogy, politics, and ethics. We show how this practice may be understood by reference to acknowledged ecofeminist tenets and in particular with the advocating of a holistic, respectful association with all forms of life on Earth. This is in stark contradistinction to dualist, corporate positions of self-interested detachment from the environment, and a corresponding denial of the entanglement of the social and physical worlds. We show how such an ecofeminist position has been capable of disrupting both established corporate truths and the discursive power relationships attached to them; and how it engenders an imperative that corporations

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must confront and engage with the deliberate, anthropogenic consequences of their activities.

#### KEYWORDS

Anthropocene, ecofeminism, Erin Brockovich, Rachel Carson, truth, Vandana Shiva

[M]ankind is not affecting climate change.

Robert Murray, Murray Energy Chairman and CEO (2017)

[O]ur leaders are failing in their duty to act on our behalf. Our current systems of governance are compromised by a focus on profits and economic growth. Politicians can be influenced by lobbies of powerful corporations and the media are hampered by vested interest of corporate advertisers undermining our democratic values.

Extinction Rebellion (2019)

How dare you!

Greta Thunberg (2019)

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

These opening quotations illustrate the diversity of positions associated with the crisis (Kenel, 2020) that characterizes the Anthropocene. While some condemn the deleterious impact of industrial and consumer practices, others disregard the entangled order of nature with society (Serres, 1990) and existential, planetary crisis (Latour, 2018). Central to the debate, as a number of organizational study scholars have pointed out, corporations are anthropogenic actors that persistently contribute to exceeding planetary boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015). Yet, countless corporations disregard any “intrusion of Gaia” (Stengers, 2017, p. 381) that might bring about a collapse of the social systems (Wright & Nyberg, 2015) on which they depend. Rather than responding to the ecological crisis entailed by industrial exploitation, many corporations prefer the convenience of an account by which it is condoned and/or legitimized (Bevan, 2008).

What we identify here is an ecofeminist position. Our primary objective is to show how this can contribute to disrupting the stability of corporate-produced accounts. Eschewing the separationist assumptions of modern dualism that structurally underpin corporate logic, ecofeminism (e.g., Plumwood, 1993; Stevens et al., 2018) relies on a more holistic ecology and builds on a respectful association between all forms of life on Earth. The ecofeminist position with what we shall show as its more complete accounts, facilitates an effective correction of lapses in material completeness, and any eventual distortions. To demonstrate the traits of this ecofeminist position, we analyze the way in which three selected environmental activists have reacted to ecological crises over the past half century. In so doing, we identify how the ecofeminist position developed here contributes to producing materially enhanced accounts of a situation previously understated in corporate communications. These alternate, enhanced accounts call into question the legitimacy of organizations in determining their own and partial version of a situation. A corporate position of “nothing to worry about here, let’s move along,” is transformed through ecofeminist position practice to “actually there is cause here for serious concern and immediate action.”

The selection and representation of three individual activists emphasize the importance of embodied experience, through which a critique of positions of self-interested detachment from the environment and the corresponding denial of an entangled world (Barad, 2007) can emerge. The ecofeminist position presents a challenge to modern, anthropogenic corporate practices in a spirit of respect for Earth’s limits. In the course of reconsidering the work of an American

conservationist, Rachel Carson, against DDT; American legal expert Erin Brockovich against hexavalent chromium, and Indian campaigner Vandana Shiva versus the patenting and sale of GMO seeds, we illustrate how the traits of an activist ecofeminist position sustain a polyphonic and diverse but coherent and dynamic critique, appropriate to the lethal challenges of the Anthropocene. By this account, an ecofeminist position exemplifies and realizes the growing contestation of the impacts of anthropogenic corporate activities—from school strikes for the climate, to the Extinction Rebellion social movement—and the emergence of new demands for corporate responsibility and accountability in environmental matters.

Further complementing the analyses of ecofeminism in organization studies (Bullis & Glaser, 1992; Gaard, 2001; Herles, 2010; Meira & Ariel, 1999; Phillips, 2014, 2019; Young, 2018), we use the diverse, nonprobability examples of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva to show that a coherent ecofeminist position underlies ethico-political practices of courage to question corporate truth, to create dissensus (Barthold & Bloom, 2020), and to challenge the discursive order of anthropocentric environmental destruction. Accepting as a rule that “the contestation, mix and interpenetration of different kinds of truth, as lived by different characters but organized” (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008, p. 529), our discussion then details how an ecofeminist position emphasizes the essentially contested object of organizational truth, suggesting that this position leads to the emergence of a disruptive order of truth that is nonessentialist and agonistic (Smolović Jones et al., 2021).

The paper proceeds as follows: we first introduce ecofeminism, explicating an exacting attitude to truth. Then, further to a review of our methods, we develop an analysis of the critical activist practice central to our theorization from the three sample subjects, detailing their engagement with ethics, politics, and pedagogy to encourage social change. In closing, we discuss how the ecofeminist position amounts to developing a more complete account of truth than current, corporate practices of truth.

## 2 | THEORY: ECOFEMINISM AND TRUTH

Ecofeminism, originally theorized (Gates, 1996) in the work of Françoise d'Eaubonne who asserts primordially that

the two most immediate threats to survival are overpopulation and the destruction of our resources; fewer recognize the complete responsibility of the male system, in so far as it is male (and not capitalist or socialist) in these two dangers; but even fewer still have discovered that each of the two threats is the logical outcome of one of the two parallel discoveries that gave men their power over fifty centuries ago: their ability to plant the seed in the earth as in women and their participation in the act of reproduction (D'Eaubonne, 1980 [1974], p. 66. Emphasis in original)

More recently, ecofeminism has been related among complementary traditions, including Marxism (e.g., Salleh, 1997), postcolonialism (L. Wright, 2016), poststructuralism (Plumwood, 1993, 2000), and care ethics (de la Bellacasa, 2012; Phillips, 2019). These traditions share a critical concern for the interlocking modes of exploitation that repress subordinated groups and threaten global life (Plumwood, 2000).

For Stevens (2018), ecofeminism is seen to arise at an intersection of two major, twentieth-century, political factions: (i) concern over the continuing struggle for women's rights and (ii) alarm at the ecological unsustainability of the industrial exploitation of nature. An Extinction Rebellion scenario is suggested by a confrontation of conservationist concerns for natural resources competing against the rights of global corporate actors and posing an ethical and environmental challenge to survival.

Ecological feminism as a field is not only concerned with the ways in which the environment impacts women's lives, it also traces historically and philosophically the points at which attitudes to women and attitudes to the natural world converge within a broader set of systemic oppressions. (Stevens, 2018, p. 121)

Selecting here Germaine Greer (Australian, 1939–) as a figure of the practice that characterizes a position of ecological feminism, Stevens analyses Greer's style as an "impassioned, performative, iconoclastic and often didactic" mode of argumentation (*Ibid.* p. 122). Steven's ecofeminist thus "employs the rhetoric of a public intellectual and activist" (*Idem*) that clearly centers ecofeminist practice on agon—for example, about female agency or environmental destruction—but within a "cultural practice of linguistic communication that emphasizes the responsibility of the speaker/writer for the words he or she utters and the potential impact of those utterances on others" (P. D. Murphy, 2011, p. 154).

This emergent ecofeminist position also gives notable attention to inclusive intersubjectivity since "interrelationship and the integration of the personal, social and environmental are key" (Phillips, 2015, p. 57). In this way, feminism and ecology are thought to inform one another mutually, through an emphasis on parallel domination of women and nature in a patriarchal society (Plumwood, 2000). Thus: "[t]he ecofeminist project seeks to illuminate how a 'patriarchal logic' [...] grounded in sets of interrelated dualisms have led to the privileging of rationality and instrumentalism that supports such systems of oppression" (Phillips, 2015, p. 56). Ecofeminism aims to establish a continuity between humans and nonhumans where philosophy, politics, and corporate practices have insisted on dualistic separations and mastery of nature seen as a stock resource to be extracted and managed. For the ecofeminist position we describe here, this involves deploying an ontological and epistemological openness toward nonhuman animals and the physical environment. Furthermore, an ecofeminist position is critical of "philosophical positions focusing on abstract and universalized ethics that seek to impose obligations and rights" (Phillips, 2015, p. 58) as opposed to considering "ethics as embodied and pre-reflective" (Pullen & Rhodes, 2013, p. 782). Therefore, ecofeminism underlines "the ways that humans are organically embodied and are part of and interconnected to the natural world" (Phillips, 2015, p. 58). This embodied connection with the environment is theoretically articulated to a system of power relations underpinned by patriarchy, as opposed to an essentialist and naturalized understanding of women's bodies (see Gaard, 2011). Thus, ecofeminism is a critical position that

upholds a transformative agenda and has initiated and supported social and political action that involves those outside the centers of power such as indigenous groups, the poor and working class, and women (Phillips, 2015, p. 57).

Furthermore, ecofeminism lays ground for a specific understanding of truth. Such ecofeminist understanding of truth is linked to an ontology of interconnectedness and holism, and the idea that there is a continuity between reason and emotions, as opposed to separation between reason and emotions (Mies & Shiva, 1993). This is also connected to the fact that there could be no ultimate and metaphysical foundation of scientific discourse and knowledge which would be underpinned by "a commitment to the pursuit of objectivity [...] [that] requires a belief [...] in 'the God trick', the disembodied view from everywhere and nowhere" (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 334). A truth production based on ecofeminism is a situated "standpoint" (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 331). Thus, as Phillips argues, ecofeminism "does not [...] offer a *grand theory*" (2014, p. 444, our emphasis) and could be understood as a "quilt" whereby "the parameters of ecofeminism allow for a wide range of emphases and methodologies [...] that share a commitment to core values such as justice and caring for both human and non-human life" (2014, pp. 444–445).

Key to this ecofeminism is the idea that the production of knowledge is linked to power and value(s). As Mies and Shiva (1993) argue, "[s]cientists since Bacon, Descartes, and Max Weber have constantly concealed the impure relationship between knowledge and violence or force [...] by defining science as the sphere of a pure search for truth. [...] out of the sphere of politics, that is, the sphere of force and power" (p. 51). As a result, "the separation of politics (power) and science which we feminists attack is based on a lie" (p. 46). An ecofeminist truth production, moving away from scientism's fiction of neutrality, would be grounded in the value of environmental justice, as opposed to patriarchy. In this way, ecofeminism considers that the truth for which it struggles is articulated toward activism and changing the world, by contrast with a detached and depoliticized view of truth. Additionally, ecofeminism is aware of the finite limits of truth and knowing, in opposition with "white western patriarchal knowledge production"

(Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 344) for which science is characterized by indefinite progress—enabling to respond to environmental challenges through technology such as geoengineering in relation to climate change (Barthold & Bloom, 2020). Ecofeminism deploys its own, diverse, and strategic practices of rhetoric which “necessarily reject dualistic and dichotomous thinking” (P. D. Murphy, 2011, p. 147). Finally, ecofeminism is aware that truth has the potential to be co-opted for negative ends in relation to the environment such as nuclear physics leading indirectly to Chernobyl or biotechnology leading indirectly to GMOs, which Shiva and Moser (1995) argue to be a danger.

The ecofeminist position developed here thus enables challenges to incomplete corporate truth claims that, grounded in patriarchal power relations, carry with them an objective of mastering nature (cf., Plumwood, 1993). As ecofeminist organizations and management studies on care ethics (Phillips, 2015, 2019, 2020; Phillips & Willatt, 2020; Young, 2018) have emphasized, there is a need to reconnect with the environment beyond the dualism of corporate environmentalism. Young further amplifies:

hypermasculine organizational culture is increasing its assaults on both women and the environment [...] [and that] [s]uch assault continues to be coupled with the ongoing refusal to give proper acknowledgement to the caring labors of women (2018, p. 294).

Our aims resonate with ecofeminist studies of sustainability (Gallhofer, 2018; Irving & Helin, 2018; Simon-Kumar et al., 2018) which are critical of the masculinist dualisms reproduced by hegemonic sustainability discourse. In particular, we connect with the need (2020, p. 154) for “the revaluation of epistemological frameworks to include what rationality currently denies and a focus on [...] a call for action” (Gallhofer, 2018; Phillips, 2020, p. 154).

### 3 | METHOD

#### 3.1 | A purposive sample

Our study is based on a purposive sample (Bryman, 2008) of three environmental activists, renowned for their fights against abusive environmental practice: Rachel Carson, Erin Brockovich, and Vandana Shiva. Some biographical detail is offered for each, delimited as context, and acknowledging their multiple, disparities. Beyond some immediate similarities that are subsequently mentioned in passing, the main focus we shall later develop is limited to their representation and practice of the ecofeminist position.

Rachel Carson (1907–1964) was an American aquatic biologist who began her career at the US Bureau of Fisheries writing brochures for the public. Noticed by magazines and publishers for her ability to combine stringent scientific observations, an emotional connection with nature, with stylistic brilliance, she published a series of remarkable natural history books on sea life that brought international fame and some economic independence. The last book that she published in her lifetime, *Silent Spring* (Carson, 2002 [1962]), is among the books that “can be said to have changed the course of history” (Lear, 1993, p. 28). It is a systematic indictment of the damage inflicted on nature and humanity by the massive use of DDT and other synthetic pesticides. Adopting the distinct, ecological stance that man is part of nature and thus dependent on it, Carson describes how the accumulation of DDT in the environment is a direct threat to life on Earth. In particular, the book’s title refers to a possible disappearance of birds following the mass killing of insects through pesticides. *Silent Spring* created a broad and polarized debate about this top-selling pesticide. Delivering a systematic critique of inadequate scientific and administrative controls over the chemical industry and its products, Carson met violent criticisms from “(1) the academic scientists investigating pesticides; (2) the government agencies that set pesticides policy; and (3) the chemical industry that had produced and promoted the pesticides” (Murphy, 2005, p. 90). However, she also received broad support from wildlife associations, conservation groups, and other governmental representatives, among which President Kennedy. Despite her death, only

two years after the publication of *Silent Spring*, Carson was instrumental in the *deinstitutionalization*, as Maguire and Hardy (2009) chose to label it, of DDT, and its ban from the USA in 1972 (Seager, 2003).

Erin Brockovich (born 1960) is an American environmental activist, consumer advocate, consultant, and non-attorney spokesperson who became famous for initiating and driving a lawsuit against the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) culminating in a major US\$333 million settlement in 1996, one of the largest settlements ever paid in a lawsuit in US history (Brockovich, 2022). Without medical, chemical, or juridical education, Erin Brockovich managed to build a case around PG&E having leaked hexavalent chromium in the groundwater and therefore causing a variety of ailments for hundreds of people of Hinkley, a desert community in California. Eventually, an eponymous film (Soderbergh, 2000) and in the title role Julia Roberts winning a Best Actress Oscar for her screen role “helped make the ‘Erin Brockovich’ a household name” (Brockovich, 2022). Coauthor of the self-help book, *Take It from Me: Life's a Struggle but You Can Win* (Brockovich & Elliott, 2001), Brockovich regularly delivers lectures on groundwater contamination (Beley, 2016) and makes regular television appearances, both as a subject (e.g., Kurtis, 2001) and a guest (e.g., TYT Politics, 2017). Since Hinkley, Brockovich has been involved in numerous complaints about ground water contamination in the United States and Australia. She presents herself in the following terms: “Erin Brockovich is a true American hero whose icon status and ‘stick-to-it-iveness’ only fuels her determination to expose injustice and lend her voice to those who do not have one” (Brockovich, 2022). Her actions and argumentation are standing objects of controversies.

Vandana Shiva (born 1952) is an Indian environmental activist, author, and adviser on intellectual property rights, biodiversity, biotechnology, bioethics, and genetic engineering. She received a Ph.D. in physics in 1978, and a few years later founded “the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology”, which is an associated social movement and an organization dedicated to develop sustainable methods of agriculture. She also founded the Navdanya movement “to protect the diversity and integrity of living resources – especially native seed – and to promote organic farming and fair trade” (Shiva, 2022). Author of over 30 books, Shiva is a critic of Asia's Green Revolution, an agricultural policy aimed at increasing food production in less-developed countries through higher yielding seed stocks and the increased use of artificial pesticides and fertilizers. Shiva claims that the Green Revolution has led to an increase in pollution as well as loss of indigenous seed diversity and traditional agricultural knowledge. She claims also that the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and imported seeds is responsible for tens of thousands of suicides among poor peasants who are unable to repay their debts. Instead, Shiva advocates that “a decentralized approach to agriculture, based upon a diverse array of locally adapted seeds, would be more likely to weather the vagaries of a changing climate than a system relying on only a few varieties” (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). As the figurehead of the alter-globalization movement, Shiva receives numerous criticisms. For example, her opposition to GMO is claimed to hamper the modernization of agriculture and reduction of poverty in rural India (Specter, 2014).

To facilitate a clearer appreciation of indicative tendencies in common, we suggest that Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva share a concern for the environment situated in admittedly differing sensibilities. Our objective is to show how their historic ecological fights are cyphers and how their figures become avatars for the contemporary outbreak of protests toward the effects, including outright denial, of the Anthropocene. The first two are US-based, whereas the third is from India. While Carson is careful not to articulate any societal criticism, Shiva openly advocates systemic societal changes and systematically refers to the dystopias of colonialism and neo-liberalism. Brockovich, meanwhile, adopts an anthropocentric stance characterized by protection of human health. Carson is a fervent defender of wild animals' rights and Shiva of a respect for the harmony of nature. Moreover, whereas Carson died in 1964, Brockovich reached her historical settlement for the Hinkley case in 1996, and Shiva continues to campaign for alternative approaches to growing food. Finally, whereas Carson positioned herself as a popular scientific author, Brockovich stresses that she has no degrees, and Shiva emphasizes her scientific training and competence. What harmonizes their evident polyphony is a dedication to producing and advocating a challenge to the truths manufactured and promulgated by the corporations manufacturing, using, or selling DDT, hexavalent chromium, and GMOs.

What unifies them further is that womanhood is an essential, categorical dimension of their fights. Carson was derided for being a woman (P. C. Murphy, 2005); Brockovich insisted on the importance of being a mother to connect

to the women in Hinkley; and Shiva argues that her fight against the use of GMOs sprang from a privileged access to the rhythms and flows of the Earth for women (e.g., Mies & Shiva, 1993). As our parsing of the data progressed, we became increasingly aware that they each ground their activism in a practice of critique. We acknowledge this to be a significant trait of an ecofeminist position.

For additional value in this brief contextualization, Carson is considered as a precursor of ecofeminism (Seager, 2003), Brockovich is widely accepted in the ecofeminist cadre (Aarsand, 2014) while Shiva is openly ecofeminist (Mies & Shiva, 1993). A characteristic of their ecofeminist position is a shared refusal to separate humanity (Plumwood, 1993), and in particular women, from all living entities, including the soil (Davies & Riach, 2019; Ergene et al., 2018; Gaard, 2001). The sense of outrage that we identify below as the starting point of their activist practice, is an expression of their ecofeminist position in the face of what they feel are scandalous environmental degradations caused by corporate chemicals.

They are also united in the effectiveness of their advocacy with regard to the crucial importance of caring for overlooked stakeholders, such as insects; the unassuming inhabitants in Hinkley; or poor Indian peasants. Thus, Shiva emphatically inveighs against the modern, capitalist practice of distinguishing and separating corporations from Nature that allows anthropogenic destruction (Shiva, 2016a) to appear nonproblematic. We detect a resonance between their activist practice of corporate criticism and ecofeminist theoretical positions, and we engage with exploring the situated epistemology (after; Haraway, 1988) of ecofeminist position(s).

## 3.2 | Data collection

Based on the purposive sample of Carson, Brockovich and Shiva, our data is a selection of texts: books (e.g., Carson, 2002 [1962]; Shiva, 2016b); press materials, in printed or electronic media (e.g., on Brockovich: Bracchi & McMahon, 2011; on Carson: Matthiessen, 1999; on Shiva: Senapathy, 2015); reportages and TV shows with or about them (e.g., on Brockovich: Kurtis, 2001; on Carson: McMullen, 1963); scientific publications about DDT (e.g., Maguire & Hardy, 2009), and hexavalent chromium (Egilman, 2006); as well as their rhetoric (e.g., on Carson: Glotfelty, 2000; on Brockovich: Rosskam, 2005; on Shiva: Schell, 2012), ecofeminism (e.g., Hrynkow, 2017), and ethics (e.g., on Carson: Cafaro, 2013). The rationale for this eclectic selection was to gather a rich collection of cues concerning our three authors: how they address media, behave with live audiences, and organize their interventions.

There is an unavoidable randomness in this data collection as the three subjects are not equally accessible in the same dimensions. For example, there is an abundant literature on Rachel Carson who is an icon of early US environmentalism (Hazlett, 2004); Brockovich has a trade to give visibility to the court cases in which she participates (e.g., Beley, 2016); and Shiva is the object of a steady media coverage (e.g., Barroux, 2018). There is also an unequal availability of media showing details of how each of them performs in front of audiences (e.g., on Brockovich: Beley, 2016; on Carson: McMullen, 1963; and on Shiva: Shiva, 2013b). Methodological incommensurability is a dualist construct with little evident value for ecofeminism. Here, in the spirit of practical holism, we persist with the challenge of interpreting the polyphony that we have openly acknowledged.

## 3.3 | Data analysis

Following an established tradition within qualitative data analysis (Harding, 2013; Silverman, 2011), we developed multiple stage coding of our materials. We started with *in vivo* coding (King, 2008) to describe what Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva speak about, coding some of their materials with their own words, with a particular attention to how they express their connections to nature and all forms of life on Earth. Examples of such codes were for Carson, empathy for animals, continuum between man and nature, care, and sense of wonder; for Brockovich: country girl, motherhood, corporate lies, toxicity, transparency, legal case, and stick-to-itness; and for Shiva: mother earth, fertility,

anti-capitalism, poison, protests, and scientific credentials. Several of these codes resonate distinctly with ecofeminist theory.

We then grouped these codes into themes with a focus on what Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva did, and thus verbs rather than nouns (cf., Bakken & Hernes, 2006), to assess what their environmental critique entails as connective practice. Examples of these themes are to show and explain, create a struggle, or defend the common good, but also a sense of outrage and pragmatism. This grouping was made manually and collectively through a series of critical discussions and we aimed at a thematic concordance across Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva, and themes that are not specific to any of them, but in common for all three. We did not retain critique or embodiment as themes as we considered that they were implicit to our focus on their actual activist practice.

Finally, and conforming with Eisenhardt's (1989) observation about the iterative character of qualitative data analysis, we grouped these themes in three dimensions—pedagogy, politics, and, ethics—as we found that these express as fully as possible yet with as little overlap as possible the key traits of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva's critical activist practice. As we were structuring our understanding of this practice, repeated movements between data and theory and discussions among coauthors led us to consider as central to their practice to challenge corporate discourses and corresponding corporate truths. Yet another round of discussion led us into connecting our data and preliminary findings with the specific ecofeminist views on truth. Resonating with our data, ecofeminism provided our analysis with cohesion and relevance that enabled us to refine our understanding of what Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva did and formulate that their fight of the partial and instrumental view of corporate truth exemplifies an ecofeminist position rooted in an embodied refusal of a masculinist politics violent to the environment.

## 4 | ANALYSIS

### 4.1 | Motivated by outrage

Daring to employ the subversive vocabulary of feelings (Phillips, 2014), the ecofeminist position demonstrated in Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva is grounded in their sense of outrage. Outrage at the careless and indiscriminate ecological destruction directly attributable to DDT, to carcinogenic hexavalent chromium in water, and to the commercial imposition of GMOs on crops. They are angered by a lack of corporate concern for the interrelationships of nature and mankind: as if corporate activities could be separated from their effect on the environment. They are determined to convince their audience of an imperative for action.

They formulate this outrage variously. Carson was internationally recognized as a reliable popular scientific writer when she published *Silent Spring* (Lear, 1993). Yet, she draws on feelings of melancholy and sadness through mentioning—with a romanticist literary style—that “early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song” (2002 [1962], p. 61)—to convey her dismay at the wholesale extermination of insects by DDT. Mixing “mythic narrative and scientific fact” (Oravec, 2000, p. 42), she expresses her rage through an alarming, nearly apocalyptic, “fabulous tale with a moral lesson” (2000, p. 46), whereupon her corporate detractors labeled her a hysterical woman who objects to science, technology, and progress (Hazlett, 2004).

Brockovich presents things even more personally: “I am a mom and I saw these people's health problems” (Brockovich in Kurtis, 2001). She reminds us that her engagement is grounded in an immediate sense of responsibility for other mothers facing what she considers to be an injustice. Shiva, meanwhile, sensationally compares industrial agriculture to war and mass murder (e.g., Shiva, 2014a). She claims that “monopolistic seed and GMOs and patents and intellectual property have really created a genocide in India” (Shiva, 2013a) to justify her “confrontational rhetoric of the antiglobalization and radical environmental movements” (Schell, 2012, p. 33 & 40).

Demonstrating a practice of the ecofeminist position, these activists openly display their affect (c.f., Phillips, 2019), while at the same time resorting systematically to the language and rigor of reasonable argument. *Silent Spring* comes with a 55-page-long list of references to “Principal Sources” (Carson, 2002 [1962], pp. 301–355). Brockovich provides

a profusion of concrete evidence to prove that the water at Hinkley was poisoned by hexavalent chromium (e.g., Kurtis, 2001). And Shiva explains in-depth why and how the widespread use of GMO causes biodiversity loss and social misery (e.g., Weinberger et al., 2014).

These are critical activists who aim at appearing driven by a commitment to unveiling things as they are. Positioning themselves as sincere, authentic, and trustworthy, they claim to speak the truth as individuals in response to an outrageous situation—which is destructive for humans and nonhumans they care for. And based on their sense of outrage, they develop a tripartite practice of environmental activism that we will now detail as characterizing a valuably distinct ecofeminist position.

## 4.2 | Tripartite practice

Using outrage as a stepping-stone, Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva engage equally with pedagogy, politics, and ethics.

### 4.2.1 | Pedagogy

The pedagogy of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva starts with showing the injustice of environmental damages of DDT, hexavalent chromium, or GMO through an appeal to the embodied experience of environmental destruction. Describing the consequence or a spraying in Northwest Miramachi in June 1954, Carson clinically dissects her sense of outrage:

Soon after the spraying had ended there were unmistakable signs that all was not well. Within two days dead and dying fish, including many young salmon, were found along the banks of the stream. Brook trout also appeared among the dead fish, and along the roads and in the woods birds were dying. All the life of the stream was stilled (2002 [1962], p. 131).

As Tommashow (2013) explains, one of Carson's strengths is to combine creative imagination with acute observation to lay the ground for an observation-based methodology that creates a sense of being there and enables an identification of the audience with the problems that she describes. Likewise, Brockovich was keen to display the samples of contaminated water that she had collected at and around private homes, pointing at their green color as a visible indication of its toxicity (e.g., Kurtis, 2001). Likewise again, Shiva refers to "illness curves" to show the negative effect of GMO on Indian peasantry, aggregating fateful destinies into forceful statistics. Thanks to an effective rhetoric of sincerity, authenticity, and trustworthiness, they turn the situatedness of their truth claims into a warrant of their validity, in what amounts to a demonstrative endorsement of the situatedness of knowledge.

Making danger and environmental degradation palpable is only the first step of their pedagogy. Carson (2002 [1962], p. 39) makes it clear that "[t]he problem of water pollution by pesticides can be understood only in context, as part of the whole to which it belongs – the pollution of the total environment of mankind"—typically an ecofeminist holistic contextualization. Correspondingly, Shiva explains:

The technology of genetic engineering, which made Monsanto a seed giant before it was just a chemical giant, that had brought us dioxins and that had brought us the toxins, that genetic technology is not a breeding technology. Shiva in Weinberger et al. (2014).

Building emotional, moral, and logical links that make people understand the urgency to adopt their cause is their recurrent concern. Being right is not enough, as activists, they want their audience to intimately share their conviction.

### 4.2.2 | Politics

Secondly, the politics of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva starts with the creation of a critical dissensus (cf., Barthold & Bloom, 2020), then displays courage in the following struggle to mobilize followers.

A contextual characteristic of *Silent Spring* is borrowed from the context of being in circulation during the Cold War: the idea that the United States should consider itself at war against pesticides (Glotfelty, 2000). In a way that coincides with the approach to science fiction film production of that time, Carson opens her book with the imaginary picture of a pastoral American village, to dramatize how a strange blight kills chickens, cattle, sheep, and even children at play, threatening eventually the extinction of mankind. For Carson, DDT should be fought with the same determination as the Soviet Union. By working within that contemporary Cold War paradigm, Glotfelty (2000) claims, Carson could circumvent public indifference to such an uncharismatic issue as pesticides by depicting them as the inimical purveyor of impending doom and give resonance to her voice.

Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva battle not only corporations. They fight to problematize an order of truth that encompasses business-friendly media and public agencies.

I embattle why our agencies do not listen to what is happening to the people [...] What we need to do and what we want to do at these meetings is reconnect you, reconnect your voice, and how you get involved [...] There is truth to power, you have a say (Brockovich in Beley, 2016).

To reconnect people and their environment Brockovich launched in 2015 The Erin Brockovich Foundation, a nonprofit organization meant “to educate and empower even more communities in their fight for one of the basic foundations of human survival: clean water” (Jones, 2015). No less bellicose, Shiva considers herself to be at war against an industrial agriculture that is itself at war against soils. “Every tool of the current [agricultural] system was designed for war” (Shiva, 2014a), and it is but imperative, she means, to declare war to these tools of biological and chemical warfare. Their vocabulary is filled with agonistic terms.

Going to war freely requires great courage. Carson, who was ill with cancer and had already serialized her ideas in *The New Yorker*, knew that *Silent Spring* would meet a fierce opposition from the chemical industry and the US department of Agriculture (Hecht, 2012; Lear, 1993). As Brockovich explains:

Anytime you get involved in a case like this, you take a risk. You could lose. You need to be prepared for that. But I never thought that way. I was absolutely not going to allow that tinge of doubt to enter my mind. I felt very confident. Brockovich in Kurtis (2001)

Similarly, Shiva has several decades of experience of being subjected to relentless ad hominem questioning, the challenging of her academic credits (e.g., Specter, 2014) and even her right to speak for Indian peasantry (e.g., Senapathy, 2015).

Their discursive strategy is political in that they take risk to mobilize people, ideas, and actions against a form of a destructive domination of nature that they find detrimental to all. In line with ecofeminism, they aim at a “radical restructuring of social and political institutions to obtain a more just world for all” (Phillips, 2014, p. 446). Carson's aim is one of mobilization to gain power against corporate market-based domination:

I feel very strongly [...] that we should have legislation requiring that these pesticide chemicals be thoroughly tested for genetic effect before they're put on the market. Carson in McMullen (1963).

Similarly, Brockovich recurrently spreads messages of empowering the people (Jones, 2015) to make changes (Beley, 2016). And Shiva introduces herself as an activist—together with author, pioneer, scientific advisor, and mother

(Shiva, 2022) at the service of freedom. Their choices of contexts, tropes and words, and, more generally, their use of the capacity of language to move and engage, aim at embodying a female fight against deleterious forms of corporate domination of nature.

### 4.2.3 | Ethics

Thirdly, the ethics of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva entails speaking for the voiceless, invoking science to render justice, and, eventually, promoting the common good. Recusing divisions, they aim at reconnecting those that corporate power practices of truth have disconnected in some ways.

Demonstrating an ontological and epistemological openness on nonhumans, Carson was among the first to speak for insects. The unsophisticated householders of Hinkley and the farmworkers of India are equally relatively voiceless by comparison with companies in the energy and chemical sectors, or institutions of state, and subject to a similar openness that challenge all kinds of discontinuities and separations. “They are treated as statistics and they are not heard” declared Brockovich about the former for the US senate Environment and Public Works Committee (2011). And Shiva ends a people’s Assembly with: “The bee has spoken, the soils have spoken this morning. And that verdict is clear: there is no place for poisons in our food!” (Shiva, 2016c). Following on their commitment to empowering the dispossessed, ecofeminist activists lend their voice to the interest of the voiceless, rejecting dualisms that run against the continuous character of the common good.

Making use of the rhetorical conventions of science and the legal system are key lifts of their ethics, the former being used to ensure the latter. Their ethics involves scientific facts, as shown by Carson’s (2002 [1962]) 55 pages long list of references in *Silent Spring*, Shiva’s academic credits, and Brockovich’s commissioned scientific experts. Science is to make justice possible. For example, since the deal with PG&E is confidential no one can access the actual legal argumentation (Welkos, 2000), but there are reasons to believe that the scientific study of hexavalent chromium (Egilman, 2006) played a central role in it. This is linked to the ecofeminist position of engagement with science, as opposed to a rejection of it inasmuch as it is not “scientism” embedded in patriarchy (Phillips, 2014, p. 444).

Their ethics also merge in a scientific and legal sense—for the sake of the common good. Beyond altruism and self-interest, it is an ethic that strives for more fairness in this world in line with an ecofeminist position: “Time brought me around. We all realized the ultimate goal was for the good of these people, and we just learned start working together” says Brockovich (Kurtis, 2001). Carson argues in an ecofeminist position that indiscriminate corporate practices put life and civilization, arguably two key elements of the common good, at stake:

The question is whether any civilization can wage relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right to be called civilized (Carson, 2002 [1962], p. 61).

Upon which Shiva answers:

We owe it to future generations, to live a habitable world, a world with fertile soils, bees and butterflies, a world in which food does not become a lethal toxin for them. (Shiva, 2013a).

Supported by a corresponding rhetorical mix, the ethics of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva, is one of emotional, scientific, and practical engagement with birds, water, and food—for now and the future—as concrete expressions of interconnected common values worth fighting for.

### 4.3 | Achieving results

Finally, where our three case-persons mobilize pedagogy, politics, and ethics, it is to achieve results through dissensus. Carson's objective was to "minimize the effects of man-made chemicals on the natural systems of the world"; she "was realistic in recognizing that some materials would have beneficial effects in controlling diseases and persistent pests, but she expressed concern that precautions be taken in the use and application of potentially toxic materials" (DeMarco, 2017, p. 129). Eschewing the structural dualisms of corporate truths grounded in a self-interested detachment from the environment and corresponding denial of the entanglement of the social and physical worlds, Carson was convinced by a continuity of the world-life between humanity, the animals, and the environment, she considered that materials that harm the environment through pollution would in turn harm people as well. Therefore, she aimed at a conscious use of science and technology, not a complete banning of chemicals—despite allegations of the contrary by representatives of the DDT industry and the US Department of Agriculture. Correspondingly, Brockovich focuses on respect for the rights of the inhabitants of Hinkley to live in a safe environment; Shiva focuses on a more just and democratic global regulation involving an Earth democracy (2016a) which "seeks to recover and revitalize a more holistic worldview, which understands the social, political, and ecological to all be intertwined within webs of intractable relationships" (Hrynkow, 2017, p. 3). Demonstrating entanglements where corporations try to maintain a separation is for them already a victory. And achieving victories, even provisionally, is essential to their activist practice.

Carson did not survive to see the banning of DDT and the creation of the US Environmental protection agency of which she is considered to have contributed to the creation (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). But, a year before she died, she declared at a senatorial hearing:

I feel strongly that a beginning must be made on it now, – in this session of Congress. For this reason I was delighted when I heard, Mr Chairman, that you were planning to hold hearings on the whole vast problem of environmental pollution. Carson (2018).

Likewise, Brockovich secured the then-largest settlement for an environmental dispute (e.g., TYT Politics, 2017) and helped reinforce the regulation on hexavalent chromium in drinking water in California (California Water Boards, 2015):

It offers any hope that tomorrow will be a better day, then I really feel that I've accomplished something, and I'm very, very proud of that. Brockovich in Brockovich and Andriani (2001).

Shiva considers the Republic of India's ban on GMO imports one of her victories (Shiva, 2014b):

We managed to get to some laws passed, labelling laws, laws to be informed of what is in the sprays that are put on the seeds. Shiva (2014a).

Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva are engaged in pragmatic demonstration of the validity of their truth claims and such victories are concrete proofs that they can show to mobilize followers.

To summarize, their critical activist practice derives from an embodied performance of outrage in the face of disembodied corporate practices of environmental destruction, endowing their claims with the legitimacy of an authentic commitment to justice and the common good. This embodiment of credible claims serves to mobilize followers through the media, empathizing with the stifled or mute victims in whose name who they speak. Accordingly, this courageous practice exceeds social conventions and roles. They endeavor appearing to speak the truth from the perspective of humanity and nature, free from the professional and defined speech of a corporate truth experts. Their own bodies are an extension, a translational metaphor of all the demands of voiceless victims of anthropogenic corporate-produced truths: they ventriloquize, for example, the inhabitants of Hinkley, to connect to those they claim they want to free from

oppression and those they wish will join their fight. Gaining access to the media amplifies their challenging fight against corporate-produced truths and mobilize their followers to win the victories, for example, in the legal context.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

In our analysis, we have shown the struggles of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva against corporate uses of anthropogenic chemicals to be consistent examples of resistance to corporate-produced truths. In a determined effort to delegitimize anthropogenic corporate activities, the ecofeminist position they adopt challenges the content, the scope, and the discursive mode of production of these truths. Drawing on a sense of somatic outrage, their practice problematizes the position of corporations as privileged and sometimes unchallenged authors of their own truths. This reveals the potential for materially richer modes of truth production based on an ecofeminist position to challenge the narrow commercial materiality of corporate truths.

Now, in our discussion, we consider more the issues for theory. At this point, we acknowledge superficial echoes between this ecofeminist position and antique parrhesia (e.g., Foucault, 2001) in that both combine ethics, pedagogy, and politics to serve social change. Here though specifically the ecofeminist position and practice are linked to ethical values. In particular the environmental justice that is invoked in fighting those injustices to people and soils linked to the use of GMOs or DDT and destabilizing the corporate truth practices that make such use and injustice possible (Barthold & Bloom, 2020) in the first place. In contradistinction to self-centered corporate monologues, Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva open organizational truth to an inclusive, ethical polyphony of new voices: for example, those of insects, local residents, and farmers that recollect the thinking-with and thinking-for of de la Bellacasa (2012). These voices introduce new and incommensurable dimensions into a fight against corporate-produced truths. Dimensions, such as the beauty of nature, the interdependency of the food chain, and a sense of security in the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the soil that sustains us. The ecofeminist position provides a vocabulary rich in ecological values—largely absent from corporate truths—such as the survival of nature, public health, and sustainable food security. The ecofeminist position also engages with debate in loci foreign to conventional corporate communication, such as social movements, activist press, and daytime television hosts. The polyphony of the ecofeminist position challenges the scope and priorities that corporations give to the truth they produce. In so doing, it brings an uncontrollable, lively dissensus while corporations aim at a bureaucratic, controlled order of truth. The carnivalesque dimension sometimes associated with social movements (e.g., Singer, 2011) finds an expression in this practice: a loud, lively, and untamed Babel of disrespectful claims, openly challenging the ruling social order. Ecofeminist practice does not complement solid organizational truth, it fragments it into something disputable, contingent, and fragile: turning truth into an object of struggle. No dissenting within (de la Bellacasa, 2012) here, but an explicit and realized commitment to fighting corporate abuses of power. The challenges to corporate truth from an ecofeminist position transcends an ethics of care by introducing a dissensual and conflict-based dimension. Whereas an ethics of care emphasizes connections with others, an ecofeminist destabilization of corporate truths adopts a voice that seeks to interrupt, to confront, and to undermine an adversary. From an ecofeminist position and central to the quest for truth is not only the interaction with-the-other through an ethics of care as scholarship has suggested but also—and as highlighted in our analysis—at the other confronting it as a powerful adversary that demands resistance through the politics of environmental justice. An ecofeminist position focuses not only on (re)connecting through care but also on disrupting and disconnecting through dissensus (cf., Barthold & Bloom, 2020).

Moreover, essential to the pedagogy of the ecofeminist position shown here, through our analysis of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva, is a direct engagement with science, the media, and law in their opposition to corporations. Science adds legitimacy to the enlarged materiality of their various claims; the media is engaged to diffuse and disseminate them and resorting to the Courts of law brings a legal validity. In making this clear, Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva perform a pedagogical attitude of transparency, inscribing and accrediting their role as defenders of the common good, by contrast with corporations acting in opaque ways which are purely expedient to their self-interest. What starts with an embodied outrage, continues with a courageous and authentic engagement in a struggle marked by

asymmetric relations of power. It then builds on a networked and mediatized discursive practice, to result in practical outcomes, for example, a court decision and/or corporate retraction. This ecofeminist position is inseparably associated with the pragmatic objectives of ecofeminist activists of establishing truth that is more complete than self-serving corporate truth. It is exemplified by the legal victories against global corporations while remaining within the limits of nonviolent activism and in line with genuine care for life (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

The political dimension of their ecofeminist position is epitomized by the manner in which Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva demonstrate practices of courageous truth-telling within the framework of asymmetric power relations. Corporations responded repeatedly to these claims for truth, with violence. Carson was publicly derided for not being a scientist, the firm of attorneys that employed Brockovich was brought into a legal controversy that nearly bankrupted it, and Shiva is recurrently targeted *ad hominem* by probusiness media and politicians. Characteristic of this courage and emphasizing the authentic expression of the inner activist, ecofeminist truth-telling requires the embodied presence of the activist. This courage is linked to the practical necessity to deploy dissensus and confront hostile others: this dimension of ecofeminism is overlooked in previous research (Phillips, 2015, 2019, 2020; Phillips & Willatt, 2020; Young, 2018). This courage is also fundamental to the credibility their supporters grant them.

To position it chronologically, the ecofeminist position of Carson, Brockovich, and Shiva confronting them with corporate environmental destruction suggests also that truth has become a hostage of “the very recent rupture in Earth history arising from the impact of human activity on the Earth System” (Hamilton, 2016, p. 93) known as the Anthropocene. On one side corporate efforts at rationalizing these impacts in terms of truth make claims about possible synergies between economy and ecology via, for example, green growth, sustainable consumption, or circular economy. On the other side is an emotional, dissensual, contextual, multiple, and uncontrollable ecofeminist position, one that is capable of initiating a new and dynamic standard of truth on the ground of its outrage-based denunciations of many of the promises of the former. Their ecofeminist practice of ethico-political confrontation delegitimizes environmentally damaging activities and confronts corporations with evidence of the deliberate, anthropogenic consequences of their activities. But it takes consequential efforts for an ecofeminist position to raise their concerns, demanding a fuller and more exacting corporate responsibility toward the Anthropocene. An ecofeminist position builds on the successive waves of warning that all living creatures on Earth risk a massive and irreversible transformation of their conditions for life to confront companies with their responsibilities as contributors to the Anthropocene. Its political stand is to warn that while the truth jury is out for deliberation, corporate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continue unabatedly.

Interweaving ethics, pedagogy, and politics to serve social change, the ecofeminist position is about material connectedness. It repudiates dualism in ontology and epistemology, primarily through connections between emotion and reason as well as between living forms and their environment, but also outrage and science. More specifically, an ecofeminist position connects an epistemology of truth production with a pragmatism of intervening on reality, establishing a continuity between what activists believe, do, say, and thus claim to be true. An ecofeminist position is one of solidarity (Smolović Jones et al., 2021) but based on struggle and dissensus to produce truth claims that are more open, more encompassing, and more complete than corporate accounts of truth. This ambition of material completeness contrasts with the incompleteness—strategically and effectively limited to narrow shareholder value—of corporate truth. The issue here is not a digital “truth” versus “lies”, as from strictly Aristotelian logic or post-truth claims. It is between *what is included in truth claims* and *what is not*. All accounts are incomplete, but some are more incomplete than others. An ecofeminist position aims at remedying the convenient incompleteness of corporate truth claims, which we assert is a vital contribution to democratic processes beyond ballot boxes and into civil and economic life, with regard to the emergency produced by the Anthropocene.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

From the true and fair view held in financial accounting, through corporate social responsibility, quality management systems, third-party certifications, stakeholder dialogs, open-source coding, and systematic product information,

corporations invest hugely and diversely in the production of truth claims that serve their strategic interest, secure their legitimacy, and settle their power. This is not least the case of the truth claims made to legitimize the environmental impact of their activities: claims which are increasingly scrutinized by governments, nongovernmental organizations, trade unions, social movements, and individuals.

In this paper, we show how an ecofeminist position makes it possible to build an opposition to environmental truth practices of corporations, building on the cases of fights led by Rachel Carson against dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), by Erin Brockovich against hexavalent chromium, and by Vandana Shiva against genetically modified organisms (GMOs). An ecofeminist position is something radically different from conventional corporate positions, which is why it creates the condition of possibility for an effective resistance to corporate practices of truth which aim at establishing the environmental innocuity of corporate activities.

From the ecofeminist position, truth-telling, relying on an ontology of nonseparation, is an open challenge to the corporate ontology of separating the economy from the environment. Building on a continuum between the body of the activist, ethics, politics, and pedagogy, the ecofeminist position accommodates the continuum between emotion and reason and connecting humans and nonhumans. In particular, an ecofeminist position repudiates the autonomy of deterministic, economic rationales in which corporate truth claims tend to obediently self-serve corporate interests. Ecofeminist truth-telling develops a courageous engagement in value-based and dissensual practices of truth that redefine the social practices of truth. We summarize this by suggesting that an ecofeminist position lays ground for a more complete truth, in the sense of a truth that accounts for more: more things, more people, more dimensions, and more views.

An ecofeminist position critically and relentlessly nourishes a warning to corporations that want to foreclose truth only to influence the agora according to their narrow economic interests. It is a holistic pragmatism that builds on broad action-based confrontations with those corporate practices of truth and denies organizations the possibility of seeking refuge in the palliative advocacy of self-interest and the false autonomy of the economic sphere. Ecofeminism stands for a creative resistance to those corporate-produced truths and brings a disturbing polyphony to confront projects of strategic corporate communication.

Ecofeminist activists dare to produce disruptive versions of partial, complacent, and incomplete corporate claims. To correct anthropogenic, material devastations, these activists call on the corporations to be responsible for their environmental destruction. In the name of the common good, ecofeminists insist on a life-or-death necessity *not* to separate economic activities from all forms of life and the environment. Is it plausible that such a project of communicative action can prevail? In the age of the Anthropocene, as Greta Thunberg forcefully stresses in our epigraph, what is at stake is the capacity of democracy to offer a future to the community.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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