Reimagining Leadership Studies with Feminist Philosophy and Speculative Fiction

Lydia Martin

Abstract

In this thesis I take a philosophical approach to leadership studies to chart new paths in the field that productively address critical philosophical and political issues related to sexual difference, power, and subjectivity. The prevalence of dualisms in leadership theory, which are dependent on an image of the human as a static and unitary subject modelled on Western philosophy's universal 'Man,' have served to reproduce power asymmetries in organisations and societies with significant detrimental effects for women and other minority subjects. While the recent 'relational turn' in leadership studies has marked a shift away from individualist ontologies, relational and practice-based conceptions struggle to account for the role of the gendered leadership imaginary in leadership practice. Furthermore, little consideration has been given to how we might study gender and leadership in ways that move beyond critique without returning to essentialising definitions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and 'leaders' and 'followers.'

To address these elisions and develop workable alternatives, this thesis draws on a 'thinking-as-research' approach to inquiry inspired by the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti. I argue that new materialism, as a philosophical framework and a political stand premised on a monistic rather than dualistic view of the world, is vital to reimagining leadership studies on emancipatory terms that exceed the boundaries imposed by humanist schemas of thought. This radically different stance, which I approach from a distinct feminist orientation, enables the development of new conceptions, frameworks and tools for leadership theory, practice, and research, with a major contribution being the conception of leadership as an assemblage. These developments are contingent on my engagement with new materialist concepts, namely assemblage, cartography, figurations, transposition, and *potentia*. The feminist speculative fiction genre comprises a crucial element of my engagement with the concepts. Selected speculative texts function as a vital resource for reworking foundational ideas and producing new knowledge in the leadership field. In engaging with philosophy and fiction, this thesis ultimately aims to create alternative registers for thinking and different ways of approaching leadership through engagement with cutting-edge feminist, new materialist, and literary-inspired perspectives.

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I would also like to acknowledge my parents and grandmother. Your encouragement, love, care, and ongoing assistance have been so vital in allowing me the space and freedom to write. Thank you for the listening ear and the bodily and spiritual nourishment. I will be forever grateful that when I most needed it, you provided me with a 'room of my own.'

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Preface

I did not set out with the intention of 'reimagining' leadership studies. After working on my initial project for a year, I was ready to go out into the world to deploy my methods, collect my empirical 'data,' and (hopefully) say something insightful about Western women's discursive constructions of 'gender' and 'leadership' via my participants reflections on stories featuring female leaders. However, in the rush to method I felt a sense of unease. I had positioned myself within a feminist post-structuralist framework, drawing primarily on the work of critical leadership scholars aligned with what has been referred to as the 'linguistic turn.' My encounters with other feminist literatures and the speculative fiction genre revealed myriad other intriguing ways of seeing and thinking about the world in terms of an 'ontological turn,' a 'materialist turn,' and a 'relational turn.' In fact, my entire understanding of what counts as 'inquiry' was quickly being turned on its head – if reading, writing, and thinking are also always modes of inquiry, as was being claimed by the philosophers and feminist fiction writers I was reading, where might this take me in leadership studies? And this question – defined by its unknowns – was too exciting to move on from.

What soon became apparent to me is that those philosophical paradigms which are defined as 'post-foundational,' namely post-structuralism and new materialism, cannot be subsumed into conventional social science methodologies. Nor do they allow for the kind of pseudo-objective, neutral and linearly ordered conceptual and theoretical work traditionally practiced in organisation and leadership studies. Instead, these radical lines of thought invite empirical research on terms described as the 'new empiricisms' or 'post-qualitative inquiry,' as well as, and perhaps more urgently, research and the production of ideas in a mode of 'practical philosophy' or 'thinking-as-research,' as it is called by Rosi Braidotti and others.

Braidotti (2011a), who is recognised as one of the pre-eminent thinkers on subjectivity, power and sexual difference, captured my imagination with her call for more creativity in thought so as to "bring about the conceptual leap across inertia, nostalgia, aporia, and other forms of critical stasis" (p. 13). Thinking differently, however, also means *doing* things differently; a process which is neither self-evident nor free of pain, as Braidotti points out and I soon discovered! As central as learning is to this process, so is 'unlearning' – the deep questioning of everything we thought we knew and accepted as given. And going off the 'beaten track' (e.g., movement without a procedural, rules-based method) requires embracing

the reality of 'lostness' and not knowing that comes with such attempts, a precarious and oftentimes disorientating position for a doctoral student. There is little doubt in my mind that I would have soon given up on my efforts to read, think and write 'differently' if it were not for feminist speculative fiction (SF).

From my feminist SF 'unteachers'[1] (Le Guin, 1986/2018), I have been gifted several crucial 'lessons.' These lessons, or practices, are embedded in feminist new materialist and poststructuralist thought, but were only made real to me in the unreality of fiction and fiction writing. Like leadership studies, with its well-established 'genre' conventions and power structures, the SF field is interwoven with long-held, masculinist traditions. To become an SF writer (or leadership scholar) means working within the systems of power that always exceed us as embedded and embodied individuals. Rather than resisting in an oppositional, 'heroic' mode, SF authors like Le Guin adopt a different strategy. Through how the stories are written, their characters and themes, feminist SF embraces resistance as a process of carefully tugging, undoing and refiguring 'webs of power' to make room for the voices of the 'other' and empower alternatives that expand on what is both thinkable and doable in our locations.

Integral to the becoming of the SF field and the multiplicity of disciplines it engages with (including feminist studies and leadership studies), are feminine-feminist writing practices. For Le Guin (1988/2018), the 'feminine' mode extends to both storytelling practices and the form of the (in)complete text, which she describes as taking the shape of a carrier-bag: "[T]he natural, proper, fitting shape of the novel might be that of a sack, a bag. A book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings. A novel [or a thesis] is a medicine bundle, holding things in particular, powerful relation to one another and to us" (p. 167). In the space of the carrier-bag, all the elements interact and relate with one another and with us in a continuing process. This contrasts to the 'hero' text where knowledge is unveiled by a hero (researcher) "pursuing luminous objects" with his weapons and words (Haraway, 2008, p. 160).

In my carrier-bag I have collected and cultivated all kinds of useful things – concepts, insights, stories, methods and so on. As Le Guin points out, a bag holds and protects; it is a tool for gathering. Enacted as a practice, this took the form of 'feeling my way' into ideas and making connections across disciplines and between concepts as I went, a process reflected in the writing style and arrangement of the thesis chapters. A bag, bowl, or container, however,

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[1] My 'unteachers' include Ursula K. Le Guin, Sofia Samatar, Margaret Atwood, Octavia E. Butler, Nicola Griffith and N. K. Jemisin.

is also a tool for distributing. From my own thesis-carrier bag, I plan to share leadership assemblages, gendered leadership subjectivities, and 'leadership *potentia*, which when transferred to the bag / box / medicine bundle of the academic article will interact and relate in different ways and with other elements in an ongoing process of creation.

Chapter One   Introduction

To make a new world you start with an old one, certainly.

To find a world, maybe you have to have lost one. Maybe you have to be

lost. The dance of renewal, the dance that made the world, was always

danced here at the edge of things, on the brink, on the foggy coast.

Ursula K. Le Guin, 1981/2018, p. 96

Let me begin with a story.

In 'The History of the Sword,'[2] a young woman named Tavis (Tav) attempts to insert herself into a living history of leadership that has traditionally excluded women from positions of decision-making power in organisations. For Tav, the sword functions as a metaphor for the kind of dominating, hegemonic, imperialistic power that is asserted in and by these institutions, and which serves to make the Olondrian Empire[3] into "a living thing, not a place to go and settle but a vast entity that grew and breathed and ate" (p. 24). Although Tav is a member of one of the ruling families of Olondria and a commander in the military, she wishes to hold Olondria responsible for the ways in which it consumes everything in its path (people, land, resources and cultures): "It's as if we're eating – eating them…As if Olondria can't stop eating" (p. 24). Part of Tav's desire to be recognised and taken seriously as a leader is to intervene in these injustices and inspire change, even though, as her lover Seren reminds her, she is unlikely to receive any recognition for her actions. "She, who knew nothing of war, told me that I, a woman, would never be remembered, that any victory would be [my male cousin's] and not mine" (p. 72). The sword, also being an extension of the body, is a device and identity that reflects the image of 'Man' – the venerated body of the warrior-hero – revered and celebrated (or feared) throughout history (p. 27), and so reified in and through the dominant cultural imaginary of leadership (Liu, 2020). As Tav knows from her

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[2] 'The History of the Sword' forms part of a longer work, *The Winged Histories* (2016) by Sofia Samatar. *The Winged Histories* is a speculative fantasy novel that tells the story of four women who struggle to record their stories in a world where women have been relegated as secondary to men, and history has excluded the female-feminine voice and body. As one character, Seren, observes, women do not compose the songs of history, only sing them, always coming behind the men (p. 190).

[3] Olondria is a quasi-Western nation that controls its poorer neighbours, such as Kestenya and its nomadic tribes, the Brogyars and the Feredhei, through unfavourable trade deals, land control, and military force.

study of the small number of swordmaiden's who have preceded her, such as Maris the renegade general and the False Countess, a woman's "path to this achievement" is "rougher and less moonlit than the paths of her companions" (*Histories*, p. 51) as to be 'different-from' is to be positioned as 'less-than' in relation to the male-masculine norm (Braidotti, 2011a).

A key difference Tav endures concerns the fact that female bodies, which bleed, leak, and give birth, have traditionally been used to explain and/or justify women's subordination to men and their exclusion from structural positions of power (Grosz, 1994), including managerial and leadership roles where the 'ideal worker' has implied a male body (Acker, 2006; Ford, 2005). Tav records how "the swordmaiden's monthly blood" can be a "cause for jest" among her followers (p. 51) as it is interpreted as a sign of feminine weakness, emotionality and carnality. Sexual dualisms of this nature rely on a negative and asymmetrical relationality "between women/femininity and men/humanity" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011, p. 388). As such, sexual difference presents a major challenge to aspiring female leaders because the histories of these assumptions are inscribed on their bodies (Braidotti, 2002).

Tav's own *Codex of the Swordmaiden* suggests that women should mimic male patterns of behaviour: "It is acceptable to follow the example of Maris, who slew two men in duels prompted by such insults [regarding her period], or of the False Countess, who used to discuss her flow openly in her camp" (p. 51). Following the fine red thread laid down by her predecessors along the labyrinthine path towards formal leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007), Tav believes she must "discover the secrets of men" (p. 3) and embody these 'secrets' in order to become a successful leader. It is a form of emancipation premised on women and other minorities securing their inclusion in the "hierarchically privileged domain" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011, p. 395) of the history of leadership by 'crossing over.' In crossing over, Tav is especially admired by the men who "have nothing to lose" (p. 72). It is enough that she never grumbles, does not speak the *che*[4] (women's language), and is independent and even ruthless: "She is happiest when singing songs of the road. Songs of the hearth make her body heavy and uncertain" (p. 75). Other women find it more difficult to relate to Tav, but

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[4] In *The Winged Histories*, women and girls share a 'secret' language, a language all young children learn from their mothers. "It was the language they used to call the goats, a barrage of clicks and humming, but there were words in it too" (p. 62). One character, Seren, recalls how as a child the "*che* inside me [was] like a well of gold. And then I grew up and [I discovered] this gold was worth nothing, nothing" (p. 217). No one speaks the *che* in public and it is never used to represent or speak about important topics – "It's only for fighting with other women, or for crying" (p. 217).

even so, "they, too admired you…Envy is a kind of admiration," Seren tells her (p. 193). Tav demonstrates how performing her identity as a 'swordmaiden' takes the form of a kind of mimicry that allows women to attain a degree of sameness and equality with men, whose achievements and collective investments in 'phallic power' have shaped popular understandings and norms of leadership (Höpfl & Matilal, 2007). However, this requires the female leader to "live hyper-abstractedly in order…to earn divine grace and homologation within the symbolic order" (Höpfl & Matilal, 2007, p. 198). As Tav quickly realises, it is a comradeship that "does not extend all the way to the ground" (p. 3). Occupying a space between the 'public' realm of work and war, and the 'private' realm of home and hearth, which is idealised in the images of the "unscarred women depicted in the temples," Tav is left feeling like "the owner of a body that would not serve" (p. 62).

Despite the difficulties faced by individual women on the path to accessing the spaces and places they have previously been denied entry on account of their biological sex, the idea of men "traveling without women," or of organising society and managing work without women, is now "[s]tupid. It doesn't make any sense" (*Histories,* p. 215). As Seren tells Tav:

> Girls herd cattle and even hunt…And other things have come to the surface, revived. I remember you [Tav] told me about the False Countess, a woman warrior you read about in a book…I remembered stories that seemed to resemble the story of the False Countess. A talk of a group of women defending themselves…a robber princess who lived without a home…I remembered these stories. Now it seems to me that they're all tied together, like a web, they seem like a series of gaps rather than a presence but when you lay them out you can see the outline of a skeleton on the ground. The outline of a woman who has died, but who was there. This is the outline of our women now herding cattle on the plain. (p. 215)

The double-edged arrival and absence of female bodies in so-called leader roles has resulted in a proliferation of research in leadership studies that has sought to compare men and women's 'leadership practices' in terms of effectiveness (Eagly & Carli, 2003), as well as elucidate the advantages and challenges of being a female leader in male-dominated and hierarchical organisational settings (Eagly, 2007; Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Other responses, questions, transformations and desires have also been activated, including the desire for recognition and representation of female leaders and their various 'styles' of leadership, as well as gender equality and pay parity in formal roles (Madsen, 2017). Such desires can be

understood as actively productive as they make things happen (Braidotti, 2011a), for example, an expansion on what is commonly presumed to constitute 'leadership' and the incorporation of formerly devalued behaviours and attributes, such as 'care' and 'relationality,' into existing models and terminology.

In much of this work, 'leadership' continues to be seen as synonymous with 'leaders' (Knights, 2018) or the leader-follower relationship (Munro & Thanem, 2018), and power is defined as a possession or object – "something elite, coupled to public prestige, [and] to the individual charisma of so-called 'leadership'" (Beard, 2017, p. 86). Within this framework, an analysis of Tav might move from a discussion of her struggles and strategies to be recognised as a 'leader,' to then focus on what is presumably *her* leadership – the ways in which she influences, inspires and motivates people to revolt against the Olondrian Empire – and how those around her perceive her actions and experience the effects. Like the heroic (masculinist) narratives which precede it and serve to obscure the 'invisible' entanglements of bodily, material and discursive relationships that constitute social phenomena like leadership (Knights, 2018), this presumably redemptive "great song" has a "great subject" (*Histories*, 2016, p. 218). Notions like 'women's ways of leading' (Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland, 2009) or a 'female leadership advantage' (Helgesen, 1995) cut into individualist leadership ontologies which intersect with popular mythologies of the 'Great (wo)Man,' transforming them into something else in the process, for example, an idealised vision of the female leader as a kind of saviour figure or organisational redeemer (e.g., Brown, 2019; Wittenberg-Cox, 2020).

However, while this might materialise different subject positions and identities for women, it is a mode of interpretation that continues to circulate within the delimiting confines of a 'map' drawn and colonised across the span of our patriarchal history; a map which relies on oppositional dichotomies to determine its topography and adheres to the logic of the unitary, fixed and exclusionary notion of the human subject (Braidotti, 2011a). Given that women have historically been situated in a subordinate position to men and knowledge has predominantly been produced from the perspective of one sex (Braidotti, 2011a, Grosz, 1994, 2005), as Benschop and Verloo (2015) observe, simply 'valuing difference' or focusing on individual achievement is "too easily absorbed into the ongoing reproduction of gender inequality" (p. 102) as it repeats the enduring Eurocentric, masculinist ideals of leadership and the gendered organisation. It is another instance of women (researchers and practitioners

alike) "[a]lways coming behind, picking up the bones that look exactly the same…[singing] as [we have] been taught" (*Histories*, p. 207).

Like Seren, who writes her observations of Tav's situation as a critique of the impossibility of women and other minority voices finding expression within the dominant (phallocentric) system of thought, I have "forgotten to forget injustice and symbolic poverty" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 60). As critical leadership scholars have recently noted, the 'odd field' of leadership studies remains mired in humanist and Enlightenment values and binary representationalist schemas (Alvesson, 2019; Knights, 2021; Liu, 2020; Spoelstra, 2018). The result being that across the interconnected domains of theory, practice and representational research practice, leadership studies continues to repeat, even if for the most part unintentionally, what the character Seren refers to as "[t]he closed and shining logic of men and women" (*Histories*, p. 216).[5] As I argue throughout this thesis, escaping (rather than simply critiquing) this logic and developing ethically and politically empowering alternatives, for both leadership researchers and those involved in leadership, is contingent on working from within a completely different philosophical framework – that of new materialism.

Positioning the thesis and its significance

New materialism re-envisions the world, matter and humans as monistic entities, a move which frees the ontological foundations of thought, knowledge and being from the conceptual constraints of ordinary dualisms (Braidotti, 2013a; Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). A monistic ontology consequently disrupts any perspective that rests on a binary relationship between pairs that privileges one above the other, such as discourse over materiality, culture over nature, and male over female (Braidotti, 2011b). In this way, new materialism "rewrites thinking *as a whole,* leaving nothing untouched, redirecting every possible idea according to its new sense of orientation" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 13). Often framed as a 'turn to matter,' a 'relational turn,' or an 'ontological turn,' new materialism recognizes "that in a monist world – because there is no 'other level' that makes things do what they do – everything is necessarily relational and contextual rather than essential and absolute" (Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 5).

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[5] As Pullen and Vachhani (2017) note, in the leadership literature there is a strong tendency to circumvent critical ethical questions related to gender, difference and subjectivity, taking these notions for granted and as self-explanatory.

New materialist ideas and concepts have found some impetus as research methodology in leadership and organisation studies, primarily through engagement with the work of Karen Barad (e.g., subject-object intra-action) and Bruno Latour (e.g., actor-network theory). There is also increasing interest in how material things and entities facilitate movement and affect in events of interaction (e.g., Ford, et al., 2017; Ropo & Salovaara, 2019; Sergi, 2016), although as Lenz Taguchi and St. Pierre (2017) note, this can easily result in another oppositional dualism between materialist approaches and social constructivism. Most importantly, however, is that the principles of new materialism reconstruct the dualistic and humanist foundations of leadership theory, practice and inquiry,[6] offering leadership scholars a plethora of new (and reconfigured) concepts to work with that are specific to this paradigm and which can only be applied in alignment with its ontology. My use of the term 'reimagining' in the title of this thesis reflects the fact that applying new materialist concepts is neither an exercise in 'filling-in-the-gaps,' nor progressing the field of leadership studies by simply adding a 'new' typology or set of insights to the existing canon. Because they bring with them their *entire* system of thought, new materialist concepts open new possibilities for critical and feminist leadership scholarship and thinking by doing work on *other* concepts that are of direct relevance to leadership, including gender, power, subjectivity, knowledge, ethics, and even leadership itself. For example, the notion and practice of cartography reframes power as "a situation or process" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4) that is always at work in leadership situations and in the construction and inhabitation of gendered leadership subjectivities. The contributions of this thesis thus lie in the careful 'transmigration of notions' (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 58) from feminist studies and new materialist philosophy into leadership studies. It is this thinking work that consequently constitutes the research project.

The purpose of transmigrating notions, which is a politically and ethically transformative exercise in each event, is to produce sustainable alternatives for the present (Braidotti, 2011b). In this thesis I introduce and explore a series of new materialist concepts – assemblage, cartography, figurations, transpositions, and an ethics of *potentia* – which link critique to creativity and enable the kind of non-dualist, post-anthropocentric, feminist

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[6] While few leadership scholars use the term 'new materialism' to describe their approach(es), there is a general trend in the critical leadership studies literature toward new materialist principles and theories, including an interest in affectivity (Knights, 2018, 2021; Munro & Thanem, 2018), becoming (Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2014), and materiality (Ford, et al., 2017; Pullen & Vachhani, 2013). Nonetheless, new materialist approaches have yet to break through the dominant mainstream/critical opposition that continues to structure and organise the field as a whole.

reconfigurations that Braidotti (2011a, 2011b) calls on scholars across the humanities and social sciences to work toward in their disciplinary locations. In working closely with the concepts from a feminist position, I aim to reimagine different dimensions of leadership and address existing impasses in leadership studies, specifically those related to gender and sexual difference. Consequently, this project aligns with broader trends in feminist organisation studies that share a concern with advancing the co-dependent goals of inclusivity, emancipation and empowerment, but from a position that is "concerned with equality for all women and human beings," not only "individual women reproducing male patterns of privilege and exercising power over everybody else" (Fotaki & Harding, 2018, p. 26).

Braidotti (2011a) stipulates that doing 'thinking-as-research' requires a radically different theoretical style.[7] Consequently, I have consciously stepped out of and subverted the normative conventions of a doctoral thesis, and made use of other critical tools and thinking devices, namely feminist philosophy and speculative fiction, as illustrated in the opening sequence of this chapter. The originality of this thesis is consequently located not only in what the selected new materialist concepts do to/for leadership studies, namely, moving beyond a purely critical orientation and toward workable non-dualist alternatives, but also in the vital movement between concepts, theory and fiction, an approach I outline and justify in the following sections.

Doing the thesis 'differently'

To do this kind of conceptual work as a *project* (rather than as discrete articles), I have taken a practical and problem-oriented approach that requires the researcher-thinker respond to the "provocations that come from everywhere in the inquiry that is living and writing" (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 603) and follow a 'map of her own making' (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 165). In other words, the researcher-thinker must embody the identity of the nomad. She is a traveller whose key imperative is to "suspend all attachment to established discourses and…resist mainstream discourses" on her journey (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 47). As I noted in the early stages of this process:

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[7] The phrase 'thinking-as-research' I borrow from Truman (2019). However, it conveys a similar idea proposed by Braidotti in conversation with Regan (2017) – that new materialism is a 'practical philosophy' that demands the kind of in-depth and immersive thinking work that remains in short supply in humanities and social sciences disciplines.

...there is something disorientating about the theory and concepts emerging from this ontological and epistemological position (and a feeling of loss as well? Loss of my individualistic sense of a coherent 'self' as an autonomous and pseudo-stable subject who can know and represent a reality that exists somewhere 'out there'). What does it really mean to call into question the taken-for-granted binaries and assumed stable 'truths' that inform my topic and discipline (and even beyond it?)... How can I fit everything into a neat and tidy methodology section when this 'I'/'me' who does the writing and reading is continually unfolding? My personal and academic selves are irrevocably entangled, and as Just (2011) puts it, "[t]he more I write, the more metamorphoses I undergo" (p. 270). (Excerpt from reflexive journal – September 2018)

For Braidotti (2011a), "the point of being an intellectual nomad is about crossing boundaries, about the act of going, regardless of the destination" (p. 58). The text itself thus comprises a 'nomadic' journey across multiple theoretical and fictional terrains and transitional spaces and places that the reader may not anticipate, but which yield multi-fold implications for leadership theory, practice and inquiry on the terms outlined in the previous section. For example, questioning the disappearance of gender-related issues and sexual difference in recent theorisations of leadership as a relational phenomenon led me to rethink leadership in terms of the new materialist notion of assemblages, an act of reimagining which forms its own distinct contribution to leadership theory (see Chapter 3). It is through this process that new problems also reveal themselves, as our encounters with ideas and things in the world 'force us to think' (Gherardi, 2019, p. 43). The concepts and ideas I have chosen to explore in this thesis are consequently those that have revealed themselves as useful in the very acts of reading, thinking, writing and dwelling with problems, a process I refer to as 'dancing at the edge of inquiry.'

'Dancing at the edge of inquiry' is a refrain that has sustained me as I have done the challenging work of bringing this nomadic text to life:

Dancing is all about experimenting with movement. It is creation with infinite possible variations; an embodied and situated practice that can involve any number of styles, flows, bodies, apparatus, and formations. Choreographing a dance involves full immersion in the process – experimentation with the different tools and ideas one brings to and develops through the process and in time with the music. Choreography

does not precede practice; you can't know beforehand what the dance will become or what it might be capable of. The dance, and you, shift and transform as you proceed, as you flow and adapt with its demands. It is always a dance of difference, not to be repeated as a formula.

Ursula Le Guin (1981/2018) describes this kind of dancing-thinking-writing as the "dance of renewal" that is always "danced…at the edge of things." An edge implies a sheer drop or a cliff face; a potential fall and even failure (a dancing off of the edge of inquiry?), but it could just as easily be the edge of a map where a blank space waits for new paths and patterns to unfurl. (Excerpt from reflexive journal – November 2019)

The inquirer-as-dancer is engaged in experimentation *as* inquiry. As Baugh (2010a) explains with reference to the new materialist philosopher Gilles Deleuze,[8] "to experiment is to try new actions, methods, techniques and combinations" without knowing "what the result will be" or what might come out of it (p. 93). However, it will "bring something to life, it will extricate life from the places where it has been trapped, and…create lines of flight from these stases" (Surin, 2010, p. 161). As St. Pierre (2015) also notes in her reflections on non-conventional, philosophically inspired research projects:

[T]he theory(ies) and/or the concept(s)…instead of a pre-determined research method, guides the study. From among many concepts, the researcher chooses those that help her think about whatever she wants to think about. She plugs concepts into the world to see how they work. (p. 90)

The collated chapters that make up this thesis are the 'findings' – or the 'lines of flight' – that have emerged from an experimental and creative process of plugging selected concepts into leadership studies and seeing what they can do:

I am currently immersing myself in Braidotti's nomadic theory, sexual difference theory, and posthuman critical theory and experimenting with a range of concepts that emerge from these paradigms that I think could be useful, such as 'figurations.' My understanding is that these concepts are multi-faceted, and can be used in a

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[8] While Deleuze never used the term 'new materialism' in his work, and is usually considered a post-structuralist philosopher, his ideas on 'becoming' and 'difference' have been credited as necessary pre-cursors to new materialist philosophies and theories of the subject and of social practices (Fox & Alldred, 2018).

number of ways to 'think and write differently' about women in leadership, as well as to reinvent or create new conceptual understandings of leadership itself. (Excerpt from reflective journal – October 2019)

Such a project in the context of a doctoral thesis is risky and unusual as the anticipated markers, such as a literature review, a methodology, findings and a discussion section, and not to mention, a clear and answerable research question(s), are conspicuously absent and replaced with something that looks more like philosophy. At the same time, however, this thesis does not aspire to provide a comprehensive and linear overview of new materialist thought and its various philosophical and methodological implications for the leadership field. Instead, it draws together diverse insights, critical commentary, and creative possibilities through its engagement with radical feminist ideas and speculative novels. Freeing our thinking and writing from normative conventions promises creative, unorthodox, surprising, open, and possibly even remarkable contributions through engagement with what are nascent and, for the most part, unexplored potentialities in my disciplinary location (Lykke, 2010a; St. Pierre, 2018).

Critical tools and thinking devices

In this thesis I draw primarily on the work and ideas of the feminist new materialist scholar Rosi Braidotti, who is recognised as offering "the most thoroughly developed and penetrating critiques of humanism and anthropocentrism" (Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 8). In fact, Braidotti was one of the first philosophers to coin the term 'new or neo materialism' (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), and a close reading of her extensive oeuvre reveals a clear and careful trajectory through the work of philosophers like Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault and towards new modes of feminist and posthumanist theorising, the regeneration of ethics, and feminist approaches to knowledge production that are distinctly non-dualist and post-anthropocentric (Braidotti, 2002, 2006, 2011a, 2011b, 2019). Alongside Braidotti, I also engage with the writing of Tamsin Lorraine (2011), Claire Colebrook (2002a, 2002b, 2004), Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2011, 2012), and Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 2005), all of whom locate their conceptual and theoretical developments at the intersection of Deleuzean philosophy with new feminist materialist perspectives on gender, sexual difference, and subjectivity (see Chapter 2).

For these scholars, working from a feminist position does not imply a sole preoccupation with empirical women, although the specificities of women's positioning and

experiences are often a central focus. A feminist orientation extends to questions and problems within a much broader domain of concern, aiming to intervene in all areas of human life by emancipating thought from "the oppressive force of the traditional theoretical approach" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 64). This is possible because, as Grosz (2010) points out, feminist philosophies of sexual difference address "the problem of all other thought," that is, not only "the gaps, lacunae, and absences of women and femininity," but also "the production of man as model, ideal, and goal" (p. 103). Feminist philosophy on these terms also enables different "ways of knowing, other ontologies and epistemologies that enable the subject's relation to the world, to space and to time, to be conceptualised in different terms" (Grosz, 2005, p. 173). A recent example of this is the emergence of critical posthumanism in the humanities, which is politically and theoretically rooted in Braidotti's (2011a) anti-humanist, post-anthropocentric *feminist* redefinition of the subject as materially embodied, embedded and in a process of continuous becoming. As such, feminism and gender politics should not be treated as just one 'thematic' concern by leadership scholars, but rather as a tool for engendering productive reconfigurations across leadership studies of the kind that I present throughout this thesis. In this regard, I join a trajectory of voices in leadership studies who advocate for and engage with anti-racist, post-structuralist and new materialist feminist theorists in the field of leadership studies (e.g., Knights, 2021; Liu, 2020; Lipton, 2017; Oseen, 1997; Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2014; Pullen & Vachhani, 2017, 2020; Sinclair, 2014).

To date, however, there has been a lack of sustained and deep engagement with Braidotti in organisation and leadership studies.[9] Reference is sometimes made to her work, but this tends to be as an explicator of other philosophers' theories, primarily those of Deleuze on whose work she builds many of her ideas and concepts (e.g., Fotaki, et al., 2014; Knights, 2015, 2021; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2014). In fact, I first came across Braidotti's work not in a methodology textbook or in my reading of the leadership literature, but in feminist literary criticism on the speculative fiction genre (namely Lacey, 2014). The designator 'speculative fiction' (SF) functions as an umbrella term which encompasses a variety of sub- and hybrid-genres, including science-fiction, fantasy, magical realism, dystopian and utopian narratives, re-written mythology and fairy tales, alternative

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[9] As Ford (2016) points out, "writers on leadership have…largely ignored gender theories," which is surprising "given a widespread recognition that organizations contribute actively to the ways in which gendered (and other) identities are constructed" (p. 229).

histories, and all manner of blends between. These tangles of narrative imagination are diverse but all "draw from the same deep well: those imagined other worlds located somewhere apart from our everyday one" (Atwood, 2011, p. 8).

Speculative novels by feminist authors are frequently engaged with poststructuralist, new materialist and posthumanist ideas which they explore in their narratives and through their characters (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018; Haraway, 2013; Hollinger, 2003; Lau, 2018). I was, and still am (see Sayers & Martin, 2021), taken with the feminist essayist, poet, and SF author Ursula K. Le Guin's assertion that speculative narratives

> …may be seen not as a disguise or falsification of what is given but as an active encounter with the environment by means of posing options and alternatives, and an enlargement of the present reality by connecting it to the unverifiable past and the unpredictable future. (1980/2018, p. 88).[10]

Speculative fiction plays a significant role in this thesis across multiple levels. First, as a mode of illustration, where I use SF both as a tool for explaining key theoretical ideas and concepts and as an alternative to more conventional empirical forms of data and knowledge. Fiction presents the kinds of leadership stories where, to borrow Seren's words from *The Winged Histories*, 'everything is up in the air,' yet women and their experiences are still central, and so along with the 'swordmaiden' (the leader), there are "all these goats and old women and feathers everywhere" (p. 220). The value of speculative narratives in this instance lies in their ability to open up "the entire matrix of intelligibility" (Land, et al., 2013, p. 140) within which organisation, leadership, and management occur. That is, they expand our perception beyond that which is given and perceived in individual experience, to reveal the role of other human and inhuman forces, affects and intensities in shaping experience and constructing social subjectivities and individual identities. In addition, and as I demonstrate

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[10] Before encountering Rosi Braidotti, or even any 'academic' feminist theory, I first found Ursula K. Le Guin. Le Guin's short story *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* featured in my first postgraduate essay outlining my initial ideas for engaging with fiction in leadership studies. Later, Le Guin's (1986/2018) powerful speech on the mother tongue and speaking subversively provided a call-to-action in my Masters thesis. But more personally, her work has encouraged me to experiment, to be imaginative, to make connections across disciplines, and to be brave. Le Guin has also inspired many feminist thinkers, including Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Cecilia Åsberg, to name only a few. Le Guin is one of my 'many mothers' and 'unteachers' (see Sayers & Martin, 2021), and her words and her wisdom infiltrate this thesis on multiple levels.

later in this thesis, *feminist* SF[11] texts are engaged in knowledge-producing, 'worlding' practices (Haraway, 2013, 2016), and so contribute to the development of alternative feminist knowledges for leadership.

Feminist SF and literary criticism have also formed an important part of my own sense-making processes and learning as I have engaged with new feminist materialist scholarship, and the different philosophical ideas and notions of the human put forth in this body of work. In their discussion of Donna Haraway's use of SF texts to inform her critical and creative thought processes, Grebowicz and Merrick (2013) argue that speculative imagination "effect[s] a cognitive estrangement from normative conceptions of science, nature, and the human," and points us toward the "construction of different worlds…from previously fixed words, metaphors, and concepts" (p. 128). Part of this complexity is expressed in the understanding that feminist SF is not just a source of 'better' stories, or a means of exploring social relations and politics via the engaging pleasures of fiction but is also a "privileged field of application" for building alternative ontologies and revising concepts and phenomena from different angles (Braidotti, 2006, p. 203). As Baugh (2000) further explains:

> A literary work *works* when the reader is able to make use of the work's effects in other areas of life: personally, socially, politically, depending on the reader's desires, needs and objectives...making use of the text to accomplish goals other than those of simply reading and interpreting it. (p. 36)

In choosing to engage with fiction in my work, I follow others in my own discipline who have recognised the advantages of thinking with the speculative mode to step out of the modernist 'realism' trap and "search for better ways of doing [and presenting] organization theory" (Pick, 2017, p. 802; see also De Cock & Land, 2006, for an overview of the different ways the literary mode has been engaged in organisation studies). Using fiction in this way

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[11] Speculative texts that explore and advance feminist ideas and theory have been labelled 'feminist speculative fiction' by literary scholars (Barr, 1987). This deserves further explanation as women writers are not necessarily feminist authors, and men may also adopt a feminist orientation in their writing. According to Cranny-Francis (1990), a feminist novel is "written from a self-consciously feminist perspective, consciously encoding an ideology which is in direct opposition to the dominant gender ideology of Western society, patriarchal ideology" (p. 1). Feminist authors may take a diversity of approaches in relation to this broad goal (Hollinger, 2003). Hence, I am not concerned with arriving at a single definition. Instead, I understand feminist literary texts to be those that are actively engaged with feminist discourses (Cranny-Francis, 1990; Lacey, 2014), and which take a specific interest in destabilising gender binaries, re-presenting the gendered subject, and re-presenting diversity and difference (Hollinger, 2003).

also serves to create "reading positions outside or beyond the traditional intellectual ones" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 68). As demonstrated in my short reading of *The Winged Histories* presented at the start of this chapter, the power of feminist SF resides in the disruptions, interconnections and insights such texts engender as part of our reading, writing, thinking and theory-making processes (Braidotti, 2002; Haraway, 2013). My hope is that readers of this thesis will have their imagination and curiosity sparked by the fictional stories that weave their way through each of the following chapters.

I employ five speculative texts in this thesis: *The Winged Histories* by Sofia Samatar (this current chapter), the short story 'Sur' by Ursula K. Le Guin (Chapters 2 and 3), *Ammonite* by Nicola Griffith (Chapters 3, 4 and 5), *Air: Or, Have not Have* by Geoff Ryman (Chapters 4 and 6), and *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E. Butler (Chapter 6). In making these selections I have been guided by some broad criteria. This included reading across a broad range of speculative genres (e.g., speculative fantasy, science fiction, alternative histories) and diverse authors lauded for their exploration of poststructuralist, new feminist materialist and posthumanist ideas (and realities) in their work (Hollinger, 2003; Lacey, 2014; Lau, 2018). Ultimately, my final selections were determined by the resonance these texts have held for me personally and their prescient themes, including a pandemic-like situation where individual women are tasked with resolving the organisational issues that arise from uncertainty (*Ammonite*), major technological change and human-machine intermingling (*Air*), and social upheaval due to human-made ecological crises (*Parable of the Sower*). It is worth noting, however, that a range of other speculative texts could have replaced any of these choices and given rise to alternative insights and equally relevant examples.[12]

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is made up of seven chapters. In this current chapter (Chapter 1) I have presented an overview of the focus and purpose of my project, its significance and the open, nomadic parameters that have guided my inquiry. I also provided framing for my engagement with feminist thought and speculative fiction. The summaries that follow offer a textual guide

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[12] I considered many texts before settling on these five, including works by award-winning feminist SF authors like Margaret Atwood, N.K. Jemisin, Larissa Lai, Nnedi Okorafor, Marge Piercy, and Jeff VanderMeer, to name a few. Engaging with these authors' works would no doubt serve to further illuminate the points I make in the following chapters, particularly with regards to intersecting issues concerning race, class and sexual orientation, as well as themes related to the mixing of nature, culture and technology in our emergent posthuman, and now post-pandemic, ecologies.

for the reader, signaling the primary uses and relevance of the concepts I engage with in this thesis and the 'reimaginings' they engender in/for leadership studies.

In **Chapter Two – Learning to think differently about gender and leadership**, I examine four feminist paradigms of relevance to leadership studies – cultural, liberal, gender de/constructionist, and new materialist feminisms. Assisted by exemplars from Ursula Le Guin's short story 'Sur,' I consider how each approach addresses and creatively reworks the 'problem' of sexual difference in leadership studies via their conceptions of gender and leadership. The purpose of this exercise is twofold. First, cultural, liberal and gender de/constructionist perspectives tend to operate either according to a dualistic ontology or are reliant on ordinary dualisms. To move beyond a reliance on dualisms, and especially sexual dualisms, it is necessary to "name the steps, the shifts, and the points of exit" that make this move possible (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 163). In critically examining the underlying assumptions of divergent feminist perspectives, I aim to challenge my own and the reader's conventional ways of understanding both gender and leadership, and the nature of the relationship between these concepts. In doing so, I make the case for adopting a new feminist materialist paradigm which reframes our view of reality and the nature of being in terms of embedded and embodied processes of becoming. This fundamental shift allows us to think differently about the role of the binary gender system in our day-to-day lives, the influence of feminist leadership ideas on women's status in culture and in organisations, and the fundamental political and ethical significance of sexual difference to leadership studies.

Chapter Three – Redefining leadership as an assemblage takes as its starting point new materialist philosophies on the subject and on social action which align with the recent 'relational turn' in leadership studies. However, relational and practice-oriented conceptions of leadership struggle to account for the role of the gendered social imaginary in leadership practice and tend to ignore the historical fact of the dissymmetrical positioning between the sexes. To address these issues, I offer the reader a new explanation of leadership as an assemblage. The notion of 'leadership assemblages' builds on recent conceptions of leadership as a relational phenomenon but shifts the focus from what leadership *is* onto what it can *do* and what makes this 'doing' possible. Resting on a monistic ontology, the notion of assemblage allows us to account for the interactive nature of discourse and materiality, and the socio-historical conditions and background presuppositions that frame events of interaction. In this chapter, speculative fiction functions as a vital resource for illustrating the dimensions of my assemblage framework in its intersection with new materialist conceptions

of action, experience and the role of discursive and non-discursive practices in events of leadership. Importantly for this thesis, assemblage thinking re-orients feminist thinking on women in leadership away from notions like 'women's leadership' and 'feminine leadership,' to highlight instead the multi-faceted role of power in forming individual leadership subjectivities.

In **Chapter Four – Cartographies of power and figurations of women's leadership subjectivities**, I engage Braidotti's notion and practice of cartography to develop a critical feminist analytic for mapping and representing the "complex workings of power" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86) that are involved in the creation of gendered leadership subjectivities. In a new materialist perspective, power is linked to subjectivity through the idea that we do not stand outside of the world but are immanent to it, an understanding which situates power not as an object or possession but as a "situation or process" through which social subjects and subjectivities are formed as part of a "collective enterprise" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4). The practice of cartography accounts for multiple modalities of power, which are repressive and productive at the external level, and entrapping and empowering at the personal or internal level. Closely linked to cartography is the concept of figurations. A figuration is an image that serves to illuminate in a concise way the network of relations that are constitutive of specific and contingent subjectivities for human actors (Braidotti, 2002). Drawing on examples from two speculative fiction novels, *Ammonite* and *Air*, I propose figurations as tool that helps us to discern and represent the complexities that are built into women's asymmetrical positioning in leadership situations and their current and changing status in contemporary leadership settings.

In **Chapter Five – Transpositions: Critique to creativity in leadership studies**, I introduce Braidotti's notion of transpositions. Drawing inspiration from music theory, transpositions signals the possibility of revisiting, reworking and reconfiguring ideas, concepts, and locations from qualitatively different angles. Transpositions consequently involves both critique and creativity, with each maintaining their singular profile (Braidotti, 2006). By holding these two strands side-by-side, we are at once critiquing what is actual but refusing to end with critique by reworking the very dynamics that have proven most entrapping and/or repressive within leadership situations, especially for women and other minority subjects. In this chapter, speculative fiction continues to function as an alternative form of empirical data on which I perform my own reconfigurations of selected power formations that were highlighted in Chapter 4. However, I also argue that selected speculative

texts are actively engaged in acts of transposition, which I demonstrate in a reading of Nicola Griffith's creative reworkings as they are presented in her novel *Ammonite*. The outcome of transpositions are empowering images, ideas and constructs that transform, rather than repeat, the repressive power structures embedded in dominant leadership discourses. Enacted by feminist researchers and speculative fiction writers, the practice of transpositions contributes to the creation of non-dualist, post-anthropocentric and emancipatory feminist leadership knowledges. By repositioning researchers and fiction writers as knowledge producing agents, transpositions as methodology opens out leadership studies to more creative forms of knowledge production which have, for the most part, been left untapped.

Chapter Six – An ethics of *potentia* for leadership assemblages builds on the theoretical and conceptual work of all prior chapters to propose an alternative ethics for leadership assemblages built on the pursuit of *potentia*, the desire to persevere. *Potentia* is not an ethical system that we impose on leadership nor is it a set of clearly defined moral guidelines for action, rather it is a concept that advances an ethics understood to unfold in time and through interactions (Braidotti, 2006, 2011b). Ethical relations in this model are those that increase people's powers of acting, that is, their *potentia*, whereas unethical encounters decrease people's joy and their ability to interrelate. My assemblage framework for leadership offers an important extension of current engagements with the notion of *potentia* in leadership studies by reframing the discussion of leadership ethics across three interrelated layers: relations within oneself, relations between the 'parts' of an assemblage, and between the 'whole' and the environment. Feminist speculative fiction functions as 'privileged field of application' (Braidotti, 2006) in this chapter because characters can be read as embodying an ethics of *potentia* on these terms within the context of stories of leadership. This rests on the supposition that speculative narratives, particularly ones where the authors are informed by feminist and new materialist ideas, serve to illuminate the theory by connecting it to concrete practices and social realities, and that the theory likewise illuminates the text by revealing the (un)ethical nature of unfolding processes and relations in leadership situations. In connecting the insights of feminist SF texts to leadership ethics, I close this chapter by highlighting the specific benefits of engaging this genre as a tool for learning across complexities.

Finally, in **Chapter Seven – Epilogue**, I reflect on the benefits and difficulties of doing thinking-as-research on the terms outlined in this introduction, and the value of experimenting with new materialist concepts and philosophy in leadership studies. I highlight

the particular advantages of adopting a feminist orientation, before outlining the multifold contributions each of the concepts I have 'plugged into' leadership studies – assemblage, cartography, figurations, transpositions, and *potentia* – makes to theory, practice and research in this field. Future research trajectories are noted, with special emphasis placed on the potential of feminist speculative fiction as a thinking device, a tool for learning, and a methodological practice in leadership studies.

'Turning together': Comments on the use of quotes, footnotes and citations

In bringing together a plurality of concepts, voices, texts and stories from across multiple disciplines, I have aimed to create a text where these elements 'turn together' in "an exchange, a network" that resembles more closely what Le Guin (1986/2018) refers to as speaking and writing in the 'mother tongue' (p. 146). While the "father tongue is spoken from above…[and] goes one way," the mother tongue is in conversation: "It connects. It goes two ways, many ways…Its power is not in dividing but in binding, not in distancing but in uniting" (p. 146). Subsequently, I have purposefully allowed room for other voices to move through and echo in the text in the form of extensive quoting (see Braidotti, 2011a, p. 67 for further discussion of this principle). It is through these words, and the ideas they convey, that I have 'felt my way into other ideas' (Le Guin, 1986/2018, p. 147) in what I see as an *ongoing* conversation with novelists, essayists, philosophers and leadership scholars.

The experimental nature of this research project has also materialised many insights and points that I have not had room to fully explore in the bounds of this thesis. As a result, I frequently use footnotes to signal to the reader where my arguments join to larger and ongoing conversations in both feminist and cultural studies, as well as to leadership studies. I also use footnotes to provide additional commentary on different authors' work, and to elaborate on selected arguments. Footnotes likewise serve a useful role with regards to speculative fiction, providing details on the plot and other textual and character-related details for readers unfamiliar with the texts.

Regarding citations, I have chosen to engage with female-feminist philosophers, such as Braidotti and Lorraine, alongside secondary sources, to explicate what are Deleuzean, Foucauldian and/or Spinozist concepts (respectively, assemblages, power as a situation and process, and *potentia*). My reasons for this are twofold. Practically, the time-limits imposed by the doctoral programme only allow for so much reading, which I have chosen to devote to feminist philosophers of new materialism. This decision, however, is also of political

significance. As both Ciulla, et al., (2018) and Pullen and Vachhani (2020) note, there is a dearth of engagement with feminist philosophers in leadership studies in general, and citation practices tend to favour men over women (see Bell, et al., 2019, for further discussion). I have yet to discover any sustained engagement with Tamsin Lorraine or Claire Colebrook, while scholars like Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti have received only marginal attention. Consequently, I see this thesis as a small step toward resolving the pervasive issue of invisibility and marginalization of female-feminist perspectives in the field of leadership studies.

Chapter Two   Learning to think differently about gender and leadership

Emphasising the social and political necessity of moving beyond reactionary critical perspectives centred on "contesting the recognised and the known" (Grosz, 2005, p. 162), feminist approaches in leadership studies have aimed to develop empowering alternatives to traditional, male-dominated visions of leaders and leadership. However, feminist perspectives offer radically divergent views on the theory and practice of both gender and leadership due to their underpinning philosophical suppositions. Interrogating these underlying assumptions is important because "how we understand existence and knowledge" is immediately connected with "how we develop and negotiate ethical and political issues" (Grosz, 2005, p. 165). In this chapter I work my way through four major feminist perspectives – cultural, liberal, gender de/constructionist, and new materialist feminisms – which are representative of broader trends in feminist theorising of gender and sex.[13] I examine how each approach, which is in direct dialogue with other perspectives and ideas, such as humanism, addresses and creatively reworks the 'problem' of sexual difference via their conceptions of gender and of leadership.

The purpose of this exercise is twofold. First, cultural, liberal and gender de/constructionist perspectives all operate according to a dualistic ontology or are reliant on ordinary dualisms (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011). As Braidotti (2011a) explains, "to move beyond phallocentric gender dualism," as feminist leadership scholars we need to identify the changes that are required and the "points of exit" that will allow for such a move (p. 163). This is necessary because 'thinking differently' is no easy task, given that in the West, we are embedded in a dogmatic, Cartesian way of seeing the world on account of our history. By charting a path through selected feminist paradigms, I aim to challenge my own and the reader's conventional ways of understanding both gender and leadership, and how these concepts intersect. Secondly, I argue that the images, ideas, terminologies, and knowledges that emerge from feminist-oriented inquiry and theorising are *active* forces in the social field. They produce material-semiotic events that can be simultaneously enabling and entrapping

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[13] There are, of course, additional feminist perspectives that could be added to this list, including psychoanalytic feminisms, socialist feminisms, post-colonial and anti-racist feminisms, feminist posthumanism, and so on. My choices here, however, reflect a concern with the major ontological and epistemological ideas informing feminist movements in leadership studies and which are broadly represented by these four paradigms (see Lykke, 2010a, for further discussion).

for sexed subjects. As such, this chapter marks an important addition to recent critical evaluations of masculinist and mainstream conceptions of leadership (see Liu, 2020, for example), demonstrating how feminist work intersects with dominant discourses to materialize changes in women's status in culture and in organisations. As part of this discussion, I make the case for the adoption of a new feminist materialist paradigm which reframes our view of reality and the nature of being in terms of embedded and embodied processes of becoming (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b). This reconfiguration allows us to think differently about the role of the binary gender system in our day-to-day lives and the fundamental political and ethical significance of sexual difference to leadership studies on monist, rather than dualist, terms. As a result, a new feminist materialist orientation relocates questions of gender and/in leadership away from a focus on representing purportedly 'masculine' and 'feminine' leadership styles, to consider instead the role of gender and other dualisms in shaping relational practices (Chapter 3) and producing leadership subjectivities (Chapter 4).

In this chapter and the one that follows (Chapter 3), I engage exemplars from Le Guin's short story 'Sur' (the Spanish word for 'south') to illustrate some of the subtle shifts and changes in perspective engendered by each the four feminist approaches.[14] Engaging fiction to examine a topic and/or concept(s) from different angles is a common approach in philosophy, as well as in cultural and feminist studies (see Braidotti, 2002, 2011b; Colebrook, 2004; Lorraine, 2011, for examples). To briefly summarize the plot, in 'Sur' a group of nine South American women are inspired by the explorer Captain R. F. Scott's journalistic account of the British National Antarctic Expedition of 1902-1904, to travel to Antarctica 'to go and to see' the polar snows. The narrator asks at the beginning of the story: "Well, if Captain Scott can do it, why can't we?" (p. 318). In this speculative and female-centric recreation of a classic leadership story (the 'hero's journey'), Le Guin's brave and intrepid women traverse the continent for several months, arriving at the South Pole before any of the men do. No one loses their life, although they do endure "hard work, risk and privation" (p. 319), and a baby girl is born. On their journey, the women re-map the terrain, giving new names to all the landmarks, such as re-christening the 'Beardmore' the 'Florence Nightingale Glacier.' However, on their return to South America, they tell no one of their experiences,

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[14] I have previously discussed this short story in Sayers and Martin (2021). However, whereas in the article we examine the insights 'Sur' offers to the topic of 'writing differently,' in this and the following chapter I present a more straightforward reading of the story through a focus on the characters and on unfolding events.

except through 'fairy tales' and 'myths' recounted in hushed whispers to their small children. In drawing on this story, I mark different moments on the way to learning to think differently about both gender and leadership.

Essentialism versus constructionism

In this section I consider what we might refer to as the dominant 'mainstream' feminist approaches to reconfiguring gender on emancipatory terms that are at work in leadership studies (and society more generally). Namely, an essentialist or deterministic perspective that sees masculinity and femininity as the outcome of sexed bodies and nature, and in direct opposition to this position, a view of sex (or 'maleness' and 'femaleness' as we know them today) as the outcome of gender which is understood to be socially constructed. The former position supports an idea of women leaders as inherently different from their male counterparts, while the latter perspective appeals to the idea of an inherent sameness between men and women that has been obscured by patriarchal ideologies. I offer a short examination of these perspectives and a critique of the strategies engendered by each of these approaches in the context of leadership studies which are broadly aligned with cultural and liberal feminist aims. I then critically evaluate the Western humanist philosophical presuppositions that underlie (and constrain) these perspectives, including their intersection with individualist conceptions of leadership.

Naturalising gender: Essentialist perspectives in leadership studies

When the women in 'Sur' first arrive at the Antarctic, they visit Hut Point, "where a large structure built by Captain Scott's party stood" (p. 322). The surrounding area is a rubbish tip, and many animals have been butchered as evidenced by the "seal skins, seal bones, penguin bones, and rubbish," making the location seem like a slaughterhouse. The hut too is dirty and in "mean disorder" (p. 322). The narrator and her companions disprove of the mess – "they could have closed the tea tin [at least]" (p. 322) – and the potentially negative impacts on the fragile ecosystem, especially for the resident penguins and seals. In surveying the scene, the narrator observes that "housekeeping, the art of the infinite, is no game for amateurs" (p. 322). In direct contrast to the men who have been there before them, the women take care of the environment and of one another; they "dug out a series of cubicles in the ice itself" (p. 324) and are careful not to leave any artificial trace of their presence on their departure. Furthermore, while the narrator is given the "unenviable honor" of taking on the official leader role should the group find themselves in a dangerous situation, decisions are, for the most part, made collectively:

…the nine of us worked things out amongst us from the beginning to end without any orders being given by anybody, and only two or three times with recourse to a vote by voice or show of hands. (p. 320).

This does not mean that everything goes smoothly. The narrator notes that the group often grumbled and even argued during this process, "sometimes bitterly" (p. 320). However, it is a relational process which materializes positive affects – solidarity, communality, and even joy. As the narrator reflects, "what is life without grumbling, and the occasional opportunity to say, 'I told you so'?" The women's approach contrasts to the men aboard the Yelcho, the vessel which takes them to the Antarctic. "Officers – as we came to understand aboard the Yelcho – are forbidden to grumble" (p. 320), and so largely follow the orders of their charismatic and authoritative leader figure, Captain Pardo, without question.

An essentialist or deterministic view of gender proposes that who we are (a woman or a man) and what we do (act in 'feminine' or 'masculine' ways) are directly correlated. While a more conservative lens conceives sexed bodies as the determining factor for a person's gender identity, a more nuanced feminist essentialist understanding considers 'feminine' traits and behaviours to be so deeply rooted in societies and reinforced by social expectations and shared experiences that they are unlikely to change and can therefore be recognised as a universally shared 'female condition' (Lykke, 2010a). In 'Sur,' the women's tendency toward acting in communal and collaborative ways that are sensitive to the lives of those around them (including nonhuman life) can be read as the natural outworking of women's essential 'femaleness' which is perceived as fundamentally different from men's essential 'maleness' (Grosz, 1994). In a cultural feminist lens the women's actions in 'Sur' offer a model of female leadership that reflects more 'feminine' ways of being, communicating and organising. This is understood to act as a counter to "masculinist hierarchical systems" (Barr, 1993, p. 161) and to male leadership, which is centred on traits like assertiveness, rationality and individual charisma. The political advantage of this reading lies in the positive reappraisal of gender-stereotypic relational and communal differences that are closely associated with maternal functions, such as listening, caring and nurturing, and which have been argued to offer distinct benefits to organisations (Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland, 2009) and societies (Gerzema & D'Antonio, 2013).

The deliberate inversion of the masculine-feminine binary in this body of leadership literature promotes an emancipatory agenda that aims to empower women as a group and

celebrate what has formerly been devalued in Western cultures, as well as in leadership theory and practice (Kolb et al., 2003; Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland, 2009). It is argued that culturally 'feminine' values and attributes present an opportunity for new forms of leadership theorising and the conceptualisation of distinct feminine leadership practices and styles, such as inclusivity (Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017; Vanderbroek, 2010). A strategy of 'equal but different' thus seeks to redress women's marginality by increasing recognition and representation of specific forms of 'female-feminine leadership.' This leads to suggestions that organisations become 'gender bilingual' in order to capitalise on previously ignored differences and denigrated 'feminine' values (Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland, 2009; Vanderbroek, 2010). Reversing the sexual dialectics in leadership studies by conceptualising 'feminine leadership' as distinct from (male-masculine-heroic) leadership operates from the assumption that theorising and/or promoting something as valuable will (eventually) make it so.

However, this line of thinking falls short of a radical reconceptualisation of gender in/and leadership on several counts. First, it unintentionally recreates the conditions for the continued discrimination and stereotyping of women by reinforcing prescriptive beliefs about male/female and masculine/feminine differences and attributes. For example, the idea that women leaders are (or should be) empathetic, kind and nurturing, reinforces the assumption that women in general share these 'essential' characteristics and that they are largely consistent across time and space (Prentice & Miller, 2005), but which are, conversely, 'out of character' for men. This is because in an essentialist schema difference is understood to emerge between two pre-existing beings (Man and Woman), whose gendered identities rest on the fact that they belong to one category and not the other (Grosz, 2005). Cultural feminist solutions also tend to rely on a transcultural, transhistorical notion of 'Woman' as representative of all (or most) women (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Lykke, 2010a). This assumption feeds into the idea that on account of being 'feminine,' women are naturally "morally superior" creatures and will show us the way toward a better, more enlightened future (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 51).

Neutralising gender: Constructionist perspectives in leadership studies

In direct opposition to the cultural essentialist position which conceives women's 'natural' differences as separate from but equal to (or better than) that of the agentic, masculine variety, a liberal constructionist view holds that men and women are innately similar, and given equal conditions and access to opportunities, will act very much alike

(Hekman, 2014). This view is premised on a constructionist rendering of gender as independent of biological sex and is captured in Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/2015) famous statement: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' In other words, "we become 'women' and 'men' through socialisation, through a symbolic and discursive inscription into social structures – not because of nature" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 93). From this position, sex is viewed as a 'biological endowment,' a necessary binary variable, but 'gender' comprises socialised and learnt behaviours which then inform our views of sex, usually in repressive and limiting ways (Calás & Smircich, 2006). In 'Sur,' for example, when the unnamed female narrator and her cousin Juana attempt to recruit women for their expeditionary force they are met with resistance: "So few of those we asked even knew what we were talking about – so many thought we were mad, or wicked, or both!" (p. 319). When a small group do finally set sail on the *Yelcho*, the Captain and his crew approach their interactions with the women through an expectation of female vulnerability and passivity: "[we were] oppressed at times by the kindly but officious protectiveness of the captain and his officers, who felt that we were only 'safe' when huddled up in the three tiny cabins" (p. 320-1).

These socially constructed gender roles, which cast women as "passive and feminine" and men as "masculine and active" (Grosz, 1994, p. 17), are understood to be "the result not of biological nature but of cultural construction and can, therefore, be changed" (Tong, 2013, p. 205). In liberal and modernist feminist approaches, change is contingent on recognising and advocating for women's inherent *sameness* to men (Hekman, 2014). The fact that the women in 'Sur' act in more communal, collaborative and caring ways can thus be read as a direct outcome of processes of socialisation, which are further tied into their social roles as housewives, mothers, daughters, and care-givers (p. 319-320). If they had been socialised differently, they might have adopted a different approach, for example, a 'heroic leadership' style that is represented to the women in the reports on Shackleton and Scott, whom the narrator and her companions claim to admire (p. 318).

Based on the assumption of an underlying and inherent sameness between all human subjects, leadership is reframed in both theory and practice as a gender-neutral position or activity; an "unproblematised norm, towards which men and women alike should aspire" (Sinclair & Evans, 2015, p. 139). In this view leadership is, theoretically, the prerogative of all autonomous and rational *human* subjects, a designation now benevolently extended to (some) women. Consequently, Bierema (2016) posits that we should aim to arrive at a point where it becomes redundant to even talk about sexual difference in relation to leadership:

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It is worth considering whether we should even be having this conversation about women's leadership? What might happen if we did away with distinctions between women and men's leadership and started talking about effective leadership that best fits the context and challenges narrow, gendered interpretations and images of leadership? (p. 133)

Following this logic, the examples of collaboration and shared decision-making in 'Sur' could be read and then presented as an 'effective' leadership style rather than a purportedly feminine one, as per the preceding section. In a liberal constructionist perspective concerned with advancing the goals of gender equality there is a double advantage to this approach. First, it makes any 'type' or 'style' of leadership into an option for *all* persons, and second, it facilitates a move from masculinist leadership ideals and behaviours (which have traditionally excluded women) toward more participatory, 'post-heroic' leadership styles that resemble communal 'feminine' behaviours and which are subsequently deemed to be more 'effective.' Unlike Captain Scott and his men who perished on their Southern Journey, or Shackleton who had to turn back prematurely before reaching the Pole, in the alternative reality presented in 'Sur' the women are well-prepared to make it to "that white place on the map, that void" where on their arrival they "flew and sang like sparrows" (p. 326). In other words, they exhibited 'effective leadership.'

A constructionist line of thought acknowledges the unequal starting point and historical dissymmetry between men and women, including the labyrinthine challenges that women face on the 'path to leadership' (Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, the presence of double binds (Rudman & Glick, 2001), pernicious stereotypes (Stead & Elliott, 2009), and women's own feelings of imposter syndrome and stereotype threat (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2017). However, it begins from the supposition that discourses and practices of 'effective leadership' are, or can eventually become, gender-neutral, denaturalised and depoliticised. Such representations pave the way for women and other marginalised groups to be integrated into the hierarchically privileged domain of organisational leadership and/or recognised as 'leaders' on equivalent terms as men. By challenging gender norms, re-structuring social roles, and re-socialising individuals, it is presumed that over time the playing field will level, and an egalitarian society where gender, race, and other sociocultural categories of difference matter very little, or not at all, will soon become a reality (Bierema, 2016; Gartzia, 2010; Johnson & Lacerenza, 2018).

Cartesian dualism and the human subject: A critique

While cultural and liberal feminist strands of thought work from a different understanding of how sociocultural categories like gender emerge, and the political and ethical strategies which should ensue on that basis, they both operate from within the same philosophical paradigm. That is, they presuppose a humanist ideal of 'Man' as the reference point for the subject and subjectivity (being), an image which relies on a reductive and binary view of gender and sexual difference. For social constructionists in the liberal humanist tradition, the individual subject is "a product of social influences imposed on an already existing subject," that is, the 'human' (Hekman, 2014, p. 115). Whereas in cultural feminist thought, there are two distinct entities – male and female – each relatively stable and fixed in accordance with nature (biological sex) but who are conceived as equally human *despite* their innate gendered differences. The image of the human underpinning both views is predicated on Rene Descartes' concept of the *cogito*, the thinking subject. In Western thought this transcendent being acts as a model for each individual human being; s/he is "a knowing subject, an epistemological subject, [who is] separate from…everything else in the world" (St. Pierre, et al., 2016, p. 102). Consequently, in both perspectives it is presumed that there is a pre-existing symmetry between the sexes on account of this commonly shared 'human' nature (Braidotti, 2011a).

Where this becomes problematic, however, is that in the Western philosophical tradition it is 'Man' – an image closely associated with white, property-owning, educated, heterosexual men – who serves as the model for this ahistorical, autonomous, and disembodied notion of the human (Braidotti, 2003, 2011a, 2013a). Philosophers informed by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories refer to this system as the "phallogocentric economy of signification" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 110) because thought is "ordered around an absolute word (logos) that is 'male' in style (hence the reference to the phallus)" (Tong, 2013, p. 192). Phallogocentric logic, which functions according to a dualistic system of thought, has shaped our "conceptions of reality, knowledge, truth, politics, ethics, and aesthetics" in Western societies for several centuries (Grosz, 1994, p. ix), giving form to culture (as a reflection of the cultural and social imaginary), and to the history of ideas, which are consequently not neutral at all (Braidotti, 2011a). Feminist thinkers working from within and beyond the poststructuralist tradition have shown that man/male/masculine are the privileged terms in this oppositional dualistic paradigm due to patriarchy's history (Braidotti, 2002, 2011a; Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 1985). In this schema, privileged terms rely on and

reproduce hierarchical dualisms and relations of domination that "create subcategories of otherness or 'difference-from'" in which different-from has come to mean 'less-than' (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 138). Consequently, over time men and masculinity have become aligned with other 'superior' terms, such as mind, language, culture, and reason, whereas women and femininity are closely tied to their 'lesser' opposites – nature, the body, carnality, domesticity, and emotionality (Grosz, 1994). Or in cruder terms, "what men do not want themselves to be; or to have" (Oseen, 1997, p. 173); that which has traditionally been marked off as passive, weak, natural, abject, dark, or inferior in all kinds of patriarchal cultures.

In this schema of thought, difference is not only constructed as 'less-than' (which is one of the key issues that *both* cultural and liberal feminist politics seek to redress), but also always functions according to a process of negation (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011). Poststructuralist philosophers have demonstrated that dualism, which is both embedded in and constitutive of language, works by positioning the "two polarised terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its supressed, subordinated negative counterpart," that is, "the primary term defines itself by expelling its other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders" (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). In terms of sexual difference, the categories woman/female/feminine have historically been conferred the role of "complementary and specular other of Man" (Braidotti, 2003, p. 45). Drawing on the insights of Irigaray and her incisive critique of the Western philosophical tradition, Braidotti (2011a) argues that

> [t]he corollary of this definition is that the burden of sexual difference falls upon women, marking them off as the second sex, or the structural 'other,' whereas men are marked by the imperative of carrying the universal. (p. 143)

In other words, 'Woman' functions as the object for man's self-definition, which results in the suppression of otherness and an underlying reality of asymmetry between differently sexed subjects (Braidotti, 2011a). As the absent 'not-one' (i.e., not the subject) in what is a sexually *indifferent* symbolic order, the subject position of 'Woman' is defined in relation to the masculine centre (as other of the Same) and never in relation to other women as a sexually specific subject (as other of the Other) (Irigaray, 1985). Furthermore, since femininity has been constructed from the "fragments and figments of phallogocentric imaginary" (Braidotti, 2003, p. 45), everything we know about 'Woman' and the feminine we know from the male point of view. This is not to say that real-life women (note the plural

rather than singular term) have not contributed significantly to culture or that these contributions are not valuable and important. Rather, the identity 'Woman,' and by association, the institution of 'femininity,' have been subject to "containment…by other definitions and other identities" within a hegemonic, two-gender paradigm (Grosz, 2005, p. 175).

Whether gender is construed as an essentialised position or a socially constructed identity and/or set of attributes open to all sexes, the masculine-feminine dialectic (the 'gender system') continues to operate according to a disciplinary regime of thought that is predicated on power disymmetries and a (false) universal definition of the human subject through which sexual difference is read and defined. The predominance of this framework is also evident in leadership research and practice which is guided by the binary structure of representationalism (Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2014), and which serves to "rehearse and reify narrowly defined gender differences" (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020, p. 8) through processes of recognition. Although quantitative and qualitative researchers generally claim not to be concerned with metaphysical and ontological questions related to being, these approaches are contingent on and (re)produce a particular description of the human subject as an 'original being' whose ontological status is separate from and precedes any interaction or encounter with others (St. Pierre, 2021). This is the Western humanist subject *par excellence*, an image which sneaks its way into conventional methodologies and informs the subject-object dualism of methods-driven research (St. Pierre, 2016, 2021), some of the effects of which I discuss in a later section. Cartesian dualism thus comes to the fore as the primary structuring principle in leadership inquiry via the widescale acceptance of pre-defined categories such as 'man' and 'woman,' 'masculine' and 'feminine,' 'leader' and 'follower,' and 'subject' and 'object' as unproblematic and already given (Ely & Padavic, 2007).[15]

The combined work of philosophers like Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida has been instrumental in deconstructing the "linchpin of western thought…the

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[15] Empirical evidence is then used to support claims that women leaders are more likely to enact transformational leadership behaviours (Burke & Collins, 2001) and will be 'more ethical' than their male counterparts (Lamsa & Sintonen, 2001), exhibiting superior levels of effectiveness in contemporary organisational contexts (Eagly & Carli, 2003). On the other hand, findings from surveys and interviews are also cited as evidence that few, or statistically irrelevant, differences exist between men and women's leadership practices, capabilities and overall effectiveness, and that given equal conditions and access to opportunities, men and women will act very much alike (e.g., Klenke, 1996; Jonson, et al., 2010; Powell, 2012).

autonomous, Cartesian subject" through interrogation of the ideas, discourses, and power structures involved in the production of the category of 'the human' (Hekman, 2014, p. 115). In the following sections, I introduce and explore two alternative strands of feminist theory that emerge from the poststructuralist tradition and their impact on the theory and practice of gender and leadership. Feminist variations on poststructuralist thought are directly concerned with displacing oppositional dichotomies by exposing and destabilising the "relations of power, in which gendered (and other) identities and subjectivities are formed" (Calás & Smircich, 2006, p. 301). These approaches can be divided into two broad categories: gender de/constructionism and new feminist materialism (Lykke, 2010a; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011). Both perspectives refuse the autonomous and unitary subject of Enlightenment thought, but whereas feminist de/constructionism prioritises a linguistic framework of explanation, new feminist materialism goes the 'way of all flesh' (Braidotti, 2002, 2011a). Different possibilities are engendered by each approach even as they overlap and are in conversation with one another, and so I discuss each in turn, beginning with an exploration of de/constructionism via Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity.

Feminist de/constructionism in leadership studies

Poststructuralism uses principles of language and the history of social practices (e.g., leadership and management) and institutions (e.g., organisations) to unsettle 'universal truths,' including those related to gender, sexual difference and the nature of being, which is understood to be fragmented rather than fixed (Benschop & Verloo, 2015; Ford, 2016). Language, in this view, is not simply a medium for expressing and representing our observations of the 'real' world but is seen to be "constitutive of the things we can think/know" (Calás & Smircich, 2006, p. 309). The binary category positions of male-female, man-woman, and masculine-feminine, in which one side is the favoured term, are thus understood to be "discursive practices that constitute specific subjectivities through power and resistance" within the context of everyday social relations (Calás & Smircich, 2006, p. 302). It is precisely this emphasis on the power of language and discourse – a 'linguistic turn'[16] – that informs gender de/constructionist perspectives and their approach to the problem of sexual difference and the role of gender in leadership theory and practice.

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[16] The basic premise of the 'linguistic turn' is that "*[e]verything* is construction, that is, comes into being or [is] apprehended only through language" (Ford, et al., 2008, p. 26).

Feminist theories that fall under the 'de/constructionist' umbrella "share a commitment to critical analysis of 'gender' understood as a historically, socially, culturally constructed and changing category" (Lykke, 2010b, p. 126). Gender de/constructionists are consequently not concerned with the question of whether men and women are actually different or exactly the same 'deep down,' but rather with interrogating how "difference [has] been produced through the representational system" and the socio-historical effects of this system (Colebrook, 2004, p. 283). In this way, de/constructionist theories of gender challenge the idea that the association of men with humanity and women with femininity is a 'natural' outcome of biological factors, even as they acknowledge the effects of these associations on the lived realities of male and female subjects (Lykke, 2010a). Importantly, this dual consideration means that de/constructionism goes beyond liberal feminist and modernist understandings of gender as a self-selected identity marker or a stereotype that can be easily cast off or remade by individuals and groups who are all presumed to be 'equally and fully human.' As Liu (2020) explains, sociocultural constructions of 'gender,' along with other social categories like race, class and sexuality, have "real, material consequences for people's ongoing experiences with privilege and oppression" (p. 14).[17] In 'Sur,' for example, the narrator notes that many more women wanted to go with them on their Southern Journey but were unable to "leave their daily duties and commit themselves to a voyage of at least six months" given their familial responsibilities which could "not…be lightly set aside" (p. 319).

Judith Butler's ideas on performativity and gender fluidity have been particularly important for feminist leadership scholars working within poststructuralist philosophical paradigms.[18] In leadership studies, the notion of performativity is used to explain how linguistic repetitions and repeated representations bring certain terms like 'gender,' 'leaders,' 'followers,' and 'leadership' into being and their impact on the formation of identities and on practice (Ford, et al., 2008; Knights, 2021).[19] Both gender and bodies are understood to be

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[17] Gender, in a feminist poststructuralist framework, is understood to be interwoven with various sets of experiences and discursive conventions related to other systematically assigned intersecting categories, such as race, ethnicity, age, class, dis/ability, and sexual orientation (Lykke, 2010a).

[18] Often Butler is privileged over feminist scholars like Irigaray and Braidotti because social construction, gender fluidity and performativity appear more conducive to enabling alternative bodies and futures, whereas Irigaray's use of the term 'sexed bodies' seems to imply an innate essentialism and a return to traditional gender divisions and roles.

[19] Recent feminist examinations of Judith Butler's oeuvre (e.g., Hekman, 2014; Lykke, 2010a) argue that her work occupies a space between gender de/constructionism, which is focused on discourse and language, and new feminist materialist renderings of the lived female body. However, in organisation and leadership studies, engagements of Butler tend to focus specifically on her notion of

performatively constituted; every small act of repetition or micro-movement of the body taking place in relation to a collection of meanings that render them as either feminine or masculine and which, over time, appear to be fixed into a 'natural state of being' (Butler, 1990; Fotaki & Harding, 2018). Subsequently, the norms of gender and leadership – which are understood to be enmeshed in, and supported by, dominant linguistic-discursive constructions and then reified in the hierarchical ordering of differences found in culture and society – are powerful and seemingly intractable. Not only do they "support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990, p. xxvii), but are also implicated in the reproduction of other oppositional categories and sex-based dualisms, for example, agentic-communal, rational-emotional, dominant-subordinate, and so on.

According to Butler (1990, 1993), these ongoing discursive practices and (gender) norms are inherently unstable, always in a state of flux and conflict since they are culturally and historically contingent, never monolithic, and require continual maintenance. Consequently, they are open to revision. 'Gender' and 'sex' and, importantly for Butler (1990), 'heterosexuality,' can be undone and remade in an infinite number of ways. Taking this perspective to its logical extreme, Learmonth and Morrell (2019) propose that we do away with 'leadership' altogether, on the basis that this concept is 'terminally toxic' (p. 6) given its non-innocent history (see also Liu, 2020). Instead of focusing on questions related to 'women's leadership,' they suggest reframing the issue as one concerning women and power (or their lack thereof). Other critical leadership scholars, such as Liu (2020), take a different route, arguing for the value of developing positive social meanings of 'leadership' that will empower women and other minority subjects as they go about their work and daily lives. Meaningful change in this view requires as a first step identifying the socially regulated discursive 'truths' that inform our identities as 'men' and 'women' and 'leaders' and 'followers,' and which produce oppressive and exclusionary meanings (Stead & Elliott, 2009), but which can, through critical questioning and contestation, be reworked in potentially emancipatory ways (Bowring, 2004; Liu, 2020). For feminist de/constructionist philosophers like Butler this is mainly achieved through the discursive formation of transgressive counter-identities that will (presumably) contribute to the liberation of theory and practice from normative conventions.

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performativity and the constitution of gender, sex and leadership identities through language, hence, it is this usage that I examine in this section.

Bowring (2004) provides a relevant exemplar of how de/constructionist theories might be mobilised toward these aims in her analysis of a fan-fiction re-writing of the fictional female leader, Captain Janeway, from the television series *Star Trek.* Bowring (2004) argues transgressive gender performances that subvert typical gender norms are powerful because they challenge the entrenched view that there are "only two types of leaders, two gender identities, male and female, and that one male or one female speaks for all males or females respectively" (p. 403). When Captain Janeway is textually/discursively 'liberated' from the strictures of conventional sex-based dualisms as a result of her relationship with the alien character, Seven, she has the potential to become "a whole person…happy, fulfilled and true to herself" (p. 401). This assertion rests on the premise that there is no 'natural' association between bodies and gendered leadership identities, only socially constructed discourses and ideologies that produce difference (Bowring, 2004; Ford, et al., 2008). For Bowring (2004) then, a feminist future is populated not with stable and unitary subjects who take up a position along a "rigidly defined male-female, or masculine-feminine continuum," but with 'complete,' fluid people (and leaders), who "occupy many places in the space-time continuum" at once (p. 389). For both men and women this is defined as a matter of wilful and self-conscious activity that requires leaving behind the material body and its disciplining effects in the quest for new identities (Braidotti, 2002), which are "fluid, not fixed" (Bowring, 2004, p. 401). 'Queering' leadership in this way is also understood to empower different kinds of leadership styles and relations. For this to occur, however, Bowring (2004) argues that we need to undo our dominant understandings of 'gender' and 'leadership,' and instead look to the emancipatory potential that is located in the recognition of a multiplicity of 'post-gender' or fluid counter-identities which can be practiced by all sexes equally and in a multiplicity of ways.

If for Bowring (and Judith Butler) this is a vision yet to be realised, for Braidotti (2006, 2011b) and other new materialist scholars (see Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), the desire to go 'beyond gender' is already being enacted in advanced capitalist societies in tandem with recent advances in genetic engineering and reproductive technologies, as well as through the rampant commodification of differences and diversity for commercial gain. As Muhr (2011) points out, women in formal leadership positions are already performing an excess of what she codifies as 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics at the same time and everywhere. This can, however, serve to create an unrealistic expectation of female perfectability in the workplace and the reinforcement of gender inequalities which ensue on

this basis (Muhr, 2011).[20] In addition, disembodied gender fluidity as an end-goal runs the risk of becoming just another "toy for the boys" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 185). As Applebaum, et al. (2003) observe, the effect is such that "[w]hen there seems to be some merit in what would normally have been considered a "female" approach, men adopt it as their own. What was seen as weak is now thought of as flexible; what was emotional now combines with the rational to bring balance" (p. 49). Sexual indeterminacy is therefore imbricated in capitalism's processes of self-maintenance, and consequently limits meaningful social transformation in accordance with what serves profit-making interests (Braidotti, 2011b). In the context of the schizophrenic present, advocating continuously malleable gender fluidity and the formation of androgynous identities proves a politically questionable aim for feminists as "[g]ender trouble is no guarantee of sexual subversion" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 44).

In addition to the political limitations of gender de/constructionism, there are several key philosophical and conceptual issues that require further consideration. As discussed above, Bowring (2004) makes the case for theorising and practicing both gender and leadership as 'fluid, not fixed.' This move requires conceiving bodies and the material world as passive surfaces which, though mutable, are subjected to, and animated by, the play of discourse (see Braidotti, 2002; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, for further critique of this issue). The dominant discourses of gender and leadership, which in this framework are understood to originate in ideological perspectives – such as humanism and imperialism, but also democracy in more 'enlightened' perspectives – are seen to be fantasies (or myths) propagated in society and in organisations which then serve to make things happen (Kelly, 2014; Liu, 2020). In Captain Janeway's case, this includes the male-dominated "quasi-military organisation," which relies on and reproduces the romanticised ideal of the morally superior agentic leader who "takes ultimate responsibility and…makes the final decision" (Bowring, 2004, p. 395). In other words, discourses and texts are constitutive forces which produce different shared and individual realities of leadership. What 'leadership' is in each instance – something that originates in the individual, the collective or in relations, for example – is thereby contingent on the numerous discursive flows (and the relationships and actions they engender) that are at work in an organisation, and which intersect with the

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[20] This has been made particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, with scientific, business and health research showing that Covid-19 has more severe impacts for diverse and disadvantaged groups. For examples of the negative impact on women, particularly in the work context, see: https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects

cultural imaginary, given that institutions and the people within them are a product of and influenced by the social contexts in which they operate.[21] This reasoning supports the claim that 'leadership,' as both a practice and a concept, is inherently fluid (Bowring, 2004).[22] As such, it allows the leadership scholar to identify and analyse specific instances of 'feminine leadership' or 'her leadership,' as Bowring does in the case of Captain Janeway: "The ship now holds many families and crew members who have flourished, both personally and professionally, under her leadership" (p. 401). In 'Sur,' however, these individualist designations would not be possible as there is no apparent leader figure. Instead, we (the researcher) might extract a different meaning of leadership from this example, exploring how 'leadership' moves between different members of the group as the task or context requires.

The framework (rather than the idea or practice) of de/constructionism as it is explained above continues to depend on a dualist ontology where discourse is privileged over materiality, as well as mind over matter and culture over nature. The result is a 'transcendentalising gesture' that mimics dualist philosophies like humanism (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011). In relation to both ontology and epistemology, de/constructionism on these terms is problematic because it "fail[s] to take into account that life basically is embedded" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 113). With regards to feminist de/constructionist perspectives on gender and sexual difference, this is also an issue because in its determination to escape biological and essentialist gender constraints that have negatively impacted on women, the radical anti-essentialist vision it advances refuses to attribute any positive pre-discursive or ontological meaning to sexual difference (Lykke, 2010a). This only serves to reaffirm the dichotomous relationship between gender and sex, and the correlation of sexual difference with pejoration, and hence something that must be overcome (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011). Consequently, while employing a de/constructionist framework in leadership studies is clearly forward looking, it cannot be truly revolutionary due to these elisions.

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[21] The problem with proprietary (or individualist) conceptions in this viewpoint is consequently not a philosophical issue, but rather an ethical one. For example, leadership that originates in the 'leader' is linked to hierarchies and forms of identification that are seen to disempower 'followers' and enforce obedience to restrictive and non-democratic processes of decision-making (see Collinson, 2020, for example).

[22] Critical de/constructionist perspectives theorise 'leadership' as a socially constructed set of ideas and norms that do not exist "in any objective sense" but which shape and influence human perceptions and experiences (Liu, 2020, p. 8), for example, through the workings of a negative ontology (Kelly, 2014). This is theoretically possible if leadership is understood to *only* be a social construction and so de-linked from any formative grounded or material process or event, which is to further claim that leadership has no ontological status (Kelly, 2014).

New feminist materialism and sexual difference

New materialism, as a philosophical stance, concerns "re-immersion in the materiality of life" (Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 5). However, this re-immersion is dependent on what equates to a metaphysical shift from dualism to monism, and hence a qualitatively different orientation for thought. Monism begins with rejection of the assumption that "matter, the world and humans are…dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 56). When this presupposition is pulled apart, we can begin to look anew at concepts like subjectivity, gender, difference, power, knowledge, and so on, without taking an oppositional or dualist position as is the case in the other approaches I have introduced in this chapter. My discussion of new feminist materialism begins by outlining the basic principles of monism and what this means for thinking subjectivity and the social on terms described as 'becoming.' I then introduce Braidotti's (2011a) three levels of sexual difference which emphasise the importance of positionality for female subjects. This discussion also provides a framework for reconceptualising the interplay of discourse and materiality as these elements relate to gender, as well as the role of academic research work in reinforcing normative (and hence exclusionary) conceptions of both gender and leadership. Finally, I argue for the relevance of sexual difference as a horizon of possibility for leadership studies rather than just a problem that we (academics) need to 'solve.' In moving across these areas, I build the theoretical foundations for future arguments, with many of these points revisited and employed to reimagine leadership theory, practice and inquiry in the ensuing chapters.

A monistic universe

Monism is dependent on the notion of the "univocity of being or single matter" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 28). Univocity and its implications for thought originate in the revolutionary work of the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (a contemporary of Descartes) and were later developed by the French poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze contends that substance is not "numerically several" as is the case in equivocal philosophies and Cartesian dualism (Colebrook, 2010, p. 278), but rather is singular, expressing itself differently and infinitely along a single plane through two modes: "the mode of extension (or spatial matter) and the mode of thought or mind" (p. 279). Importantly for new materialist philosophers, a univocal notion of substance reconceives mind and body not as separate substances but as expressions of a single substance. This means the negative relationship between binary pairs is neither natural nor inherently

structured according to negation, as is taken to be the case in dualist philosophies (Grosz, 1994). Instead, monism implies a form of "radical immanence," wherein all binaries, including mind-matter, discourse-materiality, culture-nature, human-nonhuman, masculine-feminine, and so on, are understood to be interactive forces unfolding along the same plane or 'level' (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 56).[23] In other words, "there is no 'other level,'" for example, a transcendent level, that "makes things do what they do" (Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 5).

Fox and Alldred (2018) note that we might easily mistake a monistic ontology for "a move to universalism or a unitary perspective upon the social or upon subjectivity" (p. 3). However, the repositioning of difference "outside the dialectical schema" that takes place in a new materialist paradigm implies "a complex process of differing which is framed by both internal and external forces and is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 56). The term 'becoming,' which Braidotti (2011a) borrows from Deleuze, expresses an active and embodied vision of the subject as non-unitary and always in flux, and is contrasted to 'being,' the dominant mode of thinking human subjectivity and identity in Western thought. Becoming denotes the mutability of boundaries and the productive, open-ended nature of our bodily entanglements and interconnections with the symbolic and material world, including non-human life (Braidotti, 2011a). Becoming always precedes being, so any notion of a fixed identity ('Man' or 'Woman') or original being (the transcendent and unitary 'human') is an *effect* of a multiplicity of social and historical conditions, not something primary and foundational as in traditional ontologies (Braidotti, 2011b; Colebrook, 2002a).

The notion of becoming also allows new materialist philosophers to distinguish between what are referred to as 'molar' and 'molecular' forms of life, which are co-existent rather than oppositional (Braidotti, 2013b). The 'molar' order is that which is dominant and standardised, for example, the humanist vision of the subject from which the masculine/feminine gender binary and associated identities are organised and then

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[23] Some additional points of clarification for the reader: Monism does not mean that binary pairings, such as mind and body and matter and discourse, do not 'exist' or are passive, and therefore redundant. Rather, as Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) explain, these elements are understood to "only [be] taken apart in the authoritative gesture of the scholar or by the commonsensical thinker; while in the event, in life itself, the two seeming layers are by all means indiscernible" (p. 92). A further point, and which I discuss with reference to leadership in the following chapter, is that in singular events, different aspects of any binary pair, which are also always linked to other binary pairs as is the nature of the complex world we live in, may operate in a casual-like manner; however, the precise nature of their engagement is never predictable in advance since it is always an emergent, non-linear and contingent process of interaction (Anderson, et al., 2012).

represented. The 'molecular,' on the other hand, refers to the constant flow of immanent relations, variations and processes of becoming that animate every dimension of our lives in "patterns of repetition and difference" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 28). Molar formations (which include representations and identities) are abstracted from, and then imposed over, these incessant molecular flows (Braidotti, 2011b).

Importantly, this distinction opens out onto a different way of thinking sexuality[24] on terms that are not "reducible or contained – let alone constructed – within the gender system" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 39). At the same time, however, this framework accounts for the effects of gender binaries and other repressive structures and knowledges within the social realm and in the creation of identities and subject positions, and specifically their effects on women (Braidotti, 2011a). This has led feminist scholars like Lykke (2010a, 2010b) to describe new feminist materialism as a post-constructionist perspective. While a de/constructionist framework harbours the possibility of a "pure, universal or gender free" discursively constructed subject, for Braidotti (2011a), monism means that "the subject of discourse is always sexed" (p. 94).[25] In making this statement, Braidotti (2011a) is not advocating a return to essentialism but is instead arguing for a more complex, open-ended, non-relativistic (and ultimately non-essentialist) understanding of female subjectivity across three interacting levels of sexual difference. It is important to note that these 'levels' of sexual difference occur concurrently, and are complex, interrelated phenomenon rather than discrete phases or separate categories. I outline each of these levels in turn below with reference to examples from 'Sur.'

The first level of sexual difference refers to the differences between men and women which are socially and historically allocated in accordance with the dualistic system of thought that is produced by the "universal notion of the subject" which is male-defined (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 151). The implications are clearly evident in 'Sur' where the women are

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[24] When using the term 'sexuality,' Braidotti is not referring to the sexual preferences and practices of individuals. Instead, sexuality is a way of conceiving the "complex and multiple affects engendered in the relation between two beings" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 141).

[25] The conception of mind-body parallelism holds important implications for feminist theories of female subjectivity through the idea that "a female body cannot fail to affect a female mind" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 353). From the position of monism (rather than dualism), this is neither an essentialist nor determinist position because bodies and terms are irreducible on account of our entanglement with language, of which there is no outside position (Braidotti, 2011a). As such, it is impossible to arrive at a notion of a "precultural, presocial, or prelinguistic pure body" from which to determine fixed and knowable male and female differences (Grosz, 1994, p. 19). Each female nature is unique in its particular specificities (Braidotti, 2011b).

treated in certain ways because of their sexually different bodies which are overlayed with normative cultural expectations of female vulnerability and emotionality (p. 320-1). Difference at this level is further evidenced in the ongoing exclusion of women from history and from representation (the narrator's report of the expedition remains unpublished, hidden away in a dusty attic), as well as being linked to the specificity of certain shared experiences. In 'Sur' this is conveyed through the event of one member of the group giving birth near the end of the expedition (p. 331), an impossibility at that time for either Scott or Shackleton's all-male party. The second level of sexual difference highlights the broad array of differences that exist *among* women; "different kinds of women, different levels of experience, and different identities" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 154). The women in 'Sur' are of several different ethnicities – Chilean, Peruvian, and Argentinian. Some have children, while others do not. They are of different ages and life experience; as well as possessing different skill-sets – architect-designers, a surveyor, a researcher-storyteller – all elements which serve to create a "hiatus between *W*oman and [real-life] women" (p. 156), as Braidotti (2011a) puts it.

Finally, there are differences proliferating *within* each individual woman, which expands the focus beyond positioning to include unfolding processes (Braidotti, 2011a). The third level of sexual difference is premised on the fact that "as mergers of mind, emotion and body, [subjects] are always in the midst of processes of change and emergence" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 38). If we consider the female narrator of 'Sur,' for example, she is always herself, but never one static 'self.' On the mountains she becomes a part of nature – "anything we were [in that place], was insignificant" (p. 329) – and while debating decisions with the other women, she makes the observation that, "by birth and upbringing…[they are] all crew" (p. 320). In other words, a body is always a *social body,* a nexus between self and other, nature and culture, discourse and materiality (Grosz, 1994), which also includes one's own embodied interactions with other levels of experience (e.g., sexual difference levels 1 and 2) and with other sexed bodies (Braidotti, 2011a).

Given that each subject is in a constant state of transition, the notion of an 'I' who stands separate from the environment as a self-contained and moral (heroic) entity falls apart. It is a tenuous fiction yet no less powerful for being so as while bodies are undeniably corporeal, the mind possesses the capacity to construct itself as an "autonomous substance" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 149). This is an observation Le Guin (1986/2018), the author of 'Sur,' makes in an essay outlining her motivations for the short story. Beginning with a quote from Shackleton's journal, Le Guin writes:

"Man can only do his best. The strongest forces of Nature are arrayed against us."
And I sat there and thought, Oh, what nonsense! …I don't believe that Nature is either
an enemy, or a woman, to humanity. Nobody has ever thought so but Man; and the
thought is, to one not Man, no longer acceptable, even as poetic metaphor. (p. 159-
160)

In addition to undoing the very foundations on which the humanist subject rests, the third
level of sexual difference, which is representative of our individual processes of becoming,
holds broader implications for our understanding of gender and the nature of the relationship
between discourse and materiality.

Thinking differently about gender

In a monist world the terms of engagement between materiality (body) and discourse
(mind) are understood to be contextual and relational, instead of fixed and pre-determined
(Fox & Alldred, 2018). At the epistemological level, there is consequently no pre-established
(and hence transcendent) thing, "such as matter, reality, man, consciousness or 'the world'"
(Colebrook, 2002a, p. xxix), that functions as the foundation for knowledge. Rather, all
knowledge-producing practices are contingent and situated (Lykke, 2010a). Because our lives
unfold along what is a singular, relational plane – the plane of 'radical immanence' –
becomings as they are experienced at the molecular level of bodily interaction are
"generative…of complex and multiple states of transition between, beneath, and beyond the
metaphysical anchoring points that are the masculine and feminine" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 37).
These open-ended, 'states of transition' Braidotti (2011b) refers to using the term 'sexuality,'
rather than gender.

Because bodies are sexuate (as per the three levels of sexual difference), Braidotti
(2016) stipulates that sexuality is "always already present and hence prior to gender" (p. 17).
What this means concretely is that sexuality is expressed and experienced immanently in the
context of relations (becomings) "with other bodies in [what is] a process of differentiation of
the body itself" (Gherardi, 2019, p. 44). The system of thought that positions women as
'different-from' and therefore 'less-than' is broken through as difference is no longer defined
solely on exclusionary terms (e.g., sameness to or difference from some predetermined
'universal' standard) (Braidotti, 2013b). Instead, difference (and hence sexuality) is
reconfigured as a productive and dynamic process of *differing* within experience and in
encounters where different affects are released and bodies are subsequently modified

(Colman, 2010). However, because we are also thinking-speaking, knowledge-producing subjects, sexuality is never a 'neutral' experience as it frequently intersects with the gender regime (Braidotti, 2016). In a new materialist lens, sexuality as a "rhizomic flow of affect is continuously subject to restrictions and blockages" which are "often produced by molar, aggregating affects that codify, categorise and organise" (Fox & Alldred, 2013, p. 776, as cited in Kinkaid, 2020, p. 460). In other words, sexuality and the affects it engenders in the context of relations are frequently apprehended by the gender system, for example, in the habits of recognition and representational expressions of individuals and in the practices of institutional systems, including academia (Braidotti, 2011b). Discursive constructs of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are thus continuously being created and repeated, functioning as shared ideas and 'fictions' that act with force in our everyday lives (Colebrook, 2002b).

Combining these insights, each individual body can be understood as "a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outward of affects" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 182). Put another way, while subjects are always embedded in "what is *already given*," this is not a static system as we also act "in relation to what is *given* in new events of encounters with other bodies, matter, or concepts/discourse" (Lenz Taguchi, 2013, p. 714). It is for this reason that new feminist materialism is described as a *post*-constructionist framework as it takes account of the dynamic relationship "between subject and embodiment, and between discourse and materiality" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 204) and the inherently *productive* and iterative nature of these engagements.

An external influence of particular relevance to this thesis are the gendered leadership knowledges that originate in academic work. The different understandings of gender and difference that are advanced in academic and cultural leadership discourses produce ways of speaking, thinking and writing about women leaders and leadership that establish or reinforce 'truths' about them. Cultural, liberal and de/constructionist feminist readings of women and leadership, such as those presented in the previous sections, are directly implicated in this process. For example, reading the women's actions in 'Sur' as a vision of 'female-feminine leadership' serves to advance values, like collaboration, care, and compassion that have often been maligned or are missing from organisational settings. However, because they rely on "modern forms of subjectivity oriented around the majority subject" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 82) they continue to reproduce binary notions of gender and sex. So while designations of 'masculinity' and 'femininity,' and the values assigned to them, may fluctuate and change over time, the dualistic structure of thought remains intact. Even post-structuralist critiques

and de/constructionist reworkings "bracket these categories in social scientific accounts" on the basis that "social categories are [only] identities" rather than "dynamic processes" (Kinkaid, 2020, p. 460).

This is not to say that this work does not contribute to the advancement of positive, and even emancipatory, outcomes for individual women (and men). For example, increasing numbers of women in formal leader positions in organisations and in politics, and wider acceptance (even celebration) of 'feminine' identities in these roles. Rather, the problem lies in the fact that the ideas articulated and expressed in this work constitute 'inadequate knowledge' (Lorraine, 2011; Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b). By inadequate I mean that they end in either "sterile opposition" or in repetition of the already dominant 'molar' norms (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 6). Both options are ultimately entrapping given their prescriptive nature (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). The proliferation of inadequate knowledge is perhaps unsurprising as social scientific inquiry, for the most part, is reliant on representationalist schemas given that the aim of much of this research is to represent the social world (Fox & Alldred, 2018; St. Pierre, 2021). Representation is immediately connected to practices of recognition, wherein difference functions as a mode of comparison, measurement and deduction (St. Pierre, 2021). That is, a process by which we determine whether something is the 'same-as' or 'different-from' something else, and the specific properties that make it so. At the social and conceptual levels, the result is an impoverished view of the world that takes life to be relatively stable and (ultimately) fully knowable (Braidotti, 2006).

Furthermore, as Braidotti (2011b) notes, such work does little to challenge underlying hegemonic power structures. For example, the widespread acceptance of the purportedly independent, static and/or disembodied subject (or the group, such as the women in 'Sur') as the reference point for determining what leadership is and how it works, with action seen as originating in individual consciousness and power regarded as something we possess (Knights, 2018). By failing to expose or recognise these tendencies, we fall into the trap of reproducing the same male-defined, hegemonic and individualist leadership knowledges. Even de/constructionist approaches, because they grant equal ontological status (or no ontological status at all) to a multiplicity of discursive conceptions of leadership, can become implicated in the production of 'inadequate knowledge,' as is the case for Bowring (2004) where leader identities and/or formal roles are equated with leadership practice. The power of these knowledges is located in the iterative nature of their creation and dissemination, whereby the social understandings, terminologies, images and discourses of leadership

(which are gendered and racialised, as well as human-centric) they produce in the social field both inform and are informed by academic knowledge production. Critically accounting for the effects of the effects of cultural, liberal and de/constructionist strands of thought thus comprises an important dimension of a new feminist materialist approach, as I expand on in later chapters (see Chapters 3 and 4 in particular).

Thinking differently about leadership

In presenting a relational and process-oriented view of the social realm and of subjectivity, new materialism does not allow for humanist and positivist – traits-based, deterministic, and proprietary – conceptions of leadership and the reality they purport to describe, namely, that leadership originates in an individual, their actions, essential attributes and/or in the relationship between leaders and followers. In other words, and as new materialist philosophers make clear, we have *never* lived in the kind of world that is presented in humanist thought (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). Things happen, such as the mobilization of coordinated or collaborative efforts toward a goal or intention, on account of multiple points of interrelation and connection between bodies and other things in the environment (Lorraine, 2011). As Knights (2018) further explains, "social relations are conducted in everyday life…[in an] embodied and engaged manner" (p. 82), an idea which signals the collective and relational nature of social processes like leadership.

Theorising leadership as a relational phenomenon, however, can render invisible the influence of other, and potentially contradictory, discourses, narratives and ideas that have been linguistically and discursively ascribed to 'leadership,' and which also comprise a part of their 'living histories.' In a recent review of the field of leadership studies, Alvesson (2019) observes that

> Leadership is not just a relational or organizational phenomena. It is very much a matter of contemporary "grandiose" society and ideologies of heroic individualism and elitism providing a *context* for local leadership making any treatment of leadership as closed system fundamentally flawed. More generally institutionalized discourse strongly affects leadership. (p. 32, emphasis added)

Continuing with this line of critique, but offering few viable alternatives, Alvesson (2019) argues recent conceptualisations of leadership are now so vague that the term itself now "refer[s] to everything and nothing" (p. 28). Addressing these issues in the following chapter, I draw on new materialist ideas that move beyond a concern with "the mere materiality of

substances, processes and things," and so are able to account for the "entanglements of bodily and discursive relationships that constitute our life, both socially and biologically" (Iovino, 2018a, p. 113). It is for this reason that post-constructionist perspectives should not be seen as coming after de/constructionism (as in a linear progression) but should be understood as running in parallel and productive dialogue when relocated within a monistic political ontology (Lykke, 2010a). In this perspective, how gender and sexual difference *matter* in/to leadership is relocated away from questions of how bodies are gendered and the 'style' of leadership which ensues on this basis, to highlight instead the imbrication of gender and other dichotomies in relational practices and in the production of situated leadership subjectivities. Furthermore, sexual difference is argued to form the basis for the ethical and political dimensions of leadership theory, practice and inquiry as I explain below.

Sexual difference as a horizon for change and transformation in leadership studies

The political and ethical dimensions of new materialism, feminist or otherwise, are directly tied into questions of sexual difference (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). The reason for this has already been pre-empted in my philosophical critique of liberal and cultural feminist theories of gender and difference, wherein Western philosophies of the subject (universal 'Man') rely on, and even require, 'Woman's' "symbolic absence and her social marginalization" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 359). In other words, "thought as a self-originating system of representation" and transcendence *depends* on (and consequently suppresses) the "maternal ground" from which all human life, at least for the time being, originates (Braidotti, 2012, p. 28). In alignment with other philosophers of difference, such as Deleuze and Irigaray, the particulars of our shared historical reality and of language lead Braidotti (2013b) to conclude that "sexual difference produces subjectivity in general" (p. 353). This explanation contests the reduction of sexual difference to a problem of 'biological essentialism' as per de/constructionist arguments (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011; see also Braidotti, 2002, p. 62), and hence not one that can (or should) be lightly set aside nor resolved through the creation of representational counter-identities or counter-narratives for leadership.

The particularities of this situation allow for a positive meaning to be attached to sexual difference. As demonstrated in the preceding sections, the dominant or standard 'molar' line of "Being, identity, [and] fixity," which is sexually *indifferent* as per the nature of the dualistic gender system, is not equivalent to the line of becoming, which we also always have access to (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 345). However, human subjects in general "tend

to be caught in dialectical relationships of submission" to the "central position" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 344-5). Braidotti (2013b) argues that "in order to shift from this dialectically binding location the feminist subject needs to activate different counter-memories and actualise alternative political practices" (p. 344). Mobilising these possibilities is dependent on 'Woman' and the 'feminine,' which Braidotti (2011a) contends are the starting point for processes of change and transformation. This is premised on recognition of the fact that concepts are always entangled with certain material practices, and vice versa, which serves to give them meaning (Iovino, 2018a). Points of exit from the dominant dualistic schema and/or molar order (in both thought and action) necessarily move through sexual difference, and specifically, via the practices which have been coded as 'feminine' in Western cultures – relationality, embodiment, empathy, affectivity, and immanence, for example (Braidotti, 2002, 2013b). These elements comprise 'points of exit' because they are features of active modes of becoming (e.g., 'becoming-woman'). As Colebrook (2004) explains:

> To affirm the feminine positively is to affirm a positive experience of the body, where the body allows one to relate to others, to have a world of touch and sensation, [and] to realise the difference of other subjects. (p. 204)

In this way, new materialist-informed practices of becoming and sexual difference signal the potential of the male-defined 'feminine,' and the myriad images, concepts, ideas and representations of female identity it has engendered, to be reworked affirmatively and positively *through* the flesh in a "process of sexual differing" that is "capable of producing spaces of intimacy, experimentation and relation to others" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 353). Braidotti (2011b) refers to this as the enactment of a 'sexuality beyond gender' (p. 140). Consequently, rather than emphasising identity politics, as per a feminist de/constructionist approach, new feminist materialism advances a 'politics of acts' (Braidotti, 2002, 2011b). This extends to the theory, practice, and ethics of leadership, as well as informing modes of inquiry and scholarly knowledge production, but on terms that disrupt the politics of sameness (as inclusion) and difference (as the replacement of one constant with another) that are characteristic of the feminist perspectives outlined in previous sections. Instead, it engages with and contributes to the development of "new frameworks, images and modes of thought, beyond the dualistic conceptual constraints…of phallocentric thought" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 22).

Following my general discussion of leadership in the following chapter, in Chapter 4 the feminine is shown to function as both a restrictive social category (associated with existing power formations), as well as a potentially liberatory mode of practice for individuals navigating their subjectivities in leadership situations. Sexual difference also "entails…new futures for knowledges" (Grosz, 2005, p. 168). In Chapter 5 I explore how sexual difference forms the basis for retelling and reconfiguring existing formations and phallic knowledges from different angles (Braidotti, 2011b). This results in "a deflection and broadening, an opening up [of knowledges] rather than a closing down and replacement of existing forms and structures" (Grosz, 2005, p. 165). Feminist leadership knowledges on these terms are not directed at making people 'better leaders' vis-à-vis some normative neo-liberal standard, nor more effective or inspiring in their roles. Rather, they contribute to the development of a non-phallic and potentially emancipatory social imaginary for leadership, and hence new forms of identification and values for practice. Finally, the political and the ethical coincide in Chapter 6, with sexual difference feminism comprising a key part of the foundation for developing "new frames of reference for [ethical and political] action" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 139) in the context of leadership situations.

Braidotti's (2011a) sexual difference theory also leads us to interrogate our use of the term 'woman,' and the political relevance of our embodied and embedded realities as sexed subjects. By thinking through the three phases of sexual difference – differences between men and women, differences among women, and differences within each woman – we can move beyond the use of 'Woman' as a "prescriptive model for female subjectivity" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 157),[26] to focus instead on the difference that difference makes, both socially and politically, in situated locations and in our work as feminist thinkers, writers and scholars (see Chapter 5 for further discussion). Importantly, women and other minority groups have a head start on imagining and enacting alternatives (Braidotti, 2011b). This is not classical dialectics of the variety that has informed standpoint feminist epistemologies.[27]

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[26] Importantly, this vision of the subject differs from both modernist and postmodernist perspectives which define the human subject on either universalist (and hence fixed) or relativist (and hence dis-embodied) terms. As the three levels of sexual difference indicate, a subject is grounded in their spatio-temporal location due to their inherent corporeality, but also constantly in flow on account of the multiplicity of encounters that animate their everyday lives, and so always "exceed[ing] representation" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 158).

[27] A common assumption underpinning standpoint feminism has been that of classical dialectics (Braidotti, 2011b). In this view, women and other marginalised groups are treated "as bearers of a privileged access to potentially transformative insight into the existing hegemonic gender orders" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 130). In a new feminist materialist perspective this *automatic* privileging of certain

Rather, it is recognition of the fact that those who have traditionally been excluded from knowledge and from language share different historical memories and a closer affinity with the forces and values of 'otherness,' such as embodiment, relationality, interdependence, emotionality, and collectivity, practices which can serve to undermine masculinist and patriarchal power structures across multiple levels (Braidotti, 2011a).

Conclusion

Sexual difference and gender identities are foregrounded in leadership studies because they have functioned as a primary organising principle in Western thought and culture, including our understandings of what it means to be human (Braidotti, 2011a, 2013a). In this chapter, I introduced and critically examined four feminist approaches that aim to address persisting inequalities and exclusions in leadership studies theory, practice and research. Each approach presents a different way of thinking about gender and leadership, however, I have argued that only new feminist materialism allows us to move beyond the dualistic schema of thought that maintains the binary gender system and other related dualisms. This is closely connected to the image of the human and of subjectivity that informs each lens. In liberal and cultural feminist approaches, the subject is taken to be a stable and unitary entity, whereas in gender de/constructionist perspectives the subject is a discursive construction, a move which enables alternative lines of thought and action in feminist theorising of leadership by disestablishing the 'natural' relationship between men and masculinity and women and femininity. However, in prioritising discourse over materiality, this framework continues to rely on ordinary dualisms (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011).

New feminist materialism addresses the problem of dualist thought by reframing the discussion of gender in terms of becoming and the three levels of sexual difference. In the monistic relational ontology advanced in this perspective, each subject, and life in general, is seen to be a constant state of change and emergence (Braidotti, 2011a). New materialist thought consequently displaces the notion of stable entities composed of essential attributes, as well as the idea that human beings are defined first and foremost by their identities, that is, by what or who they and others see themselves to be (which may be mutable and multiple, as demonstrated in a de/constructionist lens). Instead, new materialism operates from a view of the subject as in an embodied and embedded process of becoming, a position which also

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positions is contested. The minorities also need to free themselves from entrapment and habits of claiming essentialised (counter-)identities, which is the predominant tendency of social subjects in Western contexts given our history (Braidotti, 2011b).

highlights the productive nature of an individual's interconnections with other bodies and things in the social and natural world. In this way, new materialism "emerges as a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 21).

As further demonstrated in this chapter, a key preoccupation of cultural, liberal and even de/constructionist feminist approaches in leadership studies continues to be the link between individual bodies (as discrete entities) and events of 'leadership.' This serves to make debates around the gender-sex relationship, and the political strategies for leadership that are associated with various interpretations, into a significant issue (or even the *primary* issue). The relative importance of questions related to this relationship are displaced in a new materialist lens, with social phenomena seen to be the outcome not of "liberalism's 'individual'" or a group of individuals, but of "a conjunction of a number of persons, forces and circumstances, capable of its own experiences and actions" (Baugh, 2010b, p. 290), the implications of which I explore in the following chapter using the concept of 'assemblage.' This does not mean, however, that gender and sexual difference disappear as relevant concerns. Socially constructed gender norms and identities play a significant role in shaping, at both the symbolic and empirical levels, women's experiences and status in leadership situations. Relocated within a new feminist materialist paradigm, de/constructionism provides critical tools for the analysis of the ideological and discursively constructed aspects of sexual difference (expressed as gender binaries) and leadership and their performative effects (Braidotti, 2011b), as well as playing an important role in contesting hegemonic norms and gendered violence (see Liu, 2020, for example). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, new feminist materialism refuses to see sexual difference as only a problem that needs to be resolved or addressed within the context of existing theories (e.g., leadership theory). Instead, sexual difference signals the potential for "alternative and different discourses, knowledges, frames of reference, [and] political investments" in leadership studies that move beyond a concern with attaining sameness with men or achieving equal recognition in existing schemas (Grosz, 2005, p. 175).

In the chapters that follow, I continue to draw on literary and academic resources that address the problems and possibilities presented by sexual difference (and hence gender) through a focus on female subjects. The implications, however, extend beyond a concern with women. As is the case in other disciplines, sexual difference "resonate[s] both materially and

conceptually" (Grosz, 2005, p. 168) in leadership studies. Materially, because "sexual difference is necessarily a factor in all human affairs and practices, whether it is recognised as such or not; and conceptually, insofar as sexual difference entails new modes of thought, new futures for knowledges" (Grosz, 2005, p. 168). As such, sexual difference comprises a necessary horizon for leadership studies, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis.[28]

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[28] It has been beyond the scope of this thesis to explore other horizons that intersect with sexual difference, which I would argue include posthumanism and anti-racist feminisms (see Braidotti, 2013a, 2019).

Chapter Three   Redefining Leadership as an Assemblage

The aim of this chapter to make evident the ways in which new materialism reconfigures the philosophical grounding of leadership as a social phenomenon and provides an alternative theoretical framework for feminist analysis of gender and women's experiences in leadership. While new materialism has garnered some popularity as a methodological approach for studying the agency of material entities in contexts where leadership is said to be unfolding (e.g., Sergi, 2016), there is little consideration of the changes this philosophical lens makes to our ideas of leadership. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that "[u]ntil the last decade or so, there has been an almost total absence of theorizing on leadership that goes beyond positivist approaches" (Ford, 2016, p. 225). Relational approaches have aimed to fill this void by working from a more adequate understanding of human embodiment and the material vitality of all life, the foremost idea being that "everything is necessarily relational and contextual rather than essential and absolute" (Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 5). In the first section of this chapter, I outline the general changes this 'relational turn' engenders in our thinking and how these ideas are currently being applied in leadership studies.

While relational conceptions of leadership have been instrumental in contesting individualist and entity approaches in leadership studies and align with new materialist philosophies in several respects, they continue to present several problems for feminist and critical leadership scholars. Of particular concern is the use of increasingly vague and generalizing explanations of this social phenomenon. The term now appears to "refer to everything and nothing," leaving 'leadership' virtually indistinguishable from the activities and practices enacted on a daily basis in organisations (Alvesson, 2019, p. 28). This ambiguity is caused, in part, by the tendency of relational approaches to operate from the assumption that in order to move beyond mainstream conceptions, inquiry must begin with a more 'accurate' explanation of what leadership is, a move which depends on identifying and defining the essential properties of leadership in an oppositional mode. Whereas individualist and entity conceptions define leadership according to the characteristics and attributes of individuals, relational conceptions tend to define leadership in terms of features of the social realm, for example, leadership as a series of relations and interactions (Sergi, 2016; Uhl-Bien, 2006), a transformative encounter (Bolden, 2016), an outcome of affects (Munro & Thanem, 2018, 2020), a social practice (Knights, 2018), or a process of becoming (Crevani, et al., 2010). By prioritising material interactions, relational and practice-oriented conceptions of

leadership further struggle to account for the role of the gendered social imaginary in leadership practice and tend to ignore the historical fact of the dissymmetrical positioning between the sexes.

To address these and other issues, I offer the reader a new explanation of leadership as an assemblage. The notion of 'leadership assemblages' builds on relational and practice-based conceptions but shifts the focus from what leadership *is* onto what it can *do* and expands on current debates by reframing human involvement in terms of discursive and nondiscursive practices and situated socio-historical conditions. Assemblage, which derives from the French word *agencement* (or arrangement), refers to the "coming together of forces in relatively stable configurations with particular capacities to affect and be affected that have specific durations" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 12). The concept of assemblage[29] can be applied to structures, socio-spatial formations, social categories, individual patterns of behaviour, as well as social and natural processes (Kinkaid, 2020; Lorraine, 2011). In this chapter, I follow scholars in disciplines like education (de Freitas, 2018; Strom, 2015), geography (Anderson, et al., 2012), international politics (Acuto & Curtis, 2014), and policy formulation (Oborn, et al., 2013) who engage the concept of assemblage to describe and theorise processes like learning, teaching, international relations, participatory development, and sociomaterial engagements. Assemblages are productive and serve a function (Livesey, 2010), which in the case of leadership is to mobilise collective, collaborative and/or coordinated efforts towards some shared goal or intention. As such, thinking leadership as an assemblage emphasizes the "processes of arranging, organizing and fitting together" (Livesey, 2010, p. 18) that make this 'doing' possible. My discussion of leadership as an assemblage extends on current engagements of assemblage thinking in leadership studies, namely Oborn et al. (2013) who link the idea of 'sociomaterial assemblages' to 'distributive leadership' practices. However, in taking a distinctive Deleuzean angle, primarily via the work of Lorraine (2011), Anderson et al. (2012), and Kinkaid (2020), I offer a more thorough and extensive discussion of the notion of assemblage and how it can be used to theorise leadership on new materialist and feminist terms.

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[29] Assemblage theory was first developed by Deleuze and his co-author Guattari, and has been further utilized in the work of new materialist scholars like Claire Colebrook, Tamsin Lorraine, Rosi Braidotti, and Manuel DeLanda. Importantly, it offers a distinct vocabulary and a way of conceiving human and nonhuman connections with the world in terms of the 'provisional unities' we form through these connections (Anderson, et al., 2012).

To illustrate the shifts and changes this approach makes to our understanding of leadership, I turn once again to speculative fiction. Melzer (2006) argues that speculative narratives provide "spaces of abstraction for theorizing" (p. 3). The value of SF texts in this instance lies not in their verisimilitude as representations of organisational realities, but rather in their ability to open up "the entire matrix of intelligibility" within which organisational and social processes like leadership and management occur (Land, et al., 2013, p. 140). Furthermore, in combining the strange with the familiar, speculative narratives amplify some of the most prescient questions and crises of our times and our cultures (Braidotti, 2002). In this chapter I engage the SF novel *Ammonite*, alongside additional examples from Le Guin's short story 'Sur' which featured in the previous chapter. Whereas the leadership assemblages in 'Sur' are conditioned by a positive intention, leadership in *Ammonite* is demanded as part of the response to a series of unexpected threats and disasters. The novel opens with the arrival of Marghe Taishan, an anthropologist for the Settlement and Educations Council (SEC), at the *Estrade*, an orbital station that circles the recently colonised planet Jeep, short for 'Grenchstom's Planet – GP – Jeep' (p. 5). Jeep is already occupied by one million people, descendants of an original group of settlers who then lost contact with Earth some two or three hundred years prior. The communities on Jeep resemble pre-industrial, agricultural-based societies. This makes Jeep a world quite different from our own advanced capitalist societies, and which the employees of Durallium Company and SEC are used to operating in. Durallium Company, referred to simply as 'Company' for the remainder of the novel, is a powerful corporation (not dissimilar from many large Western corporations) responsible for "various leasing operations," mining and settlement endeavours on newly discovered planets (p. 13). As such, the plot navigates recognisable territory in the form of the ongoing corporatisation and commercialisation of non-Western cultures and societies, for it is Company that "owned and ran every line of communication, every item shipped or manufactured there: the food, the clothes, the shelter" (p. 13). The research organisation Marghe works for – SEC – is responsible for "independent observation" of Company's actions, but as she knows all too well from her previous experiences, "SEC's been in bed with Company for years" (p. 12).

Despite her concerns regarding SEC's integrity, Marghe has travelled to Jeep to observe and write a report on the indigenous population, as well as to advise Company personnel on their interactions with the local inhabitants and their communities. It is a "chance of a lifetime, anybody's lifetime" (p. 12) as "Jeep's natives were one hundred

percent female, and there was a virus loose. The two were connected, of course" (p. 14). It was upon this discovery, five years prior to Marghe's arrival, that Company personnel, which included a large security detail ('Mirrors')[30], along with technicians, engineers, biologists and an anthropological team, were infected with the virus. "Eighty percent of Company's female personnel recovered; all of the men…died" (p. 14). *Ammonite* is therefore a world and story completely occupied by women, so, as one character puts it, "the social structure here is even more out of whack than usual…nothing has to be the way you expect it to be" (p. 32).[31] Given these precarious circumstances, leadership is required to respond to the uncertainty triggered by the virus and to resolve Company's ongoing isolation from the indigenous population. Drawing on this and other examples from 'Sur,' I demonstrate the changes my framework makes to how we understand leadership, its terms of emergence and socio-material function in organisations and societies.

In the second half of this chapter, I delve into the implications of assemblage theory for (re)situating the human subject within leadership practice. Any assemblage that involves human actors is composed of both 'machinic assemblages' (nondiscursive practices) and 'collective assemblages of enunciation' (discursive practices), which are both at work as we engage in processes aimed at making things happen (Lorraine, 2011). As such, the notion of assemblage does not just provide a more adequate framework for describing leadership, but is also a conceptual device for exploring the interplay of different elements affecting experience. I make two important points in this section regarding the relationship between these two kinds of assemblages. The first concerns the non-linear but 'emergent causality' between these elements, and second, the situated and historical nature of particular sub-sets of discursive and nondiscursive practices that serve to condition experience (Anderson, et al., 2012; Lorraine, 2011). Assemblage thinking in a new feminist materialist lens accounts for the fact that "discursive and nondiscursive social practices…operate according to background presuppositions and implicit rules that can vary over time without losing their connection to a specific assemblage" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13). In the case of leadership, this includes institutionalised discourses, particular patterns of behaviour, disciplinary forces (routines and references), modes of identification, and cultural ideologies and mythologies which, as

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[30] The term 'Mirror' refers to their highly reflective armour and is used to refer to the security personnel, who are also responsible for managing Company operations, for the duration of the novel.
[31] I explore the implications of this defamiliarizing technique in more detail in Chapter 6, and how "by imagining [and engaging with] strange worlds we come to see our own conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective" (Parrinder, 2000, p. 4).

evidenced in Chapters One and Two are overwhelmingly masculinist and individualistic in nature. It is precisely because of the situated and historical nature of specific assemblages that gender and sexual difference remain a central concern in the emergence, maintenance and effects of leadership assemblages, a fact I demonstrate in my readings of both 'Sur' and *Ammonite*.

A 'relational turn' in leadership studies

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, understandings of leadership are informed by core philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of the subject and reality. Whereas 'scientific' and positivist approaches bank on certainty and stability, reframing reality as emergent, nonlinear and constantly in flow highlights the relational and embodied nature of social processes. The idea that life is rule-driven and operates according to a pre-determined schema or order is simply an image we impose on life, a consequence of our ability to perceive ourselves as autonomous entities through the attribute of thought (Braidotti, 2006). As enfleshed subjects, however, we are not isolated from our environment but are always immanent to the material world and everything "'social' and 'natural' within it;" located "in a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways" through the relationships we enter into (Potts, 2004, p. 19 as cited in Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 4). This 'relational turn,' seeded by poststructuralist thought and carried through into new materialist philosophies (Fox & Alldred, 2018), has served to open new pathways in leadership studies that challenge "representationalist, individualistic and proprietary conceptions of leadership…[and their] neglect [of] the embodied and engaged manner through which social relations are conducted in everyday life" (Knights, 2018, p. 82). Whereas illusions of stability and separateness are built into individualist conceptions of leadership and result in a preoccupation with determining the 'right' traits, attributes, and behaviours that will lead to 'good' and/or effective leadership, a relational approach begins with an "assumption of relatedness and intimacy" (Stuke, 2013, p. 59). Implicit in this shift is an understanding of human action as contingent on a multiplicity of entities and material effects. As McCullagh (2018) explains, action is always relational because "actors always act into a web of relationships" with heterogenous others (humans, technology, machines, physical spaces, documents, gestures, affects, desires, etc.) (p. 145). Consequently, relational understandings focus on the heterogenous spaces and contexts in which relations take place and the embodied processes and practices through which the

actions we might normally associate with leadership, such as decision-making, directing, organising, influencing, or inspiring, are realized.

This shift in thinking also has implications for how we understand experience. As embodied creatures we are in a web of relations with, for example, other human individuals, institutions, animal and earth others, technologies, texts, images, symbols, ideas, sounds, systems of representation and signification, and so on, and it is through encounters and different combinations within our milieus that experience is constituted (Braidotti, 2011b). Experience is therefore not an "individual property" but is "constituted in relations" which are characterised by affect (Semetsky, 2010, p. 91). Affect is defined as "the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact," in other words, it is an "experiential force" that propels processes of becoming (Colman, 2010, p. 11-12). However, it is not only human bodies that are "endowed with the capacity to affect and be affected, to interrelate" (Braidotti, 2003, p. 57). New materialist scholars, including Braidotti, argue that the capacity to induce movement and transformation is a feature of all materialities, including nonhuman animals, organisms, material objects, and "spaces, places and the natural and built environment that these contain; and material forces including gravity and time" (Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 1). Things and elements which are not 'material' are also included in this explanation, for example, "abstract concepts, human constructs and human epiphenomena such as imagination, memory and thoughts," as they have the capacity to produce "material effects" (Fox & Alldred, 2018, p. 1). In 'Sur,' for example, the idea of going a little further, and seeing a little more than the male explorers who have preceded them,[32] combined with the shared memory and wound of women's exclusion from previous expeditions due to being seen as the 'weaker sex,' are instrumental in motivating the group of nine women to plan for and undertake their Southern journey. They ask: "If Captain Scott can do it, why can't we?" ('Sur,' p. 318). As is evident in the narrator's recounting of the motivations for their journey, it is the affects circulating within the environment in which they are located that guide their actions by "recruiting [their] bodies and participation to varying degrees" (de Freitas, 2018, p. 91).

Collective action in a relational perspective is no longer located in "an exclusively human domain" nor in the "identity of actors" as per liberal humanist conceptions but is

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[32] The narrator has reread Captain Scott's book, *The Voyage of Discovery*, "a thousand times" and it has "filled me with longing to see with my own eyes that strange continent, the last Thule of the South" (p. 318).

reconceived as co-constructed in the context of interactions where we both act and are acted upon (McCullagh, 2018, p. 148). To illustrate the implications of this idea in practice, I draw on another example from 'Sur.' Not long after arriving at the South Pole, the women encounter the remaining artefacts of Captain Scott's last expedition:

> They [the penguins] insisted on our going to visit Hut Point, where the large structure built by Captain Scott's party stood, looking just as in the photographs and drawings that illustrate his book. The area about it, however, was disgusting – a kind of graveyard of seal skins, seal bones, penguin bones, and rubbish, presided over by the mad, screaming skua gulls. Our escorts waddled past the slaughterhouse in all tranquillity, and one showed me personally to the door, though it would not go in. (p. 322)

The scene they are confronted with demands a response from the women and a series of corresponding actions, including debate, negotiation, and decision-making to determine the nature of their response. Should they repurpose the hut for their own uses, leave it be, or dismantle what appears to them as a symbol of imperialist ambition and destruction? As the narrator recalls, "Teresa proposed that we use the hut as our camp," turning it into a 'female space,' while "Zoe counterposed that we set fire to it" (p. 322). In the end, the women choose neither of these options, leaving the hut as it is and deciding to make their camp elsewhere, a decision "[t]he penguins appeared to approve" of (p. 322).

Thinking with a relational lens, however, marks a shift in focus from responses and actions as they exist in and of themselves and instead prioritises the constellation of material and immaterial elements, entities and forces that together work to condition and engender collective forms of action and corresponding effects (McCullagh, 2018). Tracing the coalescing of various elements as they relate to this scenario, we can develop a more adequate understanding of the relational and processual nature of social practices, which are always characterised by contingency, complexity and heterogeneity. In this example, the harsh conditions on the ice, the nonhuman animals occupying the area, the symbolic meaning of the hut and surrounding graveyard, the passions guiding the journey, and the women themselves who are acting *within* an already provisionally ordered field, all contribute to the unfolding action. Their previous statements regarding being 'all crew' (p. 320), for example, contribute to the creation of a social context where they are free to debate, disagree and argue until a satisfactory decision is reached. The elements highlighted here are not distinct

variables that operate independently of one another. Rather, these forces comprise the milieu in which the women are situated and through which they are empowered to act. Even the penguins participate in the domain of action. As the narrator in 'Sur' notes, it was the penguins who "insisted" the women go to the hut, and who also "appeared to approve" of their decision (p. 322). That is, the women are physically and emotionally affected by their interactions with the penguins, affections which are transformed into ideas (for example, the idea that the penguins are 'insisting' they pay attention to the damage wrought by human hands on the landscape) which then serve to guide action and modify behaviour. For the women, this series of events prompts them to be more sensitive to how they are affecting the natural environment. They decide they do not want to leave any physical trace of their presence on the ice when they depart, a desire which inspires them to build an 'eco-friendly' base made of a network of tunnels dug directly into the ice.

In summary, human actions, such as decision-making, are always contingent on a multiplicity of associations, which take a different configuration in every instance (McCullagh, 2018). In other words, "action is always sociomaterial" (Sergi, 2016, p. 117; see also Oborn, et al., 2013). Closely correlated to this point is the notion of distributed agency. As Sergi (2016) points out, "agency is not located in actors – human or non-human – but rather emerges out of the associations between human and non-human actors as they happen in context" (p. 117). In leadership studies, beginning with a conception of action as non-sovereign and relational moves the "locus of leadership" away from individuals and onto the "collective, material, and embodied practices enacted in context" (Sergi, 2016, p. 111). For leadership scholars operating within a practice and/or process paradigm, this ontological shift reconfigures leadership "as something social rather than individual" (Kelly, 2014, p. 911). Sergi (2016), for example, conceives leadership as the product of collective actions, material agencies and social relations that unfold *in situ* (p. 126). For Crevani et al. (2010), these processes are always ongoing, and so leadership can be said to be a common feature of our everyday working lives, or as is the case in 'Sur,' a process which necessarily emerges in the context of any project or venture where collaborative efforts are required to achieve some shared aim or goal. As Kelly (2014) further explains, "[i]t is the 'messy' and material world of *action* and those leadership actors that embody and are shaped by this action that marks out acts of leadership from the backdrop of organizational life" (p. 910). Applying these broad criteria – leadership as the interactions, affects and/or relations that enable people to act (Knights, 2018; Munro & Thanem, 2018) – to the example from 'Sur,' we might conclude

that leadership emerges as a result of the interactions between the women, the physical environment (the hut, the graveyard, the cold), the penguins, and the shared discursive constructions relating to their 'positions,' 'roles,' and 'purpose.' The inter-relations between elements are what give shape to the women's response (the decisions and actions they need to take), offer direction (how they will go about making this decision and what to do next), and order their future actions (establishing the next sequence of tasks and how they will be accomplished) (Sergi, 2016). However, despite these productive reconfigurations there are several problems associated with these existing relational conceptions which I discuss below.

Problems with relational conceptions of leadership

There are three interrelated problems I see as arising from relational understandings of leadership. First, in attempting to describe what leadership *is*, while at the same time keeping this explanation as open as possible, relational conceptions cannot help but be reductive. That is, in attempting to capture the messy, contingent, complex and embodied nature of social practices, leadership is reduced to its most 'essential' component(s), which in the ontological paradigms adopted by these approaches, are simply features of everyday life. In other words, leadership is defined by virtue of how action is understood to unfold, for example, through processes of becoming (Crevani, et al., 2010), via interactions (Sergi, 2016), as a consequence of affects (Munro & Thanem, 2018, 2020), or in transformative encounters (Bolden, 2016). Consequently, it is easy to see how leadership scholars like Knights (2018) reach the conclusion that leadership – once we peel away all the layers of discourse, imaginary constructions and the 'regulatory constraints' they impose – might simply be the other side of affect, that is, the power of interacting bodies to induce movement and change in encounters.

This leads to the second issue – ambiguity. As Kelly (2014) points out, relational approaches make leadership virtually indistinguishable from the everyday activities and practices enacted in society and organisations. To borrow Alvesson's (2019) phrasing, this means leadership could refer to 'everything and nothing' depending on the parameters employed by the observer/researcher and the value judgements they make. Bolden (2016), for example, wonders if the experience of reading a book might constitute an event of leadership, insofar as this relation empowers the individual to act differently in the future. The ambiguity built into relational conceptions has also led some critical leadership scholars to question whether the compendium of practices, activities and actions which end up being labelled 'leadership' in academic research might be more accurately described using less ideologically

laden and elitist vocabularies, such as those associated with managing, teamwork, organising, or peer support (Alvesson, 2019; Learmonth & Morrell, 2019).

One way leadership scholars have sought to address the problem of differentiating leadership from other social phenomena is by focusing analysis on a specific set of properties, namely formal or informal 'leader' figures, 'followers,' a shared purpose, and a relevant social, organisational or political context (Ladkin, 2010; McManus & Perruci, 2015). Defining leadership in terms of set properties, however, is to undermine one of the primary aims of relational approaches – moving beyond the leader-follower binary and the associated mythologies and hierarchal ways of thinking it continues to engender in research work, as well as in organisations and society more generally (see Munro & Thanem, 2018, for example). In addition, focusing on the properties of 'leadership' presupposes the terms of engagement between parts rather than being attentive to what unfolds in the interactions between a multiplicity of human and nonhuman entities.

A third issue emerges from this prioritisation of embodiment and generalised notions of entanglement. In 'freeing' leadership from individualist conceptions that render this phenomenon the property of persons, relational theories and process ontologies tend to operate from the assumption that there is a "generalized symmetry [between] actors and objects" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 56), including between the sexes. The reason for this being that the key feminist issues in leadership studies, namely the underrepresentation of women in formal 'leader' roles and the inequalities related to their performance in these positions, are no longer seen to be such a significant issue when leadership is reframed as a relational social process involving *multiple* human and nonhuman actors. This presumption is to side-step an important point regarding the interplay between sexed subjects in situated locations. As the new feminist materialist scholar Elizabeth Grosz (1994) contends, we do not live in a world that is "totally flattened" (p. 167). However, "hierarchies are not the result of substances and their nature and value," as per humanist thought, "but of modes of organization of disparate substances" (p. 167). Social categories like gender, sex, race, ethnicity and age, for example, serve to mediate interactions through difference/identity, and so are generative of social and symbolic differences (Kinkaid, 2020). These dimensions are often relegated a secondary concern in understandings of leadership where the emphasis is placed on what is produced via the complex entanglements between heterogenous constellations of material and immaterial entities (e.g., Oborn, et al., 2013; Sergi, 2016). As Kinkaid (2020) clarifies, it is not the case that these approaches "dismiss a priori symbolic categories…they just choose not

to dwell on issues of social and symbolic difference" (p. 463). Circumventing issues related to gender has specific implications for female subjects because in the "flux of multiple becoming" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 246) that is 'fully relational' leadership (Knights, 2018; Munro & Thanem, 2020), the two sexes tend to be (re)positioned in a symmetrical relationship. For Braidotti, this is to miss an important point. Even though we are all in a process of becoming, relations are never neutral because 'otherness' "calls for an always already compromised set of negotiations" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 343). There is no pre-existing symmetry between the sexes because the category 'Woman' and the feminine have been relegated to a pejorative position of lack and devalorised difference (as other of the Same) in language and the socio-symbolic order (Braidotti, 2002, 2011a).

In the following sections, I argue that these issues – reductivity, ambiguity and symmetry – can be resolved when we resituate and expand on the insights of relational conceptions within a new feminist materialist perspective and through engagement with the Deleuzean concept of assemblage. This approach grounds our understanding of leadership in terms of the capacities it enables and the function it serves, that is, what this socially enacted process can *do* and the corresponding effects. Broadly speaking, this involves the mobilisation of collective, collaborative and/or coordinated efforts towards an aim or intention. The actualisation of these capacities through the ensuing activities and practices of individuals and groups are productive of material effects and affects that will either advance or hinder the intention(s) toward which they are directed. In this sense, leadership increases our powers of acting, but this only occurs through a *specific* function which is brought about by certain combinations of events, actions, and material and immaterial entities in situated locations where the function is required. In the following sections, I draw on examples from the novel *Ammonite* to explore the implications of these shifts in thought for understanding and describing leadership practice. Following this general discussion of what I term 'leadership assemblages,' I expand on this description through consideration of the role and relationship between discursive and nondiscursive practices in leadership relations, and how these forces operate according to a "choreography of constraints and entitlements, controls and desire" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86). Considering these dimensions through a new feminist materialist lens, I argue that assemblage theory offers important insights into the asymmetrical positioning of women in leadership assemblages and a framework that can account for changing cultural and historical conditions as they relate to gender, leadership and associated imaginaries.

What can leadership do?

Ammonite is set on an off-world colony where a deadly influenza-like virus runs rampant. Since the discovery of the virus by Company personnel, or more accurately, since the virus discovered them, they have become increasingly isolated. For the organisation to survive and eventually flourish, they must adapt and change, a situation that requires leadership. When Marghe, an anthropologist and a test subject for a potential vaccine, arrives on Jeep, she is met by Acting Commander Danner. Danner is quick to explain the situation to Marghe – the personnel at Port Central (their working base) are "operating on one-third staffing levels – under a hundred Mirrors and less than three hundred technicians to do the work of over a thousand" (p. 32) and a large proportion of their equipment is either missing or not functioning correctly. Placing further pressure on the situation is the fact that the social structure has undergone a major shift "because every single member of staff is female, then add to *that* a virus that might mean none of us ever leave this place again" (p. 32). Much like the current situation we find ourselves in due to the Covid-19 pandemic, "[w]hat all this adds up to is simple. Uncertainty. That might not sound too bad, but what it means is that the rules don't work here. It means that nothing has to be the way you expect it to be" (p. 32). Their original mandate – establishing and running a mining operation – is no longer feasible as the planetary team are now isolated from their (off-world) support system due to their contamination by a virus no one knows anything about (p. 18). They are also cut off from the other communities and inhabitants on Jeep who are wary of Company and the damage they have already caused since their arrival five years earlier.[33]

Coordinated and collective effort is a necessary feature of teams, groups, social movements, political parties, organisations, and other institutions; a function that recruits bodies and their capacities toward the enactment of activities and tasks aimed at realising specific intentions or purposes. Linking the mobilisation of collective, coordinated and/or collaborative action to leadership practice therefore seems to imply that this socio-material process is taking place everywhere and all the time. However, we can differentiate between everyday events of collectivity and collaborative action, which emerge from management and other organisational practices, such as supervision or teamwork, and those that are produced

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[33] Their isolation is partly a consequence of Company's environmentally unsustainable business practices, including setting off a large 'burn' (an area of ground destroyed by their mining operations) that destroyed a neighboring community's entire agricultural system.

by leadership through consideration of the relationship between this function, the nature of the intention or purpose that animates it, and the kind of actions and activities it engenders.

In this lens, an intention – which may also be referred to as an aim, purpose or vision – is an affective product of the wider environment. An affective product, as Colman (2010) puts it, is "an abstract result [that is] physically and temporally produced" through the "modification of experiences" that occur "when one produces or recognizes the consequences of movement and time for [conceptual] bodies" (p. 12), such as organisations, communities or groups. This means an intention is not a purely cognitive exercise on the part of an autonomous and independent human agent, but neither is human action simply the outcome of random 'happenings.' Intentions are formed via our capacities to intervene (either actively or reactively) in the flow of becoming through situated processes of negotiation and transformation (Braidotti, 2006). Different opportunities and threats are constantly emerging as other actions and events unfold in the wider environment in which human subjects, and the social structures we form, are located. In *Ammonite*, a convergence of unexpected events has destabilised the situation at Port Central, resulting in the creation of several new intentions, namely, an intention to establish mutually beneficial and long-term relations with the native inhabitants and the construction of a self-sustaining communication and supplies network in the event Company cuts their losses and abandons the remaining personnel on Jeep (p. 37). Implementing and achieving these aims in an uncertain environment requires coordinated and collaborative effort, the material effects of which will be different actions and activities that contribute to their eventuation or may even transform them into something else.

The 'success conditions' of the actions aimed at these intentions "cannot be specified in advance but only within the situated and temporally unfolding action itself" (Bowden, 2018, p. 123). In other words, there are no clear steps or procedures that will ensure the successful realization of these aims. Rather, it will require a compendium of actions, for example, planning, directing, controlling, instigating, negotiating, influencing, ordering, inspiring, and so on, depending on the demands and specificities of the situation.[34] For it is only in the very act of attempting to forge connections with indigenous communities and incorporating changes at Port Central that Danner, Marghe, and their colleagues will discover

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[34] Jeep personnel, Mirror and civilian, for example, have been busy "[a]dapting to the realities of their new home…decorating their mods [living quarters], making their own clothes, and weaving beautiful tapestries" (p. 91), actions which are predicated on the knowledge that they are unlikely to leave the planet and must become self-sufficient.

what achieving their dual aims of sustainability and connectivity look like, and what this will demand of them. For example, when Marghe visits one of the native settlements she learns about 'trata,' a kind of trade alliance formed between communities and family groups to ensure their collective flourishing. Trata is not transactional in the traditional sense, but rather "the first step on a journey whose outcome was uncertain" (p. 55). Marghe realizes that trata would assist her own community at Port Central by integrating them into the social network on Jeep; they would become "part of the cultural food chain" (p. 83). Given these potential benefits, Marghe begins the process of forming a trata agreement with the women of Holme Valley. The result, as Marghe explains to Danner is that "[w]e're linked to these people. From now on, what they do – all of them, and any of them, because the trata is woven right through these communities, linking each with another – will affect us, so they'll consider our needs before they do anything" (p. 83) just as Port Central will need to consider Holme Valley when making certain decisions.

As well as having the effect of advancing their intention to form long-term relations with Jeep's inhabitants, the trata alliance produces a new reality for Company personnel and the women of Holme Valley. As Bowden (2018) observes, "unfolding action outstrips what an agent [or multiple agents] initially intends, foresees and is capable of" (p. 113). Not only are these two communities now bound to one another, but they also have a stake in each other's success and well-being. When Holme Valley is threatened by a neighboring tribe, Danner is obligated to send assistance as part of honoring the trata agreement, a requirement that she resists at first on the grounds that the women at Port Central already have too much to do: "There's enough work here for every woman twice over…I can't, I absolutely cannot, spare anyone this time," Danner tells the representative for Holme Valley. But "trata is trata," she replies (p. 266). In setting up the lines of communication and a tentative alliance with Holme Valley, Danner and her colleagues, as well as everything they've brought with them and created (or destroyed), are now enmeshed even more deeply in the webwork that is Jeep. They are not only affected through this alliance, but they are also dependent on the mutual support it provides, building their own capabilities through the knowledge and resources traded with Holme Valley. In this way, an unanticipated outcome of Marghe's actions is the creation of a scenario and series of events that engenders the affective framing and conditions where leadership might also be required.

Returning to the example from the previous section where the women in 'Sur' visit Hut Point, their intention in this instant is to resolve the problem of what to do about the mess

left by Captain Scott and his men and whether they should set up their camp at this location or somewhere else. Making this decision is a collaborative endeavour involving negotiation and debate, however, the 'success conditions' of the intention are definable prior to any action being taken. Either a decision is reached by the group, or it is not and the project dissolves. The situation requires management of the processes involved in decision-making to ensure they reach a suitable agreement and can then act on what they have decided. Later in the story, however, when the women are focused on achieving their shared aim of reaching "that white place on the map, that void" ('Sur,' p. 326) where no (wo)man has set foot, and while doing so, leaving no trace of their journey,[35] collaborative and coordinated effort takes the form of activities such as depot-laying along the proposed route (organising) and carefully-planned practice trips to develop the skills and capabilities they will need to navigate the harsh conditions, including blizzard winds, snow blindness, and treacherous hidden crevasses. In this instance, the actions and activities are directed at something where the conditions of success (what will lead to the resolution of their aim) are only gradually revealed through the performance and ensuing effects of multiple situated and temporally extended actions (Bowden, 2018).

These examples reflect Anderson et al.'s (2012) observation that "in different conditions the same constituent parts," that is, the same people, institutional structures, physical location, roles, and so on, might engender different social processes, such as management, while "a range of causal factors," like the spread of a virus or the demands of a project where the scope exceeds the group's current capabilities can produce "similar emergent forms," such as a leadership assemblage (p. 183). The emergence of leadership is not dependent on the presence of certain properties – a leader, followers, purpose, and a relevant setting, for example – but rather is contingent on the nature and demands of the intention(s) and its relationship to the capacities, actions and activities that are engendered by specific functions in situated spatio-temporal contexts. When the realities of a situation

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[35] The narrator jokingly stipulates one of the reasons for this choice is to not cause any undue distress for the male explorers who both precede and will come after them: "I was glad even then that we had left no sign there, for some man longing to be the first might come some day…and know then what a fool he had been, and break his heart" (p. 329). However, the group's encounter with the penguins might also have something to do with it, as it is only after being invited to see the wreckage left by past expeditions that the narrator observes "the backside of heroism is often rather sad [and destructive]; women and servants know that" (p. 323). Part of their resolve not to leave any trace of their journey is thus connected to their experience at Hut Point, which demonstrates how leadership practice is contingent on all kinds of effects, not all of which may appear to have anything to do with leadership but nevertheless form the backdrop for future social action and relations.

preclude the possibility of specifying the success conditions of the intention in advance, then collective, coordinated and/or collaborative efforts will give rise to actions and activities on the part of individuals and groups that "will inevitably produce…unforeseeable effects which themselves progressively reveal what it *actually* means" to realise the intention or aim (Bowden, 2018, p. 131). On the other hand, when the mobilisation of collective or collaborative efforts are directed toward intentions where the "conditions that an agent must bring about in the world" can be set *prior to* the action(s) being performed (Bowden, 2018, p. 131), then these efforts are reflective of management activities rather than leadership practice (e.g., what management practices can *do* is ensure the successful execution of pre-established procedures and tasks). Consequently, it is in considering what leadership enables and through discussion of the relationship between intentions and the qualities of the capacities and actions that are enabled by specific functions, that we can differentiate leadership from other social phenomena that play themselves out in organisations and other social settings.

Reimagining leadership as an assemblage

By beginning with thinking about leadership in terms of the conditions of its emergence, we can reveal a more complex dynamic that resists the reductionism and ambiguity of relational approaches. In new materialist thought, ways of functioning are dependent on the *assemblage* of "objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time" and, through a multitude of engagements, produce certain effects and outcomes (Livesey, 2010, p. 18). It is the assemblage, rather than an individual entity or thing, that enables or activates collective and collaborative efforts, a capacity that is constituted through an open process of interactions *between* component parts. The term assemblage therefore refers not only to the collection of elements that compose it but also "describes the 'co-functioning' of heterogeneous parts" (Anderson, et al., 2012, p. 177) which "operate as provisional 'wholes'" (Kinkaid, 2020, p. 459). In this sense, it is both a noun and a verb. Importantly, thinking of leadership as an assemblage allows us to describe leadership without affixing this term to any one element of an assemblage (such as a 'leader,' or any other material objects or bodies) or correlating leadership with a general feature of reality (e.g., affectivity or becoming). While affectivity and becoming are features of any assemblage, leadership is not reducible to these characteristics as the ontological reality of this social phenomenon is contingent on multiple elements being drawn into a provisional, open 'whole.' In other words, and unlike relational theories, there is no essence or 'locus of

leadership' in this approach. Instead, a leadership assemblage emerges "when a function emerges" (Livesey, 2010, p. 19), and "transpires as a set of forces coalesces together" (p. 18).

An assemblage only lasts for a finite period of time in accordance with the conditions that both facilitate its emergence and its dissolution (which may occur as a result of the resolution or abandonment of the shared purpose). These conditions, however, are not static, but subject to change as other events and actions take place in the environment, serving to either further stabilize, transform or even prematurely disband an assemblage and its capacities. For example, Danner's discovery that Company have been spying on her and other staff at Port Central enables the remaining Mirrors and civilian personnel to further refine what it will mean for them to become self-sufficient when Company eventually cuts them off. This includes abandoning Port Central and developing a new site that has access to plenty of natural resources (p. 315). The constitutive powers of a leadership assemblage are also implicated in these processes of change and becoming. The new realities, connections and unforeseen circumstances actualized by different activities influence the social field and what becomes possible, as is the case with the trata agreement. This reflects Livesey's (2010) point that "an assemblage is shaped by and acts on a wide range of flows" (p. 18), further signaling the embodied and embedded reality of leadership as a productive force in the world (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this point).

Like relational and distributed conceptions that emphasise the materiality of leadership, thinking leadership as an assemblage displaces individualist and entity conceptions by highlighting the socio-material nature of action and the role of other-than-human material and immaterial entities in making things happen. As Oborn et al. (2013) explain in their discussion of policy making processes in the context of clinical coalitions, "[l]eadership was not enacted by one or another individual accomplishing certain functions; agency was enacted through a collective assemblage that was multiply distributed and contingently enacted" (p. 263). In *Ammonite* the leadership assemblage that emerges at Port Central comprises an array of heterogenous others, including the physical space, the organisational actors, the available resources and technologies, feelings of uncertainty, the desire for security, formal and informal positions, established roles and routines, shared intentions, and so on. As such, collective, coordinated and/or collaborative action (the constitutive powers of a leadership assemblage) is not contingent on an independent agent but is jointly produced as these different elements combine and interact across the duration of an assemblage. This holds particular implications for how we conceive the role of human

subjects within any assemblage. Given the collective nature of leadership, it makes little sense to use the phrase 'her/his/their leadership,' as to do so is to (re)produce the already contested idea that an autonomous and independent individual or group of individuals is the origin of action and has control over the process. However, this does not make human actors and their modes of relating redundant, especially not leader figures like Acting Commander Danner who are seen to be responsible for making plans, giving orders, and overseeing the safety of others on account of their positioning within institutional hierarchies.

As a 'working part' of the larger amalgam of bodies, ideas, passions, objects, discourses, systems and structures that serve to mobilise collective efforts within the organisational environment of Port Central, Danner contributes to the unfolding action in a distinct way. Her position and role within the institutional hierarchy is associated with certain rituals, routines and symbols that are productive of social and symbolic differences, including, for example, Danner's belief that she is solely responsible for "oversee[ing] the safety of every single human being on this planet" (p. 32). This idea is reflective of contemporary cultural investments in the 'corporate savior' or 'organisational redeemer' who will instigate the "transformation of the organisation, its people, and structures, moving it to a higher level of achievement through an almost supernatural process" (Ford, 2016, p. 225). It is also an identity that influences how Danner approaches her interactions with others, as well as producing affects in the context of different encounters that lead to action (e.g., following orders and implementing plans):

> Command isolated her more effectively than a deadly disease…In front of others, she was not allowed to be Hannah Danner, the newest lieutenant on Jeep; she had to be Acting Commander Danner, the one with all the answers, her orders crisp, clear, and fast as the breaking of a bone. It reached the stage where she could not even bring herself to eat or drink in front of other officers. It took her a long time to learn that patterns of command were well laid; as long as what she asked people to do made some kind of sense, they would be glad to have someone in charge. (p. 77)

Even Danner's gestures are interpreted through the lens of this hierarchical position that serves to differentiate her from others and is productive of physiological affects and changes in behavior. For example, when one of her subordinates, Lu Wai, notices Danner has "shifted back into commanding offer mode," she sits up straighter and becomes more alert (p. 82).

As these examples demonstrate, ways of being and acting are linked to particular ways of knowing, which are informed by the shared fictions, terminologies and identities that constitute the backdrop for meaningful action and the rules of engagement with relation to specific kinds of assemblages, such as leadership (Lorraine, 2011). As Lorraine (2011) explains, human existence is not only defined through embodiment, but also through processes of subjectification (how we come to identify our position and role within different contexts and encounters) and systems of significance (the explicit and implicit statements and rules that condition both language and behaviour) (p. 37) (see also Chapter 2). This observation offers an important extension of the notion of assemblage and its use in leadership studies. Drawing on the work of the French philosopher Deleuze, Lorraine (2011) explains that

> On the one hand an assemblage…is a 'machinic assemblage' of actions, passions and bodies reacting to one another…On the other hand it is a 'collective assemblage of enunciation', of statements and incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. (p. 148)

This means any leadership assemblage, because it involves thinking subjects, also comprises machinic assemblages (similar to the Foucauldian notion of nondiscursive practices) and collective assemblages of enunciation (similar to the Foucauldian notion of discursive practices). Machinic assemblages consist of the "specific subsets of the habitual practices and routines" and connections (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13), that enable us to "engage in projects" (p. 37). As such, this term refers to the heterogenous arrangements of elements that come together to engender physical procedures and material practices, which in the case of a leadership assemblage, is to mobilise collaborative and coordinated efforts toward the realisation of some aim or intention. Collective assemblages of enunciation refer to the "signifying and interpreting activities we engage in as we carry out our business" and include the modes of identification, "enacted rules and linguistic practices," as well as social and institutional discourses, that regulate specific collections of speech acts (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13). While these two kinds of assemblages "have a certain autonomy from one another," they are not entirely separable and so operate in "reciprocal presupposition" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13).

To give an example, the leadership assemblage that originates at Port Central includes machinic assemblages that involve, broadly speaking, the relations between Danner, Marghe,

the remaining Mirrors and civilian contractors, the physical location of Jeep with its many unknowns, the formation of a shared purpose to respond to emergent circumstances, the actions and activities that are undertaken to achieve these aims, the routines of communicating directives to staff, and so forth. As Lorraine (2011) explains, machinic assemblages are "an unfolding process of productive parts making something happen," but they also intersect "in complicated ways with ways we have of talking" (p. 37). This includes ways of talking *about* leadership – "in confused times people…like orders, firm leadership," Danner contends (p. 317) – as well as ways of talking *during* its occurrence, the identities and roles individuals adopt,[36] the small talk people make and the explanations they give, which are all examples of the speech acts comprising the collective assemblage of leadership enunciations.[37] Following other new materialist philosophers, Lorraine (2011) maintains that discursive and nondiscursive practices are not linked in a strictly casual or linear fashion;[38] "their relationships are never…a one-to-one correspondence" (p. 37). However, this does not mean that what unfolds in situ is completely random or chaotic.

Using the image of a *rhizome* (a bulb or tuber that is always spreading in multiple and unpredictable directions) as a way to explain the relationship between the two kinds of assemblage, Anderson, et al. (2012) write that "reciprocal presuppositions and mutual connections" between discursive and nondiscursive practices "play themselves out in the constitution of a social field that is always being provisionally ordered" (p. 181). Firstly, this means that as new connections are made, and "new linkages forged, the rhizome changes" (Strom, 2015, p. 322). In this constantly changing network, a multiplicity of forces and intensities are created as different lines intersect and interact to materialise different realities and practices within situated locations. To revisit a brief example from the previous chapter,

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[36] Danner, for example, frequently looks to others for affirmation of her actions – is she being a good leader? Is this something another commander would have done? (p. 170).

[37] It is worth noting here that discursive and nondiscursive practices that are present in leadership assemblages might also be engaged in management situations or simply in the everyday goings on in organisations, as is the case when managers are referred to as leaders or a specific event or encounter is referred to as 'leadership.' This does not mean, however, that a leadership assemblage has formed, as per my argument in this chapter regarding the conditions of emergence.

[38] Although, as Lorraine (2011) explains, "one can distinguish between the two kinds of assemblages, they can never…be separated" (p. 37) as they unfold along the same plane. As I explained in Chapter 2, there are no *separate* levels of existence (e.g., an immanent world of interactions and a transcendent world of concepts). A view premised on linear notions of cause-and-effect, on the other hand, presupposes separability, asking whether it is the machinic assemblages of bodies and actions that give rise to statements and incorporeal transformations, or it is discursive constructions of 'leaders' and 'followers,' and what this imagery and terminology produces in specific locations, that determines material practices. An assemblage framework refuses this dichotomous way of thinking.

in 'Sur' the narrator explains how "the nine of us worked things out amongst us from beginning to end without any orders being given by anybody" (p. 320). In part, this material practice is informed by the women's ways of talking about themselves: "we nine were, and are, by birth and upbringing, unequivocally and irrevocably, all crew" (p. 320), a statement that also serves to differentiate their approach from the hierarchical relationship between the male officers and crew that is modelled to them on the *Yelcho*, the vessel they charter to take them to the Antarctic. This way of talking is also linked to their experiences as housewives and homemakers, which the narrator suggests are contributing factors in their approach (p. 320). This process, however, is also premised on what unfolds in the environment. That none of the group's "qualities as a 'leader' were…tested" (p. 320) also has to do with the fact that they are never presented with a situation where they are in "such urgent danger that one voice must be obeyed without present question" (p. 319). The way these different lines (and others not mentioned here) traverse each other are productive of a particular lived reality for the group.

This example leads into a second important insight regarding the nature of the relationship between machinic and enunciative assemblages. Assemblage theory situates the "mutual implication" of the two kinds of assemblages "with a whole context of, respectively, nondiscursive and discursive practices" in the social field (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13). As Lorraine (2011) further explains, "words and actions have social significance in the context, respectively, of other words and actions, as well as in mutual implication with a whole context of, respectively, nondiscursive and discursive practices" (p. 13). So the cultural ways we have of speaking about situations involving collective and collaborative efforts (e.g., that most people know what is meant when an individual is labelled a 'leader' or a 'follower,' or when a situation is described as 'a failure of leadership') is in some respects "autonomous from and yet mutually implicated with ways of behaving with which we may be familiar," for example, organising, directing and communicating in a top-down manner (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13). This then has material consequences, shaping, for example, how people come to realise their position as "specific speakers and actors" in certain kinds of social assemblages (Lorraine, 2011, p. 37). Even though the traditional or culturally dominant ways of speaking about leaders and leadership, as well as habitual ways of behaving associated with the mobilisation of collective and coordinated effort, are absent from the women's experiences as they are recounted in 'Sur,' they still give meaning to what unfolds through their absence. This is because as embodied subjects we are always embedded in our own time and place,

and so what we do and say (or think) carries within it the characteristic of what has come prior conditioning what will come later. As a result, "any given event of meaning constitutes a kind of selection from a range of continuous variation in possible meaning" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13). In 'Sur,' we can see how the women purposefully rework habitual connections and modes of identification in both thought and action in their refusal to identify themselves as leaders and followers (p. 320), in their critique of hero narratives (p. 323), and by encouraging 'grumbling' and creative conflict in their interactions (p. 320).

What assemblage theory offers is not only a framework for visualising the productive entanglements of bodies, things and practices and what goes on in encounters (how different entities affect and are affected) across the different stages of a leadership assemblage (formation, maintenance and dissolution), but also a model for theorising the non-linear, but reciprocal relationship between discursive and nondiscursive practices as they unfold in each local context of leadership and in specific encounters. A further insight is also raised here, while in assemblage thinking there can be no inherent 'male foundation' to leadership (as a social practice), this comes with a clear caveat. Because the two kinds of assemblages exist at any location and are implicated in the unfolding action, and because these assemblages of statements, materials, bodies, meanings and so on, are both gendered and gendering, it is impossible to separate leadership practice from the imaginary, and hence from sexual difference. In the following section I consider the third problem I identified in relational approaches – the assumption of symmetry.

The force of the gendered imaginary in leadership assemblages

In a new materialist perspective, subjects are understood to be enmeshed in a "sticky network of interrelated social and discursive effects, which constitutes the social field" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86). As per my argument in Chapter 2, sexual difference has been, and continues to be, a "distributor and organizer of social and symbolic forces" in this network (Braidotti, 2002, p. 34). For example, even though the macro-level scholarly rhetoric on leadership has ostensibly transcended the 'heroic' hegemonic narrative, the multiplicity of cultural and academic discourses which construct the social imaginary of leadership are still impregnated with stories and images of the exceptional (male) individual (Ford, et al., 2008; Liu, 2020). The 'imaginary' in this view "refers to a set of socially mediated practices which function as the anchoring point, albeit unstable and contingent, for identifications and therefore for identity-formation" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86). The collective imagination functions as a 'binding force' in societies, organisations and communities (Lorraine, 2011),

making it possible for human subjects to form links and make connections which then serve to guide discursive and nondiscursive practices in assemblages.

Assemblage thinking from a feminist perspective incorporates this reality by "asking more questions about how social difference is (re)produced and how relations of inequality endure" (Kinkaid, 2020, p. 467). For Braidotti (2011b), these questions are connected to the role of the imaginary and to the power formations that circulate and are reproduced in our socio-historical contexts. Hegemonic or masculine leadership knowledge is expressed in the stories we tell of leadership, the vocabularies we use, the identities we adopt, the stereotypes we apply, the social practices we repeat, the rules we follow, the institutional power structures we support, and so on, which rest on a particular view of the human subject and of social categories, like gender and race, that are defined through negative difference and historically produced from a male-masculine standpoint (Stead & Elliott, 2009; Lipton, 2017; Liu, 2020). This includes the essentialization of gender traits and a preoccupation with individualist schemas and identities which are frequently exclusionary and regulative, as the critical leadership studies literature demonstrates (Learmonth & Morrell, 2019; Liu, 2020; Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2014). Gendered leadership narratives and discursive representations of 'leaders' and 'leadership' that privilege individualist and hegemonic perspectives are also continuously being (re)produced in popular culture, including films, fiction, social media, and the news (Czarniawska & Rhodes, 2006; Elliott & Stead, 2017), and through academic and non-academic texts (Alvesson, 2019; Land, et al., 2013; Stead & Elliot, 2009). Traditional forms of behavioural and trait-based leadership theorising, primarily developed from studies featuring male leaders in hierarchical organisations, for example, have emphasised the pre-eminence of the leader figure and the association of stereotypically masculine ideals with leadership practice (Stead & Elliott, 2009). Models of charismatic and transformational leadership have further attributed power and influence to individual social actors while portraying followers as passive and compliant (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992).

This has important implications for how we view the position of sexed subjects in leadership assemblages given that any enactment of leadership is connected to the "background presuppositions" and "implicit rules" that inform the corresponding collective machinic and enunciative assemblages in any location (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13). These

presuppositions, rules and routines vary over time.[39] However, as I argued in Chapter 2, there is no sexual symmetry between men and women and no 'true binary' between the mutually exclusive and dominant categories of 'Man/Woman' and 'Masculine/Feminine' because these dualisms and their associated qualities have been, and continue to be, defined in Western thought through the dominant and privileged term (Braidotti, 2011a; Colebrook, 2004). This results in "an always already compromised set of negotiations," relations and desires (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 343). Braidotti (2003) uses the phrase "history tattooed on your body" (p. 54) to describe the multi-faceted embeddedness of the subject and their historicity, which is characterised by different forms and experiences of oppression, empowerment and difference. To give an example, in *Ammonite* Danner is in a formal 'leader' position in what is a hierarchically-ordered organisational structure with formal reporting lines. Although Danner's position is an outcome of higher levels of women participating in paid employment and climbing the 'corporate ladder,' this path to the 'top' has not been straightforward for Danner: "What other Company planet was under the charge of a lieutenant? She might wear the two stars of a commander, but in her head she was still a lieutenant, playing at command, as though it were a test after which the real brass would unplug her from the simulator and point out all her mistakes" (p. 77). While Danner's move into this role is a result of the impact of a deadly virus, it is also indicative of a broader trend where women are more likely to be promoted into these positions in times of crisis and experience greater degrees of precarity in these roles as a result (Ryan, et al., 2016). Danner's position is challenged, for example, by a group of her subordinates who perceive her decisions as undermining the organisation, "making us seem less and less different to the natives…You wanted to take down the boundaries, muddle it all up" (p. 169).

The existence and (re)production of social and symbolic differences in the context of leadership relations necessitates a broader agenda for leadership scholars operating in a relational paradigm. New materialist approaches (feminist or not) must encompass not only the study of leadership assemblages (the relations between its 'parts' and the 'whole,' as well as its effects), but also of human subjects and their differential experiences in the locations where leadership assemblages form, endure and dissolve. This is of a different degree than

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[39] For example, the upvaluing of traditionally 'feminine' attributes in leadership discourses and popular culture, as well as an increasing number of women making it into formal leadership positions. These changes have served to create a greater variation in the options available for both men and women, challenging traditionally sterile notions of leadership as a singular and primarily male-masculine endeavor (Stead & Elliott, 2009).

studying 'women's leadership' or 'masculine leadership' as per conventional mainstream and critical approaches, but rather relocates the focus onto leadership *subjectivities*, which are understood to be collectively constructed and mediated by a plethora of power relations (Braidotti, 2011b). In the following chapter, I introduce Braidotti's notion of 'cartography' to build on the insights of this chapter and to introduce a feminist analytic for mapping and representing the "complex workings of power" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86) that are at work in the creation of what are always gendered leadership subjectivities and modes of identification. As Kinkaid (2020) points out, social categories like gender, sex and race, "are forces and power relations that pre-exist and exceed the individual, while producing and constraining individual subjectivities" (p. 460). Consequently, and as I demonstrate at length in the following chapter, despite the changes and transformations we are undergoing in the present, the dominant symbolic regime continues to underwrite leadership through normative processes of signification and subjectification, wherein the "symbolic and imaginary inscriptions of different bodies [takes place] in an asymmetrical power order" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 113). However, as I also argue in Chapter 4, power can also be reworked strategically by individuals and groups in ways that materialise potentially empowering alternatives at the personal level.

Conclusion

The 'relational turn' in leadership studies has created new horizons of possibility for thinking about leadership by reconfiguring social action as a collective endeavor involving both material and immaterial entities. While relational approaches have been instrumental in displacing individualist and positivist conceptions of leadership by highlighting the distributed, embodied nature of social processes, there is a tendency in this literature to define leadership in overly general terms, referring to it as a process of becoming or a series of affects. The result of this reductive approach is a form of ambiguity that treats leadership as little more than an ungrounded fiction or abstract signifier that can be ascribed to an increasingly broad and varied array of social practices on the proviso that they increase people's powers of acting. By drawing on the work of new materialist scholars informed by the philosophy of Deleuze, we can develop an alternative understanding of leadership that does not require specifying what this social phenomenon *is*, but instead begins by looking at what leadership can *do* and the specific conditions that bring it about.

Building on these ideas, I proposed thinking leadership as the product of an *assemblage*; "a conjunction of a number of persons, forces and circumstances, capable of its

own experiences and actions" (Baugh, 2010b, p. 290). The phrase 'leadership assemblages' describes the multi-faceted, embodied and processual nature of the collective, coordinated and/or collaborative efforts that give rise to a variety of actions and activities on the part of individuals and groups that contribute to the realization of an intention or aim where the 'success conditions' (the actions one must take) are not fully knowable in advance. Rather than a leader 'doing' leadership so that she and her subordinates are empowered to act towards the resolution of their intention or aim – what would be a linear and transactional process – it is the interactions *between* different and changing components that make up an assemblage and which facilitate the actualization of this function in different instances. Given the situated nature of these processes, a leadership assemblage will take a different configuration every time and cannot be predicted in advance as they will always exceed any pre-defined norm. However, the ontological reality of a leadership assemblage is always dependent on the presence of the conditions that give rise to situations where this 'doing' is required, and its duration is contingent on other actions and events that unfold in the social realm. By working within these parameters, we do not need to identify leadership by its properties (which are never set *a priori*), but neither is 'leadership' a label that can be applied to any event or practice that induces movement or change.

Assemblage thinking also allows us to reconsider the positioning and role of human subjects within leaderships assemblages and how certain processes serve to make these practices meaningful for individuals and groups. As Deleuze teaches us, any assemblage that involves human actors also comprises 'machinic assemblages' and 'collective assemblages of enunciation' (Lorraine, 2011). This resituates critical claims by leadership scholars like Śliwa et al. (2012) who argue that it is leadership itself that produces "hierarchical power relations" (p. 879). Instead, we can see this kind of outcome as the result of the interplay of nondiscursive and discursive practices which are linked to situated locations and specific formations of power, including narratives and hierarchical institutional systems. These practices characterize the two kinds of assemblages but do not equate leadership. However, these and other related forces are always at work in any situation where a leadership assemblage emerges given that machinic and enunciative assemblages are the product of their context, which is both emergent *and* culturally and historically conditioned (Lorraine, 2011). We, as researchers, can enter at multiple points in order to study temporally expressed phenomena like leadership and the shifting position and role of human subjects, material and immaterial objects, and socio-historical constructs in this milieu.

Most importantly for this thesis, however, is that assemblage thinking in a feminist perspective foregrounds the role of pre-existing social categories, like gender and race, as well as the dominant and collectively shared leadership imaginary, in creating "shared and conflicting orientations and identities…for particular groups and individuals" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 82) across the duration of a leadership assemblage. As Kinkaid (2020) argues, it is imperative not to "flatten out these historically specific forms of social difference," nor to "obscure their coherence within specific symbolic and material regimes of value (e.g., white supremacy, patriarchy)" (p. 463). A critical orientation is central to take account of women's positioning in the historically and culturally produced gender system, the outcomes of which are experienced both materially and socially, and hence are powerfully operational in the contemporary contexts in which leadership assemblages emerge and social subjectivities are formed, factors I explore in the following chapter.

Chapter Four   Cartographies of power and figurations of women's leadership subjectivities

Entering the milieu with *Air*

The major opening event in Geoff Ryman's novel *Air: Or, Have Not Have*[40] is the advent of a 'Test' for a newly developed technology (referred to as 'Air') that is similar to the internet, but which is accessed directly through the human mind; it will be "in the air we breathe" (p. 7).[41] In the Green Valley region of Karzistan – a fictional country located in Central Asia – the arrival of Air is lauded as a "tremendous advance for culture" (p. 7) which will address the global problem of a world "divided into information have and have-nots" (p. 9). The Test goes poorly, causing widespread panic in the poorer regions of Karzistan and resulting in the temporary postponement of Air's global introduction, as well as debate over the safety and viability of different formats.[42] In the village of Kizuldah, an enterprising middle-aged woman called Mae realises that when Air does eventually arrive in a years' time, it is going to upset their everyday lives in significant ways, including how she will run her fashion business as all her clients will have immediate access to the latest fashions from the runways of Paris to Milan:

> "All our lives," she [Mae] said, "are going to change. Air will come again. We have the television [and internet] now to help us be more modern, but nothing is really being done to make the village ready." (p. 76)

In recognising the need to prepare, as well as her desire to take advantage of technological change and increasing global connectedness, Mae forms two interrelated aims. As she explains to her assistant, An: "I have two purposes, I confess. First, is to help me shape my business. That will change, too. But the second is to help the village to decide: What do we want to do for the future?" (p.76-77). Both intentions ultimately require the

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[40] Published in 2005, Geoff Ryman's novel *Air* has been the recipient of multiple SF awards, including the James Tiptree, Jr Award (now known as the 'Otherwise Award') for gender-bending speculative fiction and the Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best British science fiction writing.

[41] The technology of Air, while science fictional and purposefully exaggerated, reflects the pervasiveness of smart device usage and the increasing ease of access to the collective world of knowledge via platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. In this way, the novel offers important social commentary on globalisation and advanced capitalism in postcolonial settings (see Kurtz, 2015, for example).

[42] There are two proposed versions – the not-for-profit and globally monitored U.N. System, and the for-profit, but less glitchy, Gates Format.

mobilisation of collective, coordinated and collaborative efforts, but how Mae and others in her community will go about achieving these dual aims is an open question in the novel given the lack of specificity and the newness of the situation the characters find themselves in. By applying assemblage thinking to this situation, we can trace the conditions for the emergence of a leadership assemblage, the different component parts that jointly serve to enable collective action, as well as the compendium of discursive and nondiscursive practices that animate the unfolding action and related effects.

Clearly, we can approach this milieu from multiple research angles, but in this chapter I am particularly concerned with how we can think about and study the experiences of individuals, like Mae, who are active agents in and beyond the assemblages of which they are a part. As I explained in the previous chapter, the two kinds of assemblages – machinic assemblages (nondiscursive practices) and collective assemblages of enunciation (discursive practices) – are relational practices mediated by different human strata, including processes of subjectification (the bodily interpretation of subjectivity). How female subjects experience their sex and gender in society and in the context of different social formations and social practices, such as leadership, depends on an individual's "location in the social field" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 27) and on situated processes of subject formation (Braidotti, 2011b). Considering the positioning of women in leadership assemblages is important because, as Lorraine (2011) points out, "an individual's power to affect and be affected is mediated by the many flows (e.g., physiological, organic, and social) of which she is a part" (p. 151). A feminist analytic in this schema further highlights the relations of power and mediating material and linguistic forces that encircle female subjects because of their historical situation as the 'second sex,' and the role of gender binaries in influencing how they make sense of their experiences and relate to others (Braidotti, 2011b). In *Air*, for example, Mae observes that in her negotiations with others she is "talking like a man. It was the only way to avoid the pits of emotion on either side and keep all the issues separate" (p. 142). At the same time, however, she also navigates stereotypically 'feminine' expectations and ideals, as she is seen as a "Mother to us all" (p. 159) in her village. These gendered images, narratives and expressions reflect the prevailing imaginary, that is, the "ruling social and cultural formation[s]" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 85) which are defined by the "dominant institutions of femininity and masculinity" (p. 85) and act as the "anchoring point[s]…for identifications" (p. 86) of others and ourselves in leadership situations.

This raises the question of how we can study human agents in leadership, and specifically female 'leader' figures like Mae, in ways that "move away from dichotomous thinking" (Lipton, 2017, p. 75) but are simultaneously attuned to and can account for the effects of the gender system on the construction, acquisition and enactment of leadership subjectivities.[43] Approaching this question from a new feminist materialist perspective requires thinking differently about the relationship between subjectivity, the imaginary and power (Braidotti, 2011b), elements which are frequently underplayed or misunderstood in leadership studies (Ford, 2016). In both mainstream and critical leadership studies, power has primarily been associated with individuals and/or identity, that is, power as a possession or commodity (Knights, 2018). Knights (2018) offers the following summary of the status of power in leadership studies:

> …there are occasions when the literature seems not to explore more than the surface features of fundamental theoretical concepts such as power. There is a sense in which arguing that leadership is closely aligned with power is so radical to the field that it seems sufficient not to extend any further. Consequently, the concept is assumed to be self-evident or understood commonsensically rather than interrogated. (p. 86)

Despite this general trend there are divergences, with critical leadership scholars drawing on the work of Foucault and other theorists of power, such as Deleuze and Guattari or Giddens, to contest proprietary notions of power and explore "the interrelated significance of situated power relations, identity constructions and their (sometimes paradoxical) conditions, processes and outcomes" (Collinson, 2020, p. 2). To date, however, there has been little discussion in leadership studies of the link between power and subjectivity, beyond passing comment that these elements are ineluctably connected (e.g., Collinson, 2020; Knights, 2018).

In a new materialist perspective, power is linked to subjectivity through the idea that we do not stand outside of the world but are immanent to it, an understanding which situates power not as an object or possession but as a "situation or process" through which social subjects and subjectivities are formed as part of a "collective enterprise" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4). As individuals we are "component parts of multiple assemblages at once" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 158), some that last indefinitely and so are experienced over a lifetime (but which are

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[43] Depending on the context, leadership subjectivities may imply either a collective (for example, in the context of social movements) or an individual. In this chapter, I focus exclusively on the individual.

nevertheless continually varying), such as genetic, gender, racial, family, organisational, ecological, and even planetary assemblages, and others which are contingent on social processes of engagement, such as a learning assemblage (de Freitas, 2018), a research assemblage (Fox & Alldred, 2018), or a leadership assemblage (Chapter 3). The point I am making here is that each individual is made up of multiple or 'transversal' embodied subjectivities (Braidotti, 2019). Clarifying this point is also important because it stops us from equating an individual or group's 'feminine subjectivity,' for example, with their 'leadership subjectivity,' while still acknowledging that these subjectivities overlap.

To explore these dynamics as they relate to the issue of studying women in leadership, I center this chapter around a discussion of Braidotti's (2011b) notion of cartography. Cartography is both a method *and* an alternative way of thinking about power and subjectivity. This dual focus is important because new materialist concepts and tools cannot be directly transferred into conventional qualitative methodologies, and neither can the same concepts theorised from other critical and feminist perspectives be incorporated into what have been described as 'post-qualitative' modes of inquiry which are contingent on new materialist philosophies (Braidotti, 2019; Gherardi, 2019).[44] Braidotti (2011b) describes a cartography as "a theoretically based and politically informed reading of the process of power relations" (p. 4). Applied to a situation such as the one outlined above in *Air*, a cartography aims to map the "qualitative variations in the actualisation of forces, forms, and relations" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 225) as they correlate to the creation and acquisition of leadership subjectivities by individuals like Mae in the spatio-temporal contexts where leadership assemblages emerge. As a feminist project, cartographies are also concerned with "the different politics of location for subjects-in-becoming" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 14). Given that the dialectical relationship between the sexes places women in a secondary position to men, the localised effects of the "degrees of differentiation" between sexed subjects (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 216) which are dissymmetrical but not necessarily oppositional, are implicated in the production and enactment of what are "gender-specific patterns" for social subjectivities (Braidotti, 2002, p. 182). However, because "[t]hese in-between states and stages [of

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[44] The literature on post-qualitative inquiry is still in its infancy and has yet to fully engage with the work of feminist and posthumanist scholars like Braidotti, however, there is significant overlap between these approaches in their engagement with a new materialist monistic ontology, a philosophy of immanence and the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In her book *Posthuman Knowledge*, Braidotti (2019) contends that post-qualitative approaches to research "confront the restrictive methods that are commonly labeled under 'empiricism'" (p. 138). Exploration of these linkages would further contribute to recent methodological advances in the social sciences (St. Pierre, 2016).

subjectivity] defy the established modes of theoretical representation, precisely because they are zigzagging, not linear, and process-oriented, not concept driven" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 217), they are expressed, rather than represented, as *figurations*. Figurations of women's leadership subjectivities functions as "sign-posts for specific geo-political and historical locations" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 164). Importantly, they do not aim to make "universal claims" (p. 164), but neither are they metaphors or archetypes. Instead, they assist us in developing a more accurate understanding of the current and changing status of women in leadership, and in this instance, female subjects in positions where they exert significant influence over others. Underpinned by a notion of agency as embodied and contingent, figurations also provide a site from which to critically assess the ways in which individuals handle their leadership subjectivities and their resultant epistemological and political practices in their locations.

Because the notions of cartography and figurations are new to leadership studies,[45] my aim in this chapter is to not to enact this mode of inquiry per se. Rather, I aim to explain and demonstrate the shifts of perspective these theoretical and methodological innovations demand of the researcher and what they can do to/for our understanding of women in leadership. This includes disruption of normative approaches that treat women in leadership as a homogenous group whose varied experiences, preoccupations and strategies are omitted or glossed over (Billing & Alvesson, 2014), while still offering insights into women's 'shared' experiences through the use of figurations. As in the preceding chapters, I continue to draw on examples from speculative novels, namely *Air* and *Ammonite*, to illustrate the dimensions of the cartographic approach and its implications through analysis of extracts from the texts.

Introducing the different dimensions of cartography

To elaborate on Braidotti's cartographic approach, we must begin by reconfiguring our understanding of the concept of subjectivity and how it functions in relation to the self. As I discussed in Chapter 2, subjectivity in a Western humanist lens is equated with a universal notion of 'being,' and hence with the human individual as a self-contained and unitary subject. In leadership studies this is the dominant view, with subjectivity simply being seen to equate static social identities like 'man' and 'woman' or 'leader' and 'follower.'

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[45] There have been some engagements, however, with different elements of Braidotti's methodological approach, including figurations (e.g., Bolsø, et al., 2017; Fotaki & Harding, 2018; Gherardi, 2019; Sayers, et al., 2021).

Subjectivity is also easily confused with individualism and particularity, that is, what we (and others) perceive at the level of consciousness (Braidotti, 2011b). Phenomenological perspectives, for example, often conceive subjectivity as something that is formed through conscious "acts of making *meaning* of bodily lived experience" (Lenz Taguchi, 2013, p. 710). Consequently, subjectivity as a theoretical concept is rarely discussed in leadership studies as it is taken to be either self-evident (a matter of identity) or pre-given, as feminist leadership scholars like Ford (2016) have noted. Feminist post-structuralist approaches have offered the most in-depth discussions of subjectivity in leadership studies thus far. However, this view "is predicated on the understanding that language and discourse constitutes subjectivity" (Ford, 2016, p. 235), which, as I pointed out in Chapter 2, continues to prioritise the mind over the body and discourse over materiality as the dominant forces in the construction and acquisition of social subjectivities.

A new materialist perspective builds on the insights of post-structuralism to define subjectivity as "a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multi-layered social structures" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4). This explanation rests on an ontological understanding of the subject as grounded in the material and social realm but also always in a state of change and motion, a view which "invites us to rethink the structure and boundaries of the self" in terms of the dynamic movement *between* the self and society and the material and symbolic (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 3). Consequently, as Braidotti (2011b) explains, "[t]he emergence of social subjects is always a collective enterprise, 'external' to the self, while it also mobilises the self's in-depth structures" (p. 4). That is, the human individual's ability to (re)actively respond to what is given in experience in both thought and action (Braidotti, 2011b). Power is implicated in this process because "power relations act simultaneously as the most 'external,' collective, social phenomenon and also as the most intimate or 'internal' one" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4). The practice of cartography aims to account for both of these dimensions of power, which are repressive and productive at the external level, and entrapping and empowering at the personal or internal level. To move through an explanation of these dimensions and the implications for inquiry, I have organised this chapter into three distinct parts for which I provide an overview below.

The restrictive and disciplinary function of power establishes the political entry point for Braidotti's (2011b) cartographic approach. Consequently, prior to enacting the cartographic method, it is imperative to establish an understanding of the power asymmetries and repressive structures that are currently at work in the social realm and how these inform

the social imaginary (or symbolic system) of leadership. This involves engagement with critical and feminist readings of the intersection of gender and leadership discourses, alongside consideration of the existing and emergent material and discursive forces that are at play in shaping the dominant narratives, images and ideas we hold of women as leaders and/or as participants in leadership. In the following section I offer a short survey of these conditions as they relate to processes of sexualization in the present.[46] This is, in essence, an alternative to a conventional 'literature review.' However, this approach visualises the material and discursive, past and present, male and female as in a web or network of interactive relations and so refuses to take a static or linear view of the power formations and imaginary institutions that circulate in the social field (Braidotti, 2011b). Following this exemplar reading, I repeat a key argument from Chapter 2, that despite this dynamic movement and the changing position of female subjects within the social realm, there continues to be "a shortage on the part our social imaginary" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 85). As a result, the social imaginary of leadership continues to operate in accordance with the 'gendered machine' of culture and organisations (Muhr, 2011), a reality that places women in a dissymmetrical position vis-à-vis their male counterparts.

Following this discussion, I demonstrate how the cartographic method tracks external flows of power in the construction and acquisition of individual leadership subjectivities. This is premised on an understanding of power as not only restrictive and repressive but also *productive*, a view which sees subject formation as occurring in a "distributive, dispersed, and multiple manner" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 6). Applying this perspective to leadership, leadership subjectivities are understood to be constituted through relational flows of power and becoming in situated locations, which means they will take a unique configuration in each instance. There are, however, "repetitive patterns…and processes" that produce and maintain what are recognisable configurations (Lorraine, 2011, p. 163). Cartographies trace the multiple and intersecting lines (material, semiotic, discursive) and forces (cultural, social, political) that are at work in locations where leadership emerges, and which are involved in the creation of specific and temporary social subjectivities for individuals. Taking up a subject position, however, does not equate leadership. Rather, the acquisition of subjectivity

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[46] Braidotti (2011b) argues that there are three major axes of difference: sexualization, racialization, and naturalization. All three could be considered in relation to the leadership imaginary, but given the focus of this thesis and the limited word count, I have chosen to focus only on sexualization. Future research work might choose to emphasize these other dimensions in tandem with sexualization, as per Liu (2020).

is constitutive of certain identities and changing roles for human subjects (for example, as a 'leader,' 'hero,' 'follower,' 'helper,' or 'collaborator').

Because this approach takes a view of the creation of subjectivities as "relational and outside-directed," a process which occurs both above and below the level of individual consciousness (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 216), a cartographic reading cannot be performed using only conventional methods of data collection that privilege self-narratives and internalised perspectives, such as interviews, surveys or focus groups. In social science contexts, ethnographic data (which may include interviews) offers a more comprehensive picture of the multiplicity of intersecting forces at work in the formation of leadership subjectivities and how they act and are acted upon by individuals in the context of leadership assemblages. As Braidotti (2019) contends, "[t]he favoured approach is an enlarged empiricism that respects the phenomenology of experience, while avoiding exclusive references to identity-indexed claims…and ethnographic observations [are] a concrete case in point" (p. 136). As demonstrated in this chapter, literary texts can also be employed as an alternative to ethnographic data. Fiction is particularly adept at "rendering visible occluded, sprawling webs of interconnectedness" (Nixon, 2011, p. 45 as cited in Iovino, 2018b, p. 234). This makes certain kinds of fictional narratives an important alternative to ethnography, especially in situations where it is difficult to access the kinds of empirical data that allow for adequate and comprehensive analysis of the power flows involved in subject formation. In this respect I follow others in organisation and leadership studies who employ novels as 'surrogate cases' and/or sources of 'data' equivalent to ethnographic studies (e.g., Czarniawska, 2006; Patient, et al., 2003; Rhodes, 2009).[47] Speculative literary texts further rise to the challenge of providing appropriate forms of empirical data by offering relevant "cultural illustrations of the changes and transformations that are taking place at present" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 182). For example, they make visible the impact of other variables and conditions, such as technological change or the uncertainty rendered by a global pandemic, on processes of gendered subject formation. This includes the intersections of feminine ideals with heroism, and techno-bodies with images of the maternal mother figure as illustrated in my cartographic readings of Danner (in *Ammonite*) and Mae's (in *Air*) leadership subjectivities.

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[47] Rhodes (2009), for example, investigates the theme of overt and highly individualised organisational resistance as it appears in the 'dirty realism' of Charles Bukowski's novel *Factotum*. Rhodes argues that this novel acts as a form of 'field material' which makes it possible to study a social process which has eluded the attention of organisational scholars and is difficult to study through more conventional means.

It is from these cartographies or 'maps' of situated flows of power and the practices they enable in leadership assemblages that we can produce figurations for these locations. In the third section of this chapter, I consider how engagement with Braidotti's (2011b) notion of figurations enables an alternative mode of representation for social subjectivities, as well as providing a framework for critically assessing the acquisition and enactment of these subjectivities by individuals. This involves consideration of the second dimension of power as it relates to subjectivity, that is, where "power relations act…as the most intimate or 'internal'" phenomenon (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4). Power, which is understood to be a situation rather than an object or possession, can be experienced by an individual as either entrapping or empowering depending on their epistemological and sense-making practices (Braidotti, 2011b). Entrapment results when we see ourselves as static beings and employ a representational mode of thought. By inhabiting this traditional ontology, the collectively constructed subjectivities acquired by the individual or group in question continue to be seen through a lens that is premised on dualisms and static identities with "specific properties" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 159). This significantly limits the range of ways available for thinking about ourselves and how we relate to others. In the context of leadership, this usually takes the form of either complying with or resisting the parameters set by subject positions in an oppositional mode (e.g., by constructing counter-identities).

For Braidotti (2011b), however, this represents only one possible option. As discussed in Chapter 2, a subject is also "grounded and flowing" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 137) which means she can strategically rework these structures of power in "sets of relations" with others (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 6). Doing so, however, is contingent on a "radical process of de-familiarisation or dis-identification from dominant representational and even self-representational practices" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 348). As Lorraine (2011) points out, "how we understand ourselves affects the forms our evolution takes" (p. 32). Escaping normative modes of thought and action is difficult and never automatic because language is "one and the same for everyone" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 93) and dualisms function as shorthand for how we make sense of and represent the world on a day-to-day basis, including our understandings of our own bodies and gender (Colebrook, 2002a, 2004). In this chapter, I discuss this dual notion of power in terms of its implications for the individual subject rather than the ethical implications of relations of power for leadership practice, which are also significant (see Chapter 6).

The changing status of women in relation to leadership

Dualistic gender categories have played a significant role in shaping, at both the symbolic and empirical levels, men and women's experiences and status in Western culture (Braidotti, 2011a). This includes their forms of participation in collective projects, such as leadership, and the subjectivities they have historically been entitled to. For example, in their deconstructive analysis of four popular leadership texts by prominent (male) leadership scholars, Calás and Smircich (1991) show how classic definitions of leadership are dialectically opposed to, but simultaneously inseparable from, the notion of seduction, a term which is closely associated with female bodies (e.g., the 'seductress' who leads astray). However, "seduction must be denied, repressed, an unwanted term handed over to women" (Oseen, 1997, p. 177). Thus, at the socio-symbolic level, to be male is to lead, but to be female is to seduce, an outcome which has reinforced women's historic position as 'less-than' and outside of leadership knowledge (Calás & Smircich, 1991). Recent critical and feminist-oriented studies of leadership continue to demonstrate how systems of power and cultural investments in ideologies such as patriarchy, imperialism, white supremacy, neoliberalism, and military and economic domination, are still actively at work in the creation and maintenance of the dominant leadership imaginary in the West (Learmonth & Morrell, 2019; Liu, 2020; Spoelstra, 2018; Wilson, 2016). As Liu (2020) argues in her comprehensive overview of the leadership field, it is an imaginary that is "built on the back of gender and colonial subjugation" (p. 39), and repeated in the various power formations – narratives, images, identities, fictions, fantasies, models, terminologies, theories, representational regimes, and so on – that are always already at work in organisational and social settings. The imperialistic, hegemonic image of the 'hero leader' or 'Great Man,' for example, has functioned in society and organisations as a model for successful corporate leadership and is reified through hierarchical organisational structures, further reinforcing the association between leadership and white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-male bodies (Collinson, et al., 2018; Liu & Baker, 2016).

Despite the persistence of these images and identities, the leadership imaginary and the symbolic and institutional systems that support it are not static (Braidotti, 2006). In the contemporary context of advanced capitalist societies, modes of identification frequently exceed the more obvious patriarchal forms outlined above (Braidotti, 2011b). Essentialist and liberal conceptions of the 'feminine,' for example, do not simply impose stereotypes on women but also work to facilitate the production of alternative images and narratives of the

contemporary female leader through their political affects. "[T]he symbolic is porous to historical transformations and hence mutable" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87), and it is through collective investments in other ideologies, ideas and social changes, including feminism, the democratic imaginary (e.g., 'post-heroic' notions of leaders and leadership), as well as increasing numbers of women in highly visible positions of influence, that new leadership narratives, identities and vocabularies have emerged. Zenger and Folkman (2019, 2020), for example, draw on recent survey data of people's perceptions of female leader figures to show how public opinion has shifted toward the idea that women make better leaders during times of crisis because of their perceived superior interpersonal skills, innate sensitivity and decision-making capabilities. As one character says to Mae in *Air*: "People need heroes. They yearn for them…They need heroes…To defend them, to build things" (p. 220). In this emergent narrative, *she* (the female leader) is the solution to the crises of the times because she is seen to be fundamentally different; more compassionate, empathetic, communicative and closely attuned to nature and bodily forms of intuition than her male counterparts.

Changing material conditions in the present, such as the emergence of 'techno-nature-cultures' that serve to blur the categorical demarcations between humans, machines and animals through technological advances (Braidotti, 2013a; Haraway, 2016), have also created possibilities for new kinds of multi-cultural, hybrid leadership identities. In the novel *Air*, this is expressed in the promise that all the former 'have-nots' will become 'haves' as a result of their ability to access vast swathes of information and connect with other human-machines instantaneously. As it is explained to Mae, "These Everyone-Haves would have their memory, their knowledge, and their skills increased" (p. 193). The fast pace of technological change and global connectivity in the present overlap with fantasies of human superiority (Braidotti, 2013a) and visions of "muscular power" and control over nature (Braidotti, 2002, p. 231). Technology is thus reframed as a business imperative, as well as a way to address the problems of climate change, over-population, pollution, and ecological degradation.

The confluence of these forces in neo-liberal, post-industrial economies means that "sexualized, racialized, and naturalized differences…no longer coincide with sexually, racially, and naturally differentiated bodies" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 51). Paradoxically, however, "this sexually indeterminate…social discourse goes hand in hand with the return of sexual polarizations and stricter gender roles," as evidenced by the emergence of the post-feminist 'emancipated' woman alongside essentialised gender stereotypes and expectations (Braidotti, 2006, p. 49). For example, women are often seen to be 'healers' of the Earth, the

critical conscious for environmental well-being and care (e.g., Jacinda Ardern and Greta Thunberg), while men (e.g., Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos) are the visionaries who will resolve the mess we find ourselves in through technological innovation and human exceptionalism.[48] This paradoxical situation is further exemplified in Sheryl Sandberg's popular book, *Lean In* (2013), and the 'Lean In' movement (LeanIn.org), as well as other corporate-minded, female-authored business and celebrity CEO texts (Adamson, 2017). According to Sandberg (2013), aspiring female leaders must 'internalise the revolution,' 'lean in' to current power structures, and close the 'leadership-ambition gap' by focusing on internal barriers and the ways in which they hold themselves back. Women are thus expected to "reclaim and embrace aspects of their femininity, including feminine characteristics and behaviour, attitudes and roles" but simultaneously mimic masculine norms and manage their bodies for success without being perceived as too 'difficult' or 'bitchy,' if they wish to be perceived as 'good' leaders (Adamson, 2017, p. 323).

Although this is only a condensed overview of some of the forces at play in the present as they concern the ongoing issue of the sexualization of women and leadership, it highlights the fact that as feminist researchers and thinkers "we need to acquire a flair for complicating the issues, so as to live up to the complexities of our age" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 51). Seeming binaries, such as materiality and discourse, male and female, human and machine, are not fixed but are mutually interacting forces through which new realities and modes of existence for human subjects are created (Braidotti, 2013a).[49] The implications are such that, as Lorraine (2011) explains,

> …the relationship of things and words, bodies and significance, lived experience and psychic identity, mutates over time in keeping with forces larger than any given human individual and uncontainable by essentialist notions of what it means to be a woman or a man. (p. 38).

However, even though we "live and inhabit social reality in ways that surpass tradition" our social imaginaries continue to operate according to the binary representationalist logic of the

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[48] Citing a study by Knights and MaCabe (2015), Collinson (2020) notes that men in formal leadership positions are frequently "treated as if they were 'masters of the universe' with the ability to predict and control the future" (p. 8).

[49] It is worth noting here that the cartographic method could also be applied in this broader context to conduct genealogical readings of the "power relations at work in society at large" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 6). However, in this chapter I focus on how we can use cartography as an approach for the empirical study of women's leadership subjectivities, a method that Braidotti (2011b, 2019) advocates as an alternative to conventional modes of quantitative and qualitative inquiry and empiricism.

'gendered machine' (Braidotti, 2006, p. 85; see also, Muhr, 2011). That is, through dualisms predicated on negation. As I explained in Chapter 2, this dominant Western humanist and anthropocentric system of thought "renders women/female/feminine as other/abject/lack" through its prioritisation of the masculine (Pullen & Vachhani, 2017, p. 188). So even though new images, ideas, terminologies, identities, and so on, that are inclusive of women and the feminine now abound in leadership studies and in the social realm, they continue to circulate within the delimiting confines of this dominant system, ultimately reinforcing (rather than displacing) the masculinist symbolic systems and ideologies that sustain it. With regards to external flows of power, this means the social and organisational spaces we occupy are gendered and so have an impact on the construction of leadership subjectivities, as I illustrate in the following section. From a feminist perspective of sexual difference, the issue with this reality is not so much that it disadvantages individual women or produces inequalities (although in many situations this is indeed the case), but rather that it "captures and blocks the many potential alternative ways we may be able to think about our environment and ourselves" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87). Furthermore, as an image of thought, it also influences how we relate to and navigate the disciplinary and affective landscapes we are a part of, a problem I explore in my discussion of entrapment and empowerment, which are understood to be ways of working within systems of power.

Mapping external flows of social power

While imaginary institutions and power formations are external to the self, they are also always immanent to our embodied locations as virtual (and often invisible) intensities embedded in "social, economic, and cultural arrangements" (Ford, 2016, p. 235). As such, they pre-exist the emergence of any leadership assemblage and have an impact on the subject positions created in these contexts. However, contrary to post-structuralist perspectives,[50] in a new materialist view they do not function as a 'master code' that determines or arranges leadership subjectivities in a top-down and relatively linear manner through conscious and unconscious thought (Braidotti, 2011b). Rather, these disciplinary frameworks intersect with myriad other material and immaterial forces in relations of power that are productive of

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[50] When Braidotti (2011b) discusses poststructuralism in the context of subject formation she is referring to the fact that as a 'linguistic turn,' poststructuralist visions of subject formation tend to over-emphasize the role of language and the symbolic. They share a tendency to work from the idea that there is a "social constructivist grid" that "formats and produces the subject" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 5). This results in the idea that an individual or group is in a process of being 'subjected-to' the dominant and changing formations of both gender and leadership, a perspective which implies subjectivity is constructed and ascribed in a top-down, one-directional manner.

unique configurations of subjectivity in each instance, but which are nevertheless connected to dominant social formations, such as the leader-follower dichotomy and the gender binary. In other words, the attributes, identities and ways of behaving that are assigned to temporally situated leadership subjectivities emerge in events of connection. External or situational flows of power are thus understood to be "both bound historical categories *and* flows of boundless energy" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 355, *emphasis added*) in situated locations.

The cartographic method aims to account for the forces of power at work in the empirical locations being studied (Braidotti, 2011b), and specifically those involved in the emergence of leadership subjectivities.[51] As an approach to reading the data, the process of cartography requires "start[ing] in the middle to look for what emerges in the connections among different fields and flows" (Lenz Taguchi, 2013, p. 714), hence use of terms like 'mapping' to describe this method. In this way a cartographic reading differs from conventional qualitative approaches by refusing to "order the chaos of differences, stacking them into bundles, themes, or categories" or by tying "analysis to a root of origin or essence" (Lenz Taguchi, 2013, p. 714). Instead, the first phase of cartography involves tracing different lines and the intersections between multiple discourses, concepts, material structures, bodies, ideas, matter, and so on, which are implicated in or contribute to processes of subjectification in leadership assemblages, including identity formation (discursive practices) and correlated ways of behaving and relating to others (nondiscursive practices). In the following paragraphs I provide condensed accounts of my cartographic readings of *Ammonite* and *Air* (which act as an alternative to other forms of ethnographic data in this chapter) and descriptions of the gendered leadership subjectivities acquired by two main characters, Danner and Mae which, following Braidotti (2011b), I represent as 'figurations.'

In *Ammonite*, Acting Commander Danner is positioned at the top of the organisation's hierarchy in a structure that specifies clear roles and responsibilities for its members. As Danner observes, "the patterns of command were well laid; as long as what she asked people to do made some kind of sense, they would be glad to have someone in charge" (p. 77). In the context of the leadership assemblage that emerges at Port Central, Danner and her subordinates gravitate toward the leader-follower dichotomy and associated discourses that

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[51] By 'leadership subjectivities' I am not necessarily referring to 'leader' roles. However, we can plausibly differentiate between different kinds of leadership subjectivities and subject positions based on the identities and roles they enable (e.g., leaders, followers, collaborators, participants, etc.). These can change over time and across the duration of a leadership assemblage and may not always take such clear-cut and familiar forms (and perhaps not even *human* forms).

support the idea of a single individual being responsible for protecting the welfare of the group (p. 79) and giving orders (p. 171). This is a narrative and associated pattern of behaving that aligns with and is supported by the existing institutional power structures at Port Central. For example, clear lines of reporting, the use of formal titles and ranks, and the ongoing isolation of Danner from the majority of her subordinates. The disruptive and threatening physical circumstances caused by the virus further reinforce this desire for an organisational hero or saviour figure who others can depend on (or blame) in what is a "situation [that] scares us all" (p. 171). This 'hero' will make the "smart moves" and decisions that will return them to the status quo (p. 77). These discourses and material realities intersect with Danner's sexed female body, and in particular, Danner's own culturally informed understandings of how she should be and act as the first *female* commander on Jeep. One the one hand, this involves embodying what are perceived by Danner and her colleagues as certain pre-existing and fixed attributes and behaviors associated with organisational leader identities – being decisive, clear, in control, rational and authoritative. On the other hand, stereotypically feminine ideals such as selflessness, care and compassion interweave themselves into this situation as ways for Danner to establish herself as someone people can trust to do the right thing. Selflessness, in this instance, means carrying the burden of responsibility whatever the personal cost, which for Danner includes boredom and loneliness as she mostly works behind the scenes (p. 79-80), a far cry from the heroic acts and high visibility of inspirational or charismatic leader figures.

The intersections between these external flows of power produce and constrain the leadership subjectivity acquired by Danner and which she subsequently embodies in her interactions with others. For example, when the women of Holme Valley request that the Trata agreement be honoured (which was one of the outcomes of leadership as discussed in Chapter 3), they go directly to Danner who is seen as the 'head-woman' (p. 293) at Port Central: "The trata was made in good faith. I was there. So was one of your Mirrors, Lu Wai. She is under your direct command, which makes you responsible" (p. 260). This identity is a product of her collectively constructed subjectivity, and it places particular expectations on how she will behave in any given circumstance, for example, responding decisively and with authority, but also with compassion (p. 170-1).

Whereas in *Ammonite* the existing organisational hierarchy is a major element in determining the different leadership subjectivities and identities taken up by individuals, in *Air* it is Mae's 'Question Map' that powerfully connects her body to discourses concerning

leaders and leadership and correlated practices of taking charge and initiating social action. Mae uses her Question Map – which comprises (among other things) questions concerned with finding out what the village wants for their future and how they plan to make themselves ready for the arrival of Air – to interview all the families in her community. This prompts discomfort on the part of many people, but it also produces an idea of Mae as the change-maker in her village; she is an image of and representative for 'progress.' However, progress in this context is also connected to narratives of life and death. As Mae explains to her lover, Kuei, when he questions her obsession with 'info' and teaching those in the village to engage with it:

> 'This village,' she answered him. 'What your grandmother showed me is that everything dies. It is not good enough just to live. You have to know that death is certain. Not just of the person, but of whole worlds. Ours is going to die. It is dead now. The only thing I can do is help it be reborn, so we can survive.' (p. 159)

The idea of rebirth as both a metaphor and a way of managing intensive change intersects with the discursive field of mothers and mothering, which prioritises the maternal function of women like Mae. As one character puts it, Mae is becoming a "Mother to us all" (p. 159). A mother is not seen as a 'leader' in this situation as there is a disjuncture between what the village thinks a leader to be – male, wealthy (or at least wealthier than the majority), property-owning, serious, authoritative – and how they see Mae, who is just the local 'fashion expert' (p. 1). As Mae herself observes, she is not in a "position to give orders" (p. 109), but neither are her community in a situation where clear orders would serve to resolve the many unknowns they are collectively facing: "not one of us, knows a thing about [Air]. We will all become like little children again. We will all be lost unless we learn" (p. 115). It is the stereotypical 'good' mother – the one who cares for, nurtures and protects her children – who will usher them into the future safely.

Another line which intersects with these social formations is that of the new and improved techno-body – the 'Everyone-Have' – and a being who will, presumably, become a reality once everyone in the world is connected to the info-network that is Air (p. 193). This reflects the classic humanist and imperialist idea of 'Man' as the measure of all things (the standard version for the 'Have'). Mae ostensibly becomes a 'Have' (rather than an everyday 'have-not') when during the 'Test' her 'Air-mind' accidently merges with that of her friend and neighbor, Old Mrs Tung. As a result of this mishap, after the conclusion of the Test Mae

is left with access to certain features in Air, including an ability to access vast swathes of information which Air processes for her instantaneously. Mae describes it as like having a Kru in your head; "*Kru* in her language meant 'a great teacher'" (p. 68). As a kind of 'cyber-entity' or machine, Mae is simultaneously threatening and reassuring. Threatening in the sense that human-machines have the potential to penetrate (p. 201) and consume (p. 222) everything around them. But also reassuring as the sexually differentiated female body – a biocultural entity associated with comforting notions like nurture and rebirth – is a potential foil to these practices. Mae is thus construed as an 'Earth-person,' as her friend Kwan describes her, someone who is attuned to life despite having access to the virtual technological realm of Air. The identity that is made available to Mae in the leadership assemblage is thus one centered on the image of the mother, who is a helper rather than a traditional hero.

As demonstrated in these examples, leadership subjectivities are mediated by the productive intersections of social structures, forces and power formations that encircle or gather around human actors both prior to and during the formation, maintenance and dissolution of leadership assemblages. A cartographic approach expresses these power relations, which "define [a subject's] respective positions" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 14) in the leadership assemblage(s) of which they are a part, in terms of figurations. A figuration is an image that serves to illuminate in a concise way the "complex web of relations" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 173) that are constitutive of specific and contingent subjectivities for human actors in their locations. My cartographic reading of the power relations that are at work in the construction of Danner's leadership subjectivity, for example, can be conveyed through the image of the 'selfless heroine.' In this way of thinking we do not say that Danner *is* a selfless heroine since a figural image is not a direct representation of the subject. Rather, a figuration serves as a framing and situating device for expressing what is in the process of being made available *to* Danner as a female subject located within recognisable patterns and situated flows of external power relations (Braidotti, 2011b). For example, where hero narratives intersect with leader-follower dichotomies and the gendered expectations ascribed to roles and bodies, certain constraints are imposed, and options made available within situations of social power. For Danner, this creates an expectation that she will 'balance' stereotypically feminine and masculine attributes as they have been historically and socially defined, that is, the highly individualistic, masculine-male hero and the selfless, sensitive feminine-female leader who puts others needs before her own. In the case of Mae, we can express her location

of power through the figuration of the 'mother-machine.' This image conveys the intersections between the maternal function associated with female bodies, which is further reinforced by the fact that Mae is both literally pregnant *and* directly involved in the 'rebirth' of the village, and the technological changes that simultaneously displace and reinforce the idea of human superiority. The 'selfless heroine' and the 'mother-machine' are thus "vehicles to imaginatively ground our powers of understanding within the shifting landscape of the present" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 75).

To clarify further, a figuration emerges from a cartography and so is always dependent on the actual conditions of the situation, which are "localized, situated, [and] perspectival" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 136). For a researcher, this requires a subtle differentiation in approach. We do not start with the idea of a figuration, such as the mother-machine or the cyborg, and then apply it to a location. This would require practices of recognition based on a set of clear parameters that are determined in *advance* for the figuration.[52] A figuration is unique in each configuration as per the nature of cartographies and difference. However, we might still use the same terms to describe gendered leadership subjectivities in another context if the location of power is similarly reflective or repetitive of what are shared historical and localised conditions. In other words, it is due to the shared affinities between locations that figurations are seen to "function as material and semiotic signposts for specific geo-political and historical locations" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 136).

By thinking the situational flows of power that compose subjectivity in terms of figurations, we can also adopt an alternative notion of agency for subjects like Danner and Mae who are embedded in changing and socially contingent systems of power. As Ford (2016) points out, in leadership studies the "role of subjectivity and agency is [often] underplayed" (p. 233). Individuals tend to be seen as either 'subjected-to' disciplinary forces of power (as in a Lacanian or Marxist lens) or, in a liberal humanist perspective where power as a force that exceeds the individual usually fails to be considered, agency is seen to be something an independent being possesses and uses as they please (Braidotti, 2006). Agency,

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[52] Muhr (2011) does exactly this with Donna Haraway's cyborg figuration, arguing that it is representative of a certain kind of female leader who acts in ways that are both extremely 'feminine' and extremely 'masculine' Muhr then takes this further to develop the representational notion of the 'cyborg leader' and 'cyborg leadership,' which is argued to be the 'dark-side' of charismatic leadership (p. 348). This approach both necessitates and rests on the reduction of subjectivity to identity, the figural to the metaphorical, and sexual difference to pre-defined gender attributes.

in a Deleuzean perspective (or what we can also refer to as a new materialist lens), however, is always contingent:

> That an agent can make choices and act accordingly depends on the convergence of forces beyond her control in an actualization of a state of affairs that includes her as an embodied individual with the psychic self and social identity that she has.
> (Lorraine, 2011, p. 157)

Agency (as it relates to subjectivity) is a matter of the way we move about within systems of power, of which there is no outside. A subject, in other words, is not the agent of her own subjectivity, but an active participant in the processes and power relations that co-construct her various subjectivities and which constrain or enable her ability to act in assemblages. Figurations, like the selfless heroine and the mother-machine, function in cartographies as useful anchoring points that capture, if only for a moment, the flows and in-between connection points that the subject under analysis is (consciously or unconsciously) engaged with. This engagement takes the form of entrapment and/or empowerment (Braidotti, 2011b), which leads into the second phase of the cartographic approach.

Entrapment and empowerment

As a first move, it is crucial to establish what the notions of entrapment and empowerment are actually referring to in this context.[53] Contrary to normative schemas, these terms do not equate processes of compliance with or resistance to disciplinary and external forces of power. Nor are they a framework for assessing whether socially contingent and collectively constructed leadership subjectivities and the social imaginaries that support them serve to empower or constrain an individual in their relations with others. Rather, entrapment and empowerment concern the epistemological and political practices of the subject in their implications with power, which are contingent on self-knowledge. That is, how we perceive and/or understand ourselves in relation to the "choreography of constraints and entitlements" that structure our various subject positions (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86). Degrees of entrapment

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[53] The context in which these notions are discussed and the other concepts they are aligned with is important. For Braidotti and other new materialist scholars, power is a pluri-faceted and multi-dimensional force that is experienced across multiple levels – individual and collective, social and personal, relational and political – and can be applied in relation to ethics, affectivity, subjectivity, etc. In leadership studies, power as entrapping or coercive and empowering and enabling has primarily been discussed in terms of the interactions and encounters *between* bodies (c.f., Munro & Thanem, 2018), and hence as a schema or set of criteria for leadership ethics (see Chapter 6 for further discussion).

and empowerment are thus a matter of orientation in an ontological sense, and hence a way of responding to what is given in experience (Braidotti, 2011b). The result of entrapment is a leadership subjectivity inhabited in a conventional way that repeats normative patterns of knowing and doing. Whereas empowerment follows a different line of possibility that experiments with power relations and in doing so "actualize[es] the practice of…figuration as the *active* pursuit of affirmative alternatives" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 164, emphasis added).

Entrapment occurs when an individual or group only "realizes possibilities as they are represented or representable in the categories of dominant memory" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 158). In other words, epistemological practices are ordered according to binary representationalist logic and relatively fixed notions of identity and self (who is it I want to be?) that are correlated with certain behaviours (Lorraine, 2011). Danner, for example, is constantly wondering if her actions align with what "another commander would have done?" (p. 171), a question which is conditioned by the idea associated with her situated leadership subjectivity that leader-heroes must present and act in a certain way in relation to their subordinates to maintain authority and confidence. Even when Danner acts against the limitations imposed by this position, as is the case when she turns to several other women for help in responding to compounding crises at Port Central, she "must first represent to herself what it is she must do [or not do] in order to be able to carry out that act" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 157). In asking for help, she expects "looks of pity or contempt – decision-making was her job, her burden, no one else's" (p. 172). Likewise in *Air,* Mae, in a moment of resistance against the regulative social powers that demand she act in stereotypically 'feminine' ways, makes use of "available categories of meaning" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 161) to delineate between different embodied behaviors: "[she] was well aware that she was talking like a man [aggressively, authoritatively]. It was the only way to avoid the pits of emotion on either side and keep all the issues separate" (p. 142).

Consequently, regardless of whether these moments constitute acts of compliance or resistance to external forces of power, the thresholds for meaning and action, which are interactive structures, continue to align with traditional forms of representation that are underpinned by dualistic logic. That is, the familiar values, identities, and patterns of behaving and relating that are already built in as options into the existing social imaginaries of gender and leadership. These fictions are, of course, useful and even necessary to get things done. However, when they become 'rules' or ideas that govern action and inform belief, for example, defining our understanding of what it means to talk 'like a man,' or what

it takes to be a 'good' leader, then they act as entrapping forces in the context of social relations (Colebrook, 2002b). Actions and encounters, however, can also prompt possibilities for other ways of knowing and doing. After a meeting with two of her subordinates, Danner feels "restless, insecure, shaken loose from all her normal patterns" (p. 81). This affective experience prompts a new idea for her, that there is an 'us' involved in the leadership assemblage at Port Central. Nonetheless, she fails to explore this thought further, and even at the end of the novel the meaning she makes of her role and identity continues to align with existing norms: "It's *my* job to steer us onto the right track" (p. 372).

Entrapment is the common situation because even though stasis is an illusion and binaries always exceed the parameters of our representations precisely because they are processes *not* static categories (see Chapter 2), our "[e]stablished mental habits…railroad us back towards established ways of thinking about ourselves" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 85). As social subjects with a shared history, we are conditioned by "factors common to all," such as "language, social relations, biological structures, technology" (Baugh, 2010b, p. 290). Because the dominant system is premised on universal 'Man' (human being) as the origin and measure of difference/sameness, it is easy to see how we remain caught or entrapped in this traditional ontology and associated dualistic modes of thought which lead to "our voluntary servitude to universal norms" (Baugh, 2010b, p. 291). Furthermore, it mirrors what is already being (re)produced in what are gendered social spaces, and "is so familiar, so close, that one does not even see it" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 16). As already discussed at some length in this chapter, this is a powerfully operational system, which not only orders our ways of thinking but also sustains dominant patterns of activity, systems of meaning and modes of subjectification and identification associated with leadership and other subjectivities in ways that are oppositional and reactive (Lorraine, 2011).[54]

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[54] I am not arguing here that representational thought is wrong (which would be a moral judgement) or necessarily negative in practice (an ethical concern). Claiming a fixed identity or representation of the self can be an important political move for female subjects who have previously been excluded from certain positions and roles (Braidotti, 2013b). Furthermore, these sense-making practices and related ways of acting and behaving can be imperative to getting things done in our day-to-day lives. As Lorraine (2011) argues:

> Just as representations of the body can be pragmatically useful, so can representations of the self be useful. The problem comes not in representing the self in terms of a static identity with specific properties, but rather in reducing a dynamic unfolding of individuation to such representations, stripping the creative resources of intensive becoming in the process. (p. 158-9)

For Braidotti (2011b), empowerment is always an underlying possibility in *any* location or situation, another way of "responding to the given, to experience" (p. 146), and hence to the relations or situations of power expressed in cartographies and via the use of figurations. Consequently, empowerment exists as an option on a continuum with entrapment, rather than being its opposite. This situates figurations not as representational or signifying devices, which to-date are the primary way they have been used in leadership studies (c.f., Benschop, 2021; Muhr, 2011), but as 'living maps' (Braidotti, 2011b). As an orientation on the part of the knowing subject, empowerment is premised on treating power as a *strategic* situation (Braidotti, 2011b). As Lorraine (2011) explains, this "intuitive subject experiments with the intensities of her situation, feeling for resistances and resonances, pursuing new connections (sometimes with the help of philosophical concepts, art forms, or scientific functions) that can induce new forms of experience" (p. 157). For Mae, this process is prompted by her attentiveness to the possibilities for her own evolution that are engendered by the arrival of Air: "Through Air she could add knowledge to herself in a new way" (p. 83).

These shifts in thought and action allow Mae to remake her understanding of her position as a 'mother-machine,' and the binaries underpinning it, namely the male/female, masculine/feminine oppositions and nature/technology dualisms which have up to this point fenced off other possible ways of thinking about herself and others:

> Reaching into Air, Mae seized reality, as she herself had been seized, and very simply, very easily, Mae's mind ripped the metal of the [metaphorical] fence apart. She giggled at how funny it was that everyone should take the fence so seriously… 'This season,' she said, 'Air-aware young ladies will wear the fences they have torn down as a sign of their strength. (p. 214-15)

This signals for Mae her potential to unfold power connections in different ways than those set out for her by the disciplinary forces of power (which are always makeshift) that are at work in her location. However, fully actualizing empowerment so as to avoid slipping back into entrapment is contingent not only on experimenting with the intensities and flows of power that define our leadership subjectivities, but also on the knowing subject's conscious disengagement from "the dominant normative vision of the self they had become accustomed to" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 139).

To elaborate on the implications of this point I draw on a short excerpt from *Air* that takes place near the end of the novel and is written from the perspective of one of the

secondary characters, Kwan.[55] Kwan is looking for other ways to understand and explain the world and the nature of being to her son, Luk, who has been brought up to be "modern and scientific" (p. 363). To do so, she draws on her history and position as an Eloi woman. In *Air*, the Eloi are a small ethnic minority group whose ideas and knowledge of the world have been over-ridden by the more dominant dualist systems of thought in both Western and Chinese cultures. Kwan engages her mother's indigenous worldview and the story of the 'four principal spirits' – Earth, Air, Water, and Fire – to describe the embodied and embedded nature of the human subject. For Kwan, these 'spirits' refer to different layers or features of reality, namely, corporeality and embodiment (Earth), soul or self (Air), change and time (Water), and desire (Fire) (p. 366-7). Within an Eloi perspective, these forces interact as "layers of struggle and synthesis," rather than as "paltry oppositions" (p. 362). Consequently, when Kwan asks her son what or who he thinks Mae is (p. 365), she is not referring to a static notion of identity or being, but rather appealing to an idea of Mae, and indeed to all of them, as non-unitary subjects who are 'rooted but in flow' in what is a monistic universe (Braidotti, 2013a).

As discussed in Chapter 2, within a monistic ontology "matter, the world and humans are *not* dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 56, emphasis added). Monism "privileges change and motion over stability" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 29), which is signified by Water in Kwan's conceptual schema and which she argues offers a more complicated view of the embodied self in relation to time:

> There are two kinds of time. There is time in motion, measured by clocks, and there is 'the Time.' The Time is the situation you live in. You make it, the world makes it, most of the time it is like a punch you roll with. (p. 366)

In other words, the subject is at once grounded in a specific time and place – a historically and culturally conditioned location – but she also "open[s] out on to a unique world or becoming, a unique way of moving through life and connecting with life" (Colebrook, 2002b, p. 106), carried along by Water (time and change), stirred by Air (spirit or self), and animated by Fire (desire and yearning). Fire, as Kwan explains, "is not just sex, it is yearning, for everything, here, now, on Earth. It makes us have children, it makes us love them, love our friends. Water carries us, but Fire makes us swim" (p. 367). It is an understanding of yearning

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[55] Kwan is a close friend of Mae in the village and is an avid supporter of Mae's project to educate the village about the coming technological changes, and is also actively involved in the project herself.

or desire not as lack, which is the normative view of desire, but as something productive and creative within events of relation and through which each subject is constantly being reinvented (Braidotti, 2006) (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this idea and its implications).

It is through this explanation that we also arrive at a more adequate understanding of sexual difference that is not reliant on the binary gender system, even while it acknowledges the effects of gendered discourse on our historical realities and situated positions and identities as sexed subjects in leadership. As per Chapter 2, sexual difference refers to the constructed dimensions of gender and identity, but it is also conceived as an ontological force (sexuality) that is located in the "immanent interrelations" between bodies (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 143). As Braidotti (2011b) further explains, this "built-in assertion of sexual difference, allows for an enlargement of both the notion of moral agency and that of political subjectivity" because "[i]nsofar as all subjects partake of the same essence, and are therefore part of nature, their common features can be located precisely in this shared capacity for affecting and being affected" (p. 145). In this view, the liberal humanistic notion of the "isolated individual" is displaced which results in self-other engagements following an alternative model premised on the idea of "complex and mutually dependent co-realities" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 162). In *Air*, Kwan acknowledges this dependency in how she frames her description of Mae's relations with others – Mae "derives her power from women, from the Circle [a fashion business], from Bugsy [an American logistics agent for their enterprise]" (p. 366). This raises the question of what bodies can or might do in a leadership assemblage, and the transformations they (and the assemblage as a 'whole') could undergo, when we become "open to being affected by and through others" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 162). This occurs only through the line of becoming, which is to say, through the 'Earth' (nature) in embodied forms of engagement.

As Kwan puts it, we are all 'Earth-people' (p. 366) because we are physical and material entities, and so can always experiment with our own becoming in encounters with alterity (Braidotti, 2011b). However, Earth is also "female and solid, nourishing and dark and fertile as the womb" (*Air,* p. 362). This is not to say that men are somehow less 'Earth-like' or less corporeal, but rather that women are *more* like the Earth on account of their historical positioning. This is reflected in the discursive alignment of 'Woman' and 'femininity' with the body, earth and nature, and the practices and attributes historically and culturally attributed to these categories, such as communality, embodiment and immanence (Braidotti,

2011a). In other words, it is because the feminine is positioned as 'other' to the disembodied, self-regulating, rational, and purportedly universal male/masculine referent for leadership knowledge and for subjectivity, that in the context of interrelations purportedly 'feminine' practices have the potential to induce other forces and values that allow for the transformation of ordinary experience (Braidotti, 2013b). This involves, for example, seeing 'Woman' and the 'feminine' not only as identities, categories and/or attributes defined in accordance with binary representationalist logic, but also as *verbs*. That is, as activities and processes that hold the potential to induce more intensive forms of relationality when actualised in and through encounters (Braidotti, 2013b). Consequently, empowerment both triggers and allows for the creation of alternative knowledges, values, narratives, forces, and modes of relating that are "not yet sustained by the current conditions" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 342). What this might look like in the contemporary present remains an open question as new hybrid arrangements of technology, nature and culture, such as the 'mother-machine,' begin to emerge in these digital, 'posthuman' times.

In summary, individuals and/or groups can either comply with or resist the parameters of the power flows in their situation within a traditional ontology (entrapment), or rework elements of these forces in the process of their own subjective becoming (empowerment). This is dependent on "choos[ing] a path of immanent changes" and on disidentifying from "established patterns of thought and identity formation" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 140), actions which generate potential alternatives to existing gendered leadership imaginaries and entrapping subjectivities. This is a process that is ongoing, and never 'finished.' At least not in the sense that we 'arrive' once and for all at a point of empowerment, given that we remain embedded in constantly mutating networks. Importantly, the notions of empowerment and entrapment, which are ways of working within systems of power, challenge a staple idea in the critical feminist leadership literature which is summed up in the following way by Muhr (2011): "we all are – caught in the gendered machine where it seems impossible for her [the female leader] to get out and others to get in" (p. 354). In a new feminist materialist perspective, while the gendered machine may be our common history and our dominant social reality, it is not necessarily our destiny. Braidotti's cartographic approach and the concept of figurations demonstrates that "the subject is not a mere victim of the way she or he is positioned. She or he has agency; she or he can think, imagine, act and resist in order to change her or his situation" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 38). Encouraging women (and men) to

experiment with these possibilities, and providing them with the tools and frameworks to do so, must form a necessary component part of women's leadership development in the future.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the notion and practice of cartography enables an alternative way of conceptualising the relationship between power, subjectivity and the social imaginary (Braidotti, 2011b). In relation to leadership specially, it reframes our understanding of and approach to studying female leadership subjectivities. My example cartographic readings have shown how a variety of interacting lines and connection points are involved in the emergence of situated, heterogenous and temporally contingent leadership subjectivities for individuals. We can thus understand Danner and Mae as "entit[ies] enmeshed in a network of interrelated social and discursive effects" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86), effects which are the product of the multiplicity of intersecting material and linguistic flows of power and knowledge which are at work in their locations both prior to, during and after the occurrence of leadership. Braidotti's (2011b) cartographic approach provides a framework and a method for moving across these multiple layers to map and discern their effects on subject formation in situated locations of power. As the example of Mae illustrated, these collectively constructed and embodied leadership subjectivities often supersede the leader-follower binary by making other identities and non-traditional ways of relating available to individuals. By starting with a cartographic reading of the linguistic and material forces at work in the locations where leadership assemblages form, we can avoid sterile and classificatory ways of thinking that presuppose a limited array of options based on likeness-to or difference-from an implicit normative standard. This also serves to situate sexualization as a "dynamic variable" rather than a "unitary categor[y]" in the construction and inhabitation of leadership subjectivities by individuals (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 129).

There is no one origin point or single source for leadership subjectivities, and so no masculinist model or ideological system that lies behind them. However, the fictions we share of gender and leadership, including cultural investments in hero narratives, 'leader' attributes, masculine-feminine stereotypes, and so on, continue to operate as powerful structuring forces in the constitution of subject positions through the modes of representation that are employed in these contexts. In other words, the "patriarchal mode of representation, which can be named the gender system" continues to reproduce recognisable categories and states of affairs (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 149). This is especially the case when these discourses intersect with particular socio-material realities, such as hierarchically ordered organisational

settings or pre-existing role divisions. Other situational forces, such as the presence of a deadly virus, rampant technological change or compounding ecological crises, also create the conditions whereby people seek to resolve their anxieties and fears "through identity securing strategies of…leadership" (Knights, 2018, p. 88), as I have argued in this chapter. Combining these insights with an assemblage view of leadership, we avoid slipping into proprietary conceptions of leadership (where leadership is seen to be the property of individuals or groups) (Knights, 2018), while acknowledging that these very ways of thinking, and the discursive representations associated with them, can inform how individuals approach their engagements with others in the context of the actions and activities that make-up events of leadership. Furthermore, these forces are implicated in the "production of social difference" (Kinkaid, 2020, p. 460) and serve to determine the material-symbolic status of individuals like Mae and Danner.

The development of figurations for these power locations helps us to discern the complexities that are built into women's asymmetrical positioning in leadership situations, where the dominant and intersecting social imaginaries of gender and leadership are predicated on a dualistic system of oppositions that continue to operate through negation even in post-feminist and purportedly emancipated, meritocratic and globally-connected societies. However, they are also 'maps' for an individual's situated location, and hence a tool for the second phase of cartography – discerning moments of entrapment and empowerment. Entrapment involves degrees of compliance and resistance within a representational schema of thought that continues to repeat and sustain existing power relations and norms. Empowerment is a method of intuiting and experimenting with the intensities of a subject position – which are conveyed through figurations, such as the mother-machine and the selfless heroine – and involves disengagement or dis-identification from established ways of thinking about or understanding oneself. Importantly, a subject always has access to both options. They are not oppositional or mutually exclusive but rather offer different lines of possibility for human actors. Empowerment is particularly important because in reworking dominant narratives, images, ideas and fictions of gender and leadership, it is a mode of engagement that contests existing social imaginaries and actualises other possibilities. This is not a straightforward process as it requires moving beyond the representational and "dualistic conceptual constraints…of phallocentric thought" on the part of subjects, as well as on the part of the researcher (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 22). As I have argued in this chapter, cartography and figurations are conceptual tools that enable this process.

In the following chapter I introduce Braidotti's (2006, 2011b) notion of 'transpositions' to discuss alternative approaches to conceiving and approaching the scholarly production of feminist leadership knowledges. Alternative knowledges comprise affirmative reworkings of dominant images, narratives and symbolic systems of gender and leadership that do not rely on or reproduce dualisms. Such work is important because "[t]he imaginary continues to be of relevance, providing the leverage we need to implement changes at the in-depth level of the self," as well as in society and organisations more generally (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87). However, producing such alternatives is complicated by the fact that entrapment is the dominant situation. Transpositions addresses this issue by remaking critique as creativity so as to retell, reconfigure and revise selected ideas, concepts, and locations, and the formations of power that sustain them, from a qualitatively different angle (Braidotti, 2011b).

Chapter Five   Transpositions: Critique to creativity in leadership studies

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how we, as feminist leadership scholars, can bring forth, collate and convey alternative and potentially empowering knowledges that will lead to greater freedom for those engaging in leadership. This aim is dependent on "reorient[ing] research on women and leadership away from dominant masculine narratives" (Lipton, 2017, p. 77). This is no easy task given the strong pull of dualistic modes of thinking. Consequently, to avoid the regulative and exclusionary tendencies underpinning cultural, liberal and deconstructionist feminist approaches to knowledge production (see Chapter 2) we need to employ an alternative frame of reference, namely, new feminist materialism. Recognising the potential that exists for creating empowering alternatives for leadership when we work with other articulations of subjectivity and gender in a framework of sexual difference, Lipton (2017) asks us to pick up the "ball of red thread, the clew of feminist knowledges…[to] grasp hold of it and carry onwards through the labyrinth" (p. 78). In this chapter I take up this call by introducing and engaging with Braidotti's creative mode of engagement with the present which she names 'transpositions.'

Drawing inspiration from music theory and genetics, transpositions signals the possibility of revisiting, reworking and reconfiguring existing ideas, concepts, and locations from qualitatively different angles (Braidotti, 2011b). In other words, the "new is created by revisiting and burning up the old" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 161). Transpositions consequently involves both critique and creativity, with each retaining their singular profile (Braidotti, 2006). By holding these two strands side-by-side, we are at once critiquing what is actual but refusing to end with critique by creatively reworking the very dynamics that have proven most entrapping and/or repressive within leadership situations, especially for women and other minority subjects. Creativity in this view is contingent on a form of '*radical empiricism*' that is "completed through thinking *about and with* theories and concepts" (Truman, 2019, p. 9).[56] The practice of transpositions consequently resituates the feminist

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[56] Other radical empiricist approaches include, for example, Gherardi's practice of 'groping experimentation,' a method she derives from the work of Gilles Deleuze. Groping experimentation is employed by Gherardi to revise the concept of gender in organisational studies from multiple angles of sexual difference, including a fleshy mode, a musical mode and a non-living mode (p. 50). In leadership studies, Lipton (2017) engages a "creative analytic" based on Cixous' strategy of *l'ecriture feminine* to rework "institutional power relations" and phallic knowledges that appeared in her data (p.

researcher-writer as a creative agent in the research process who can intervene in and envision alternatives by engaging in different ways with research 'data' and with ideas. In this chapter speculative fiction continues to function as an alternative form of empirical data on which I perform my own theoretical reconfigurations of selected power formations, namely those related to selflessness and heroism. However, I also argue transpositions are embedded in feminist SF narratives, which I demonstrate in a reading of Nicola Griffith's creative reworkings of the concept and practice of responsibility as presented in her novel *Ammonite*. The outcome of transpositions are empowering images, ideas and constructs that transform, rather than repeat, the repressive power structures embedded in dominant leadership discourses. As such, they create new points of reference for leadership practice and its politics, including subject formations and processes of (dis)identification.

Transpositions is a politically charged style of scholarly knowledge production that, to borrow Vachhani's (2019) description of embodied writing and research, is "open-ended, incomplete, and uncertain" (p. 19). Enacted by feminist researchers and speculative fiction writers, this method contributes to the creation of non-dualist, post-anthropocentric and emancipatory feminist leadership knowledges, or what we can follow Liu (2020) in calling 'redemptive' leadership knowledge. As an approach and a style, such creative work subverts the "masculine common sense" that underpins much academic writing and research work in organisation and leadership studies (Rhodes, 2019, p. 34). Creativity, which we can also construe as a form of feminine writing given that it resists the strong pull of established modes of ostensibly rational, distant, and objective thinking and writing, is thus an "act of politics" made evident in the very act of experimentation (Rhodes, 2019, p. 34). In demonstrating this feminist politics via transpositions and in a discussion of feminist scholarly knowledge production I hope to open out new directions for leadership scholarship that, as Lipton (2017) charges us, will "empower both readers and researchers alike" (p. 78)

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75). By revising and rewriting her data from a radically different angle, Lipton (2017) discloses other lines of affirmative possibility for women leaders that are not based on the delimiting strategies of inversion, sameness and/or balancing stereotypically masculine and feminine attributes. Similarly, in education studies Lenz Taguchi (2012) reconfigures events to disclose other possible 'realities' in the data by becoming part of the flow of events in her analysis. Although she does not use the term 'transpositions,' working instead with Donna Haraway and Karen Barad's notion of diffraction, Lenz Taguchi's approach also involves creative reworkings of the kind proposed in this chapter.

Introducing transpositions

In this section I introduce Braidotti's (2011b) notion of 'transpositions'[57] and discuss its relevance to leadership studies as a research practice. Braidotti borrows this term from both music and genetics, the musical description of which I find most relevant for this chapter. Braidotti (2011b) explains that "[a]s a term in music, transposition indicates variations and shifts of scale in a discontinuous but harmonious pattern" (p. 226). To give an example, if we think of our critical cartographies of power locations and power relations as an 'original piece,' given that they are contingent on the *actual* encounters, interactions, and forces at work in a subject's location, then transposition is the discursive operation of playing this same piece on a different register; that is, in a different chord, tone, or melody. The *effects* of this movement are the disclosure of other rhythms (or forms) for the various knowledge formations at work in these locations and associated patterns of activity (e.g., meaning-making) and practice. The purpose of this exercise can be summed up in the following way: the "consumption of the old," or what already exists, "in order to engender the new" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 68).

Transpositions can easily be confused with the act of extension, that is, a "quantitative multiplication of options" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 225). While multiplication indicates the paradoxical and non-static nature of any representation or image in the social realm, which can subsequently lead to the deconstruction of normative stereotypes and expectations regarding female leaders and leadership, transpositions is not directly concerned with producing "variations on a theme" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 226). Instead, it implies a process of reworking repressive locations and regulative social identities, and the various ideas, images and narratives that sustain them, to disclose other possible, contingent realities for women (and men) in leadership through work on these power formations. This is possible because power is processual rather than static, and therefore provisional, and so enfolded within every restrictive power formation and hegemonic narrative or norm is the possibility for its re-patterning in thought and action (Braidotti, 2011b). The practice of transpositions consequently activates different ways of seeing the idea, "concept, phenomenon, event, or

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[57] Transpositions is also used by Braidotti (2006) in other contexts, including in relation to memory, as well as to think through the complexities of ethics, subjectivity, and difference in terms of becoming. However, it is Braidotti's (2006, 2011b) ruminations on the notion of transpositions as a methodological practice that I focus on in this chapter.

location" so as to rework, reconfigure and modify it from "different angles" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 225).

There are no explicit criteria or instructions for 'doing' transpositions. However, a fertile imagination informed by the specific theoretical, political and ethical concerns of the researcher-thinker is essential (Braidotti, 2011a). The 'qualitative leap' that Braidotti (2011b) refers to in her discussions of transpositions is framed as a shift in perspective – the movement between critique and creativity – which "takes the form of a hybrid mixture of codes, genres, or modes of apprehension" (p. 225) for reconfiguring aspects of the location(s), concepts or ideas we are studying or writing about. Transpositions consequently makes "conceptual diversity into a core issue" for "actual methods of thought" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 226).[58] Such possibilities are dependent on the philosophical shifts of perspective I have argued for in previous chapters and so are directly linked to the conceptual resources engaged by the researcher and/or writer and for which they must be accountable (Braidotti, 2011b).

As I demonstrate in the following section, feminist-oriented transpositions take as their starting point the critique of existing power formations that rest on a particular view of the human subject and of social categories, like gender and race, that are defined through negative difference and have historically been produced from the male-masculine standpoint (see Chapter 2). The outcome of transpositions on these terms is the opening out of already existing forms and knowledges, rather than their wholesale replacement or abandonment (Braidotti, 2011b; Grosz, 2005). What are normally entrapping and/or regulative regimes of power thus become potentially generative thresholds for thought and action. In this chapter I offer two different examples of transpositions in action – transpositions as theoretical reconfigurations, and transpositions as fictional reworkings. In the first instance, I draw on my previous analysis of Danner's location of power as it is portrayed in the novel *Ammonite* to reconfigure the stereotypically feminine ideal of 'being selfless' into 'becoming selfless,' and to rework the traditional heroic, which is vested in masculine images of hyper-agency, control and exceptionalism, as a horizon of possibility for an alternative form of embodied

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[58] This feeds into one of Braidotti's (2011a, 2019) broader arguments for trans- and inter-disciplinary alliances in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Conceptual diversity might include, for example, moving across diverse areas such as technology studies, ethics, political and social philosophy, feminism, environmental and human rights, anti-racist perspectives, speculative and science fiction, and post-colonial and posthuman theory, to give only some options. What such proliferations of creative energy and transdisciplinary erudition would offer to leadership studies, and particularly knowledge production, remains to be fully explored.

heroism. My aim is not to argue for the veracity of these reconfigurations, but rather to show how actively engaging the theoretical and "conceptual imagination" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 6) serves to "produce visionary alternatives" for leadership, "that is, creative alternatives to critique" that transform existing and/or dominant conceptions (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 14).

The second example of transpositions I present also comes from the novel *Ammonite*, but re-orients the focus from the text as an alternative form of empirical 'data', and onto the author, Nicola Griffith, who I argue is doing the work of transpositions *as* speculative fiction writing.[59] I focus on one specific concept that Griffith critiques and reworks – responsibility as control and deferment – via the character Marghe. In considering this example and how the text reimagines responsibility, I advance the idea that selected feminist, postcolonial and posthuman speculative narratives are already enacting the feminist epistemological practice of creatively reworking (or transposing) masculinist images, narratives and ideas that inform contemporary organisational processes and practices. Selected speculative novels, such as *Ammonite*, can thus be read as knowledge-producing events. In this instance, the text is "seen not as a disguise or falsification of what is given but as an active encounter with the environment by means of posing options and alternatives" (Le Guin, 1980/2018, p. 88).

Transpositions as reconfigurations: 'Becoming selfless' and 'alternative heroism'

In the paragraphs that follow I demonstrate how the practice of transpositions looks knowingly into networks of power and the social imaginaries (images and representations) that support them so as to produce affirmative alternatives for these locations. Drawing on key elements from my cartographic reading of Commander Danner's experiences in *Ammonite*,[60] which I conveyed through the figuration of the 'selfless heroine,' I critique and rework the stereotypically feminine ideal of 'being selfless' and propose an alternative vision of heroism which is premised on active immersion in the present. I begin with a critique of

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[59] This has also been referred to as 'fabulation,' which operates according to a similar principle: "restructuring patriarchal narratives, values and myths" through story-telling practices (Braidotti, 2002, p. 191; see also Barr, 1987, 1993). Transposition as I outline it here, however, necessitates that the author/researcher also *critique* whatever it is they are focusing on *prior to,* or as part of the process of, remaking or reworking it.

[60] As discussed in the previous chapter, novels like *Ammonite* from which these examples are taken, can be used as an alternative to other forms of empirical material. However, other forms of ethnographic data would be just as, or even more so, appropriate for a full study or research project. For the purpose of illustration, however, literary fiction is a useful and relevant resource.

selflessness and heroism as they are actualized in Danner's situated location before introducing other discursive meanings and material practices for these constructs in a process of transposition, ending with a short discussion of the broader implications of this approach.

As evidenced in the fictional empirical scenario presented in *Ammonite*, selflessness is linked to normative femininity and leadership through the pattern of taking care of others regardless of the personal cost to oneself. It is a private experience and set of social conventions (often found in the context of traditional family settings) transferred to the public realm of work and organisations for the benefit of these institutions. For Danner, selflessness manifests in the long hours she spends "worrying over supplies" (p. 91) and taking on additional obligations (p. 265), as well as the time vested in meeting expectations that she will be a compassionate and attentive leader. For example, she carefully trawls through the detailed personnel files on one of her new staff, Marghe, and offers her own security files to Marghe, so they will have a "basis for communication" (p. 32).

Despite implying otherwise, being selfless remains heavily invested in liberal humanist conceptions of the self and associated discourses – being self-sacrificing and fully responsible is who she (Danner) *is* and who she should *be* – expectations that function as the measure for determining the quality of her performance as a leader. Normative meanings of selflessness further manifest as practices of detachment, especially in social orders defined by the delineation of clear roles and responsibilities, and which serve to cut individuals like Danner off from open relationship with others. "Command isolated her more effectively than a deadly disease" (p. 77). For Danner, this also means she sees her subordinates as having only limited agency in the leadership assemblage, while she is vested with hyper-agency (both by herself and others) in her idealised role as a kind of hero-leader. As is the case in Danner's situation at Port Central, a traditional notion of heroism "involve[s] rational, disembodied and highly instrumental performances that reflect and reproduce homosocial bonding and social exclusiveness" (Knights, 2018, p. 90). Through her resourcefulness, courage, and sheer willpower, she will resolve all the problems facing Port Central, including managing the outfall of the virus. For Danner this belief is supported by the narrative that "there is nothing she could not do, if she wanted it badly enough, even…changing the world" (p. 77), which further reinforces her conviction that there are situations "only she could handle" (p. 79). Again, this identity results in a negative form of relationality premised on the idea of separability of self from other, and self *over* other, which she understands as vital to maintaining her authority (p. 372).

As *Ammonite* further demonstrates, even in an all-female organisation[61] the assumptions and ideas regarding how female leaders should behave and the identities they are entitled to continue to operate according to collectively shared and dominant memories of what it means to be a heroic individual and a woman. As Lu Wai explains to Danner:

> The situation scares us all. Those who are less brave than others will look to something, someone, concrete to blame. Which means you: you're the one giving orders that won't let them hide behind the idea that this is any other tour of duty [or work situation]. (p. 171)

Selflessness as a gendered discourse is imposed on and adopted by Danner and manifests as a practice of self-sacrifice to manage an uncertain situation in the context of a hierarchical organisational structure so that Danner can balance the demands placed on her, as well as those she places on herself. Consequently, reading this exemplar through a critical feminist lens there appears, at least on the surface, to be no emancipatory images or redemptive alternatives to be derived from this location. Marrying critique with creativity in a process of transposition, however, aims to "unfold new, more actively affirming" alternatives (Braidotti, 2012, p. 36) by taking these "given forms and materials of knowledge, of concepts and languages, and attempt[ing] to present and use them differently" (Grosz, 2005, p. 165). What this means concretely is that the gendered meanings ascribed to selflessness and heroism in this empirical location can be altered by "reading and speculating with theory" (Truman, 2019, p. 7). In the paragraphs that follow I illustrate two such reconfigurations, drawing on sexual difference theory and the notion of leadership assemblages to do so.

Two productive avenues for reworking selflessness involve the feminist values and practices of sexuality and relationality (Braidotti, 2013b). In the first instance, sexuality brings forth an alternative discursive meaning for selflessness as the full *expression* of sexual difference. Sexual difference refers to the differences between men and women, which also join up with "the differences among different categories of women" and "the differences *within* each singular woman" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 353). In this retelling, the notion of selflessness becomes a means of recognizing how each female subject is "a multiplicity in herself: split, fractured," finite, and always dependent on a multiplicity of social, political, natural and biological forces that are unfolding in productive (though not always positive)

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[61] As mentioned in Chapter 3 in my summary of this novel, a virus has wiped out all of the male population on Jeep, leaving Port Central occupied only by women.

interrelations (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 157). By disassociating selflessness from modes of personalization ('being selfless') and connecting this construct to the three levels of sexual difference, selflessness implies a practice of self-reorientation. It is a process of '*becoming selfless*,' through attentiveness to the fact of our own mutability, pluralism and inherent instability, and is expressed in the recognition of the contingent and constantly changing nature of the self. 'Becoming selfless' offers a line of flight out of restrictive understandings of difference, which are premised on representational ways of thinking about who one is or should be based on stereotypes and prescriptive models of leadership. This can lead to a new perception, a new way of looking at things, or a re-adjustment in one's relationship to and with others (Braidotti, 2002).

The dissolution of the notion of a static and unitary self or a transcendent ego also challenges the Western humanist assumption of separateness, or self-containment. Importantly, "the necessary premise to the enlargement of one's field of perception and capacity to experience…[is] the disappearance of firm boundaries between self and other in the encounter" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 167). Selflessness reimagined on these terms is not the loss of personal agency but rather the enactment of even *more* agentic and grounded forms of connection as it infers cooperation with others premised on acknowledgement of shared affinities and physical and mental interdependence. Embracing selflessness as a productive and positive mode of approaching encounters with others in leadership relations is dependent on heightened receptivity (or openness) to the encounter as a potentially transformative event for both oneself and the 'other.' That is, a shift from passive and reactive forms of engagement to active and fully attentive modes of relation. If Danner were to embrace this alternative form of selflessness in her encounters, it would allow her to more accurately intuit the affinities she shares with her subordinates, not only their shared fears regarding the virus and the future, but also their bravery and ability to share the burden of managing an uncertain situation (p. 171-2). On these terms, selflessness becomes a circumstance within the context of relations rather than a restrictive social category or identity that facilitates detachment and isolation. We might say then that 'becoming selfless' is a process of learning to live more realistically, and selflessness as one of the actions that serves to make this possible in the context of leadership relations. This is no longer selflessness as self-denial and detachment as Danner has been living it, but rather the embodiment of selflessness as the full experience of becoming-*with* others via openness to the encounter.

Events of 'selfless' exchange, which are not limited to encounters with other humans, also have the potential to open up other ways of thinking about concrete situations, their complexities and what might be possible in the event. This is important because leadership emerges only when the 'success conditions' for the resolution of an intention or aim are not knowable in advance. In other words, it is indicative of a situation that necessarily *requires* adaptability and creativity to respond to what emerges in situ and as a result of instances of collaborative and coordinated action. Instead of a traditional heroism, however, where Danner is tasked with redeeming the organisation almost singlehandedly, by transposing the heroic through the application of a new feminist materialist theory of embodiment we arrive at an idea or image I refer to as 'alternative heroism.'

An alternative heroism is characterised by an embodied form of attendance to the dynamic relationalities that characterise the changing landscapes of which we are a part, not in an oppositional mode where an individual tries to control and manipulate these forces, but rather through increasing "the capacities one is able to extend in evolving patterns" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 67). For example, forging connections between groups and entities, challenging or questioning the implicit and explicit rules on which habitual practices are based, encouraging others to attend to the specific intensities of a situation rather than relying on established norms and values to determine how to act, and even cultivating opportunities for collective experimentation with other ways of relating premised on more radical frames of reference, such as feminism. Acts of embodied heroism therefore aim at conditioning or preparing the environment in ways that will lead to more collectively empowering collaborative and communal efforts in the task of achieving the resolution of a shared aim or intention. An individual with authority, such as Danner, is placed as a catalyst for these possibilities insofar as she has been granted decision-making power and can influence others on account of her position. Consequently, an alternative heroism advocates the careful and conscious use of one's ability to influence and engender change to meet the demands of the situation and transform the social environment in potentially positive ways.[62]

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[62] One may want to challenge what on the surface appears to be an individualistic, humanist emphasis on the individual and their ability to influence (see Knights, 2021, for instance). However, it is important to keep in mind that an assemblage framework does not eradicate the individual, nor the relative importance of their positioning or location within any specific social situation (see Chapter 3). Instead, the individual, whether a 'leader' or some other person vested with greater authority or decision-making powers, is understood to be a *part of* the assemblage with differential powers of acting based on numerous contextual factors. This relocation means that enactments of alternative heroism, as well as traditional heroism, are not the origin of leadership, nor are they 'acts' of

This is not to say that 'heroism' of any kind is necessary to the success of leadership.[63] However, heroism recrafted on these terms refuses to fall into the trap of repeating the binary logic of the heroic/post-heroic debate, which is organised along gendered lines, with the 'heroic' being traditionally masculine, independent and active and the 'post-heroic' being feminine, communal and passive. Instead, an alternative heroism is neither 'masculine' nor 'feminine' in the oppositional sense but nevertheless moves *through* the feminine (as a practice or process rather than a social category) to arrive at an idea of heroism as a more embodied, involved, agentic and creative form of engagement with the demands of one's present environment. That is, the feminine acts as the ground for developing an image of heroism that is located in a 'politics of acts' rather than in a binarized or exclusionary form of identity politics and positionality. Transposed in this way, heroism is relocated as an event or response to complexity rather than being associated with a person or fixed set of attributes.

In summary, transpositions (as a radical empiricist practice) repositions the feminist researcher as a creative agent in the research process who can intervene in and imagine alternatives by extending analysis beyond that which is given in experience. The empirical field is consequently understood to be a "middle ground," where the researcher "extrapolates from experience without being bound to it" and objectivity is recast "in the mode of situated practices" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 137). There is no endpoint to this process – we can always experiment some more and from different political and ethical angles, as well as bringing other collaborative resources into our inquiry (Braidotti, 2006). This shift in orientation differs from conventional quantitative and qualitative methodologies which begin with social and empirical realities and *then* use theory, philosophy and/or concepts to explain or interpret what is given. Rather than applying feminist theories as interpretive devices to make sense of the determinate forms and themes evident in the 'data' (e.g., 'feminine' and 'masculine' ideals, stereotypes, modes of identification, to give some examples), the creative side of transpositions *begins* with these resources and uses them to move through the empirical field to disclose other possible realities and affirmative knowledges. It is process of "creative mimesis" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 225) that realises the epistemological significance of "*seeing*

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leadership. Rather they are forces at work *within* an assemblage, and which impact interactions between bodies, as well as between the 'machinic (nondiscursive) assemblages' and 'collective (discursive) assemblages of enunciation.'

[63] The notion of 'success' in this context refers to the resolution (rather than abandonment) of some kind of intention or aim through the actions and activities collectively enacted by a heterogenous array of entities, which as I argued in Chapter 3, is one of the pre-requisites for the emergence of a leadership assemblage.

the world" from differing and more emancipatory perspectives (Lykke, 2010a, p. 139). In the following section I argue that feminist SF is also doing the work of transpositions, with selected texts critically revising leadership norms and presenting empowering alternatives in the context of their narratives.

Transpositions in feminist SF: Recrafting responsibility in and through fictional narrative

Writing and all kinds of literary forms, including SF, have been employed as tools of imperialism and patriarchy. But SF is also a form which can be used differently and subversively, especially by those who have traditionally been excluded from history. Braidotti (2002) points out that because the SF genre is "[e]minently political, in both a dystopian and a utopian sense, it destabilised authority in all its forms and, as such, it exercised a fatal attraction for feminist writers bent on challenging the masculine bias of literature and society" (p. 189). Through purposeful engagement with emergent feminist ideas, seminal speculative novels like *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) by Ursula K. Le Guin and *The Female Man* (1975) by Joanna Russ interrupted widespread assumptions about male-female gender roles, relationships, and difference, and set the stage for a plethora of self-conscious feminist SF novels in the 1980s and 90s that engaged with developments in postmodern, critical and poststructuralist feminist thinking (Lacey, 2014; Melzer, 2006), and more recently, with new feminist materialism and posthumanist thought (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018; Lau, 2018). The turn of the century has also marked the publication of many more feminist SF authors of colour, such as Nnedi Okorafor, Nalo Hopkinson, Sofia Samatar, Vandana Singh, and N.K. Jemisin. Barring Octavia E. Butler, women of colour have long been ignored in the field of SF (Hood & Reid, 2009). In their writing, which often combines science-fiction, fantasy and magical realism elements, women of colour explore intersections of gender, race and class, and in doing so, critique white, neo-liberal feminist narratives together with racist and patriarchal structures (Hood & Reid, 2009). Feminist writings of speculative fiction novels can consequently "be understood as part of a feminist criticism of existing power relations" (Melzer, 2006, p. 3-4), and feminist readings of these texts serve to make speculative narratives into "wonderful, messy tales to use for retelling or reseeding, possibilities for getting on now, as well as in deep earth history" (Haraway, 2016, p. 119).

Feminist science scholar, Donna Haraway (2013, 2016), proposes that SF is a knowledge-making field. Selected SF texts produce alternative knowledges by creating

"different worlds and possibilities from previously fixed words, metaphors, and concepts" (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 128), which is, in essence, the essential characteristic of transpositions as it has been defined in this chapter. Feminist and posthumanist SF, moreover, are genres and modes of storytelling directly concerned with reworking dominant institutions and formations of power from angles which challenge fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of being and of sexual difference (Braidotti, 2019; Lacey, 2014; Lau, 2018). Taking their starting point in critique of existing norms and values, feminist SF authors like Nicola Griffith use their writing as a tool to "destabilise power formations…[and to] work toward new possibilities for the kinds of stories that women writers can tell by revisiting, remaking – and in the process, unmaking – the stories we have all been told" (Lacey, 2014, p. 76).

In writing *Ammonite*, Griffith (2002) was directly concerned with questions related to sexual difference, identity and subjectivity.[64] Not oppositional difference, where women are either "inherently passive or dominant, maternal or vicious" (p. 376), but rather portraying female subjects as diverse entities with differing experiences. Griffith (2017) further explains that

> I wrote…*Ammonite*, to address the question that has been the subtext of countless science fiction narratives: Are women human? I aimed to render the question meaningless by writing a novel without a single male character that begins from the standpoint that women are simply people. (p. 39)

However, Griffith contests essentialist accounts and avoids resorting to androgyny by emphasising embodiment rather than focusing on identity. The 'feminine' in this text consequently functions not only as a delimiting social category (as is the case for Danner) but is also a "recipe for transformation" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 114) in the interactions between certain characters. My treatment of *Ammonite* up to this point has predominantly focused on Danner and the leadership assemblage at Port Central, elements of the novel that Griffith writes as normative examples in order to show how even in an all-female context our conventional ways of thinking and relating are embedded in our collective psyche and

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[64] *Ammonite* received the Lamba Literary Award for lesbian SF on its initial publication in 1992, as well as the Tiptree Award in 1993, which recognises speculative works that contribute to the development of new understandings of sexual difference and gender.

supported by dominant social formations. However, the novel also presents a contrasting narrative in the form of Marghe[65] and the native women on Jeep.

The possibility for the new, and for the truly different, is evident at the very start of the novel in a "metaphor made concrete: Marghe is about to cross the threshold to another world, an irrevocable choice manifested in a physical step" (Griffith, 2017, p. 13). It is through the character of Marghe – her metamorphosis across the duration of the novel and her relationships with two indigenous women, namely Aoife and Thenike – that Griffith actively reworks selected concepts, ideas, images and assumptions that inform normative ways of thinking and acting, including those related to leadership. The angle Griffith adopts to enact these revisions is premised on bodily immanence, expressed as an attentiveness to the "physical and emotional interaction [of the character] with their environment" (Griffith, 2017, p. 14). This position is further reflected in the title of the novel – *Ammonite.* As Marghe explains to Thenike, ammonites "curve around and around, in on themselves. Many-chambered" (p. 232). The imagery associated with the ammonite echoes an idea held by the native communities, that "all life connects" (p. 232), with the virus-human relationship being portrayed by Griffith as one such mode of vital connection.[66]

I concentrate here on one specific transposition embedded in the novel – responsibility (depicted as control) critiqued and then creatively reworked (transposed) as part of the novel's narrative arc. Responsibility is often associated with leadership practice, which Knights (2021) links to an historical "preoccupation with order, harmony, and stability," as well as with "masculine identities which seek linear-rational control over anything outside the self" (p. 683). In this schema, the concept and practice of responsibility serves to reinforce hierarchical modes of relating, which then make their way into leadership assemblages (as discursive and nondiscursive practices) based on the understanding that this is how things have always been done (e.g., 'leaders' take responsibility). In *Ammonite*, the character Thenike links the power of the 'old ways,' which include social divisions,

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[65] Who is Marghe? I introduced Marghe in Chapter 3. She is an anthropologist who arrives on Jeep to both test the vaccine and act as an advisor and liaison between Company personnel and the native population of Jeep.

[66] Griffith's emphasis on connection reflects an important observation made in new materialist philosophy: that we can either choose to acknowledge the connective nature of life or ignore it, but regardless of our conscious decision, "there [is] no real choice" (p. 198). As Marghe experiences in her encounter with the virus, "that decision was made already. All she [Marghe] had to do was accept it: Jeep the world, Jeep the virus, would become part of her now whether she wanted it or not" (p. 198).

regulative identities and expected patterns of behavior, to memory practices: "All their memories interlock and look down the same path to the same places. Each memory reflects another, repeats, reinforces, until the known becomes the only" (p. 200). Drawing on examples of Marghe's experience, I show how Griffith disrupts the shared 'memory' of responsibility as responsibility *for* the other and redefines it in accordance with a relational ontology.

Soon after arriving on Jeep, Marghe leaves the relative safety of Port Central in a bid to discover the origins of the virus and learn more about the indigenous cultures in her role as an anthropologist (p. 35). Danner is reluctant to let her go as she sees it as her prerogative to ensure Marghe's safety (35-6), which is dependent on Marghe remaining in Danner's 'sphere of control' (the organisational setting): "If you go…I can't protect you. Do you understand that?" (p. 36). Marghe does understand – the concept and practice of responsibility that Griffith portrays here is premised on the idea of responsibility passing from one person to another depending on their positional power and what they can do to/for others on this authoritative basis (p. 132). It is a situation Marghe encounters again when she is forced to join the Echraidhe community.[67] Like Danner, Aoife, the formal leader of the Echraidhe, keeps tight control over the tribe. This leads Marghe to start "think[ing] in terms of things happening *to* her, not her *acting*" (p. 99). Responsibility in this context thus materializes as an aggressive form of disempowerment or even erasure on the part of those designated as 'followers,' with Marghe continually seeking Aoife's approval and care (p. 96).

Escaping the Echraidhe after her life is threatened, Marghe makes her way to Ollfoss, a larger and more prosperous community. It is at Ollfoss that Griffith starts to unpack the discursive conditions for revising commonly held understandings of responsibility. This begins with Marghe's realization, prompted by her discussions with the native woman Thenike, that "[t]hey were connected: the world, her body, her face. Perhaps she should not be asking who she was but, rather, of what she was a part" (p. 198). This idea underpins an alternative construction of responsibility by the women in Ollfoss that is defined in terms of offering and allowing, rather than ordering and controlling. Or put another way, rather than being responsible *for* some situation, thing or person, we are responsible *to* one another. "How else could it be?" Thenike asks (p. 207), when we recognise that any human action is

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[67] The Echraidhe are a nomadic tribe whose numbers are dwindling. Part of the reason for this is their unwillingness to form a Trata agreement with any other local settlements or communities and so they remain insular and closed off from those who could help them thrive and grow.

necessarily responsive, relational and socio-material (see Chapter 3). This alternative vision further reflects Haraway's (2016) notion of 'response-ability.' Response-ability aims to account for how we are "at stake to each other – across regions, genders, races, species, practices," an understanding which enacts a displacement of the kind of "high-wire acts" and "humanist patriline[s]" that support conventional understandings of this concept (Haraway, 2016, p. 132).

When Marghe receives a message regarding the disintegration of the Trata (trade) agreement she was instrumental in setting up between Port Central and Holme Valley, she adopts her habitual view of responsibility: "I'm responsible for what I set in motion" (e.g., she identifies as the 'responsible party' who is qualified to bring order and stability) (p. 294). Thenike challenges this interpretation, and encourages Marghe to reframe her approach to reflect the alternative understanding of response-ability introduced above: "How will you go to them? As…the one who should have 'done something,' or…[as one] offering advice and mediation"? (p. 294-5). In asking these questions, Thenike evokes the feminine as a strategy (rather than an identity) for response-ability through an emphasis on the spaces of intimacy created through bodily connections (e.g., what Marghe offers to others and receives *as* an embodied subject).

By weaving in feminist possibilities with critique of masculinist norms, Griffith 'transposes' the concept and practice of responsibility, connecting it to options that advance a theoretical concern with the immanent and responsive nature of interactions. However, the situated nature of reading transpositions in speculative texts is not to provide an 'objective' account of the author's precise intentions, which I would argue is impossible anyway (see Melzer, 2006). Instead, such readings are composed of complex interactions between the reader (and what I bring to the event of reading, namely a concern with feminist theory and a focus on leadership), the author, and the story itself. An advantage of reading transpositions in fiction is that fictional works extend the discussion of alternatives by elaborating (at least tentatively) on the implications for praxis within an experiential context, which is not the case for theoretical reconfigurations such as those presented in the preceding section. Regardless of the precise form, however, both approaches offer an opportunity to "think differently" about "gendered structures, processes and practices" in leadership without fixing these dynamics into another repressive normativity (Lipton, 2017, p. 78). Transpositions thus comprise a form of *feminist* scholarly knowledge production as I explore below.

Transpositions and feminist knowledge production in leadership studies

In this section I situate the practice of transpositions in relation to scholarly knowledge production in leadership studies, and specifically, how the practice of transposition contributes to the development and dissemination of feminist, or what we might also call 'redemptive,' leadership knowledge. By 'leadership knowledge' I am not referring to knowledge *of* leadership,[68] but rather the cumulated sets of ideas, images, narratives, representations, terms, concepts and so on, that both inform and are produced via discursive and nondiscursive practices in leadership assemblages (Chapter 3), as well as those that play a role in the formation and inhabitation of leadership subjectivities (Chapter 4). This feeds into a larger discussion regarding the production of knowledge in leadership studies, and the displacement of 'phallic' knowledge as a political and ethical agenda for feminist and critical leadership scholars (Lipton, 2017; Liu, 2020). I argue that the practice of transpositions directly contributes to this body of work, addressing several of the ongoing problems facing leadership scholars due to their reliance on conventional methodologies. I begin by framing scholarly knowledge production on new materialist terms, before discussing the parameters for *feminist* (redemptive, non-phallic) leadership knowledge and how this kind of 'adequate' knowledge is brought forth in leadership studies, both through more conventional methods, as well as via transpositions and creative writing practices. In closing this discussion, I highlight the particular contributions that feminist knowledges make to leadership practice, organisations and society more generally.

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[68] In an assemblage framework, developing knowledge of leadership would focus on the "nonconscious orientations lived by the human subject at the intersection of organic, signifying, and subjectifying strata" in assemblages (Lorraine, 2011, p. 158). Such an approach reveals the role of other human and inhuman forces, affects and intensities in making things happen. This forms the basis for creating counter-narratives of leadership that displace individualist assumptions and contribute to materialist imaginaries of/for leadership. With regards to producing redemptive leadership knowledge that contest hegemonic gender discourses, however, a focus on nonconscious experiences, which comprise encounters and affects, can only deal with gender and other differences, such as race and ethnicity, critically or neutrally in terms of its role in discursive and nondiscursive practices. This is because an assemblage and/or relational, process-based view of leadership rejects the assumption that there can be such a thing as 'feminine leadership' or 'feminist leadership,' insofar as these designations are dependent on individualist and proprietary conceptions of leadership. However, it might be possible to describe leadership in terms of the 'feminine' or 'feminism' depending on the effects of the assemblage, or with regards to the nature of different collections of internal or external relations. For example, 'feminist leadership assemblages' or 'feminine relations' within a leadership assemblage. These suggestions deserve further exploration but are beyond the scope of this thesis.

From phallic knowledge to feminist knowledge

The understanding of knowledge I am working with in this chapter has been prefaced in my discussions of power and subjectivity, as well as in my introduction to new materialism in Chapter 2. To reiterate briefly, Braidotti (2019) argues that "knowledge is being produced across a broad range of social, corporate, activist, artistic and mediated locations, as well as in scientific, technological academic settings. Producing knowledge is…the stuff of the world" (p. 80). However, as Lykke (2010a) further explains, "[k]nowledge-producing practices are not neutral…but dependent on the knowers' contextualisation in time, space, historical power relations, bodies and so on" (p. 18). In other words, there is no neutral ground, foundation or outside position from which knowledge is constructed. So, as Haraway (2016) puts it, "[i]t matters what thoughts think thoughts, what stories tell stories, what knowledges know knowledges" (p. 199).

A reoccurring issue for leadership studies is that of inadequate knowledge and its strong influence on the collective imaginary. By inadequate I am referring to the fact that many of the narratives, discourses, images and ideas associated with leadership are regulative, exclusionary, and even oppressive, as has been strongly argued by a number of critical leadership scholars (e.g., Ford, et al., 2008; Learmonth & Morrell, 2019; Lipton, 2017; Liu, 2020; Liu & Baker, 2016; Stead & Elliott, 2009). Part of the reason for this is an ongoing reliance on dualisms and/or an anthropocentric, humanistic conception of the subject and of identity. The power of these knowledges lies in the iterative nature of their creation and dissemination, whereby the dominant social imaginaries and discourses of leadership (which are gendered and racialised, as well as human-centric) both inform and are informed by dominant knowledge formations, as illustrated by my cartographic approach in the previous chapter. Inadequate knowledge, which is also often phallic or hegemonic knowledge, perpetuates power asymmetries and produces inequalities that support "a seductive economy" in leadership studies and in leadership discourse and practice that can be "extremely harmful to both women and men" (Lipton, 2017, p. 77). The very idea of 'feminine leadership,' for example, has been instrumental in shaping what society and individuals recognise as appropriate, gender-stereotypic ways of acting and behaving for women in formal positions of authority, further reinforcing the reductive association of women with femininity and men with masculinity (Pullen & Vachhani, 2017). This situation overwhelmingly benefits white and/or highly educated women – in whom supposedly natural

'feminine' attributes and traits are more readily recognisable – while leaving the institutional power structures and hierarchies virtually unchanged (Braidotti, 2011b).

Liu (2020) argues that critical and feminist leadership scholarship "lay[s] the groundwork for wide-scale scholarly resistance – epistemic disobedience – against white supremacist ways of knowing" (p. 150). To make the 'qualitative leap' from critique to creativity, and hence from hegemonic and phallic knowledge to feminist leadership knowledges, scholars must work with an alternative vision of the subject and of sexual difference, as demonstrated in my examples. In other words, politically and ethically transformative leadership knowledges are not based on detachment, hierarchies, dualisms, or notions of individual exceptionalism, and neither is such knowledge directly concerned with increasing leadership 'effectiveness' (Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2014). Orientation is thus central to the work of knowledge production in leadership studies. As Stanley (1997, p. 4) puts it, "[a] feminist theory of knowledge is linked to a feminist way of knowing, and this in turn is linked back to a feminist way of theorising being" (as cited in Lipton, 2017, p. 72).

Given that leadership is always a collective enterprise involving multiple human and nonhuman actors (see Chapter 3), bringing forth alternative knowledges of and for leadership is not only contingent on moving beyond the binary gender system and related stereotypes but also on decentering humanist notions of the unitary and independent human individual and the forms of identification that sustain these visions. Consequently, what counts as 'feminist' or 'redemptive' knowledge is dependent on the forces these knowledges both convey and allow us to express. Namely, they should enable us to think differently about "our environment and ourselves" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87), both at the social and individual level, and in ways that will contribute to the alleviation of inequalities and unjust practices, such as racism and sexism. This is important because stereotypically 'feminine' images and ideals like selflessness, care, nurturing, helping, embodiment, and so on, are often projected onto female leaders, as well as shaping contemporary leadership discourses and narratives in an oppositional mode, and so cannot easily be cast off as illustrated in my critique of Danner's situation. As Truman (2019) contends, because such assumptions are "*material* realities, a situated [new materialist] feminism must attend to and intervene in the processes and assemblages that allow inequalities to emerge, persist, and reproduce" (p. 7). For feminist leadership scholars this requires challenging the foundational ideas and discourses aligned with leadership in Western cultures, which also include the ongoing preoccupation with individual leader figures and their purportedly 'transformational' powers. "Qualitative

research sites and events—both empirical sites where research is conducted and radically empiricist sites of reading and speculating with theory [such as transpositions]—are crucial material situations for practicing feminist politics" on these terms (Truman, 2019, p. 7), as I discuss at a later point in this chapter.

New feminist materialist approaches to scholarly knowledge production also eschew the idea of the researcher as an objective and fully rational entity, emphasizing instead the situated nature of our research practices and the politics of our positions as thinkers and writers (Lykke, 2010a). For Braidotti (2006), this also includes "recognition that not one single strategy of resistance is possible" for transpositions (p. 7). Instead, the 'degrees of difference' between sexed subjects is a determining factor for "the sort of political maps and conceptual diagrams we are likely to draw" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 261). Difference in this context refers not only to differences *between* men and women, but also to differences *among* women, including multiple and inseparable variables, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, dis/ability, lifestyle, religion, and so on, which interact in a tangle of non-static relationships that are characterised by different flows of power (Braidotti, 2011a).[69] The implications are such that "[k]nowledges, like all other forms of social production, are at least partially effects of the sexualised positioning of their producers and users" (Grosz, 1994, p. 20). It is for this reason that women and other minority groups, who on account of their gendered and racialized subjectivities are positioned in an asymmetrical relationship with the male-masculine norm, have a head start on imagining and enacting alternatives (Braidotti, 2011b). This factor has been taken up by feminist leadership scholars as the main avenue by which to bring forth and collate the kind of redemptive leadership knowledges described above.

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[69] It is important to further clarify my use of the term 'woman' in this context. As the "culturally dominant model for female identity," the signifier 'Woman' functions as an 'embodied genealogy' that affects the lived reality of sexed female subjects (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 156). It denotes not only experiences of exclusion and oppression but has also been used positively as a shared bond from which feminist resistance and collective change has, and continues to be, organised and demanded (Braidotti, 2011a). However, as an identity category, the term 'Woman' is highly reductionist as it implies a universally shared experience of womanhood and femininity, one that has tended to assume as its default image the white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-female woman. So, while it needs to be recognised that "all women partake of the condition of the 'second sex,' which can be seen as a sufficient condition for the elaboration of a feminist subject position" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 155), and therefore a politically-charged position from which to speak, think and write, the category 'Woman' must simultaneously be contested and deconstructed. This is because although "women may have common situations and experiences…they are not, in any way, the same" (p. 156).

(Re)producing feminist knowledges in leadership studies

In a post-constructionist lens, meaning-making is understood to be both materially *and* discursively mediated, as well as immanent to the circumstances and positionality of those we are studying and writing about (Braidotti, 2011b; Lykke, 2010a). In more conventional modes of research work that focus on the situated perspectives and conscious orientations of individuals and/or groups, the production of feminist leadership knowledge is contingent on the study of subjects who challenge discourses and repressive knowledges via intensive "negotiation of meanings" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 34). Empirical studies might seek out diverse perspectives and transpositional-like reconfigurations of dominant norms by turning to social and grass-roots movements (Munro & Thanem, 2020), feminist organisations and activist spaces (Benschop, 2021; Liu, 2020), as well as individuals who are purposefully moving toward more empowering modes of becoming, such as Mae in *Air* (see Chapter 4). Liu (2020) gives the example of a feminist activist group "subvert[ing] dominant assumptions that to be a leader necessitates…exerting command and control over those who occupy lower ranks" (p. 135). By shifting their understanding of leadership from authority figures to focus on the cooperative efforts of the collective, the group refuses to be influenced by the prevailing cultural narrative that successful leadership is dependent on a superior individual who possesses certain attributes or traits. This approach to empirical inquiry situates the human subject(s) of research as knowledge-producing agents at the level of their own individual experience and in their situated locations, and the researcher as a co-producer in the creation of alternative knowledge through their engagements with the 'data' and in the dissemination of their findings. As Liu (2020) suggests, we can think of this as a process of "working together [with research participants] …so that the social meanings of leadership may grow to encompass the invisible and forgotten acts of resistance by marginalized people and communities" (p. 139).

The political and ethical contributions of this mode of inquiry are derived from the 'richness' of the data and so are dependent on whether or not those being studied are actively engaged in the strategic reworking of power formations. The predominance of entrapment as an orientation and situation for most people (researchers included) can prove problematic for qualitative research projects aimed at producing empowering knowledges.[70] Consequently,

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[70] As I argued in Chapter 4, entrapment is the common condition for most social subjects due to the force of habit that makes ordinary dualisms into the foundation for knowledge practices and subject formation in leadership situations. Habits manifest as "uncreative repetition" which also "engender forms of behaviour that can be socially accepted as 'normal' or even 'natural'" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 9).

this approach often requires the researcher look outside of normative organisational contexts, which are often hierarchical and predicated on the clear division of roles and labor, to find appropriate exemplars (e.g., social movements, environmental groups, feminist and activist projects). However, relying on anomalous or atypical empirical situations as the source of emancipatory alternatives can prove limiting in terms of the applicational value of such knowledges in everyday situations of leadership. This is especially the case in settings where preexisting power structures and power relations inhibit such strategies as 'radical democracy' or 'bottom-up organising' (see Munro & Thanem, 2020). As Painter-Morland and Deslandes (2014) note, these and other circumstances (such as our tendency to think on dualistic terms) point to "the difficulties in developing an alternative discourse on leadership" (p. 851).

Conventional qualitative approaches like the ones described above also tend to situate the researcher as a relatively passive entity. That is, their role is to reflexively make sense of and interpret empirical events in accordance with the particulars of their analytical framework. This is followed by the communication of these interpretations in clear and accurate writing (Rhodes, 2019). Transpositions as a methodological approach challenges the wide-scale acceptance of these criteria as the 'correct' or only way to do research and so produce leadership knowledge. Braidotti (2013a) argues that "[t]hinking is the conceptual counterpart of the ability to enter modes of relation, to affect and be affected, sustaining qualitative shifts and tensions accordingly (p. 170). It is for this reason that feminist thinkers operating from new materialist and post-constructionist perspectives ask us to take seriously the epistemological significance of both seeing and (re)writing the world from radical and self-conscious feminist and posthumanist standpoints (Lykke, 2010a), which is the aim of transpositions as both theoretical reconfigurations and fictional recraftings. In this frame, the alliances we make and resources we draw on are understood to yield "their own specific effects" in each event of their application (Braidotti, 2006, p. 7). For example, my notions of 'becoming selfless' and 'alternative heroism' are a contingent effect of my interactions with feminist and other theoretical resources, the empirical 'data,' my own political belief system, and situated perspective as a female-feminist researcher, all coming together within the textual location of this thesis.

These kinds of alternative approaches to knowledge production form the basis for what Braidotti (2006) refers to as a "heterogenous style of politics" for leadership studies that is "based on centrelessness," and which has the potential to bring forth a "variety of possible

political strategies" for inquiry (p. 7). As I have demonstrated in this chapter, this might take the form of theoretical reconfigurations or something more creative, like fiction writing (see also Lipton, 2017) or collaborative analysis. Lenz Taguchi (2013) suggests, for example, bringing together multiple lines of analysis for the same location, event, or concept by several individuals. The contribution of such an approach is a "multiplicity of different kinds of readings of data" which Lenz Taguchi (2013) argues assist in creating "a multiplicity of fields and flows" (p. 714). I see transpositions as offering an important contribution to feminist leadership inquiry *as* heterogenous politics by further situating a "fertile, generous imagination [as]…crucial" to feminist epistemological endeavors (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 212). In addition, because it does not require that there be any existing evidence of alternative feminist and emancipatory knowledges within an empirical situation, we are not restricted to centering inquiry on more obscure or difficult to find empirical scenarios, where, for example, the subject(s) of research see the world from a radically different, materialist or non-dualist perspective. Transpositions on these terms allows the researcher-thinker to push further than what is normally thinkable in the parameters established by and repeated in much qualitative research work. As a methodological practice it thus joins a trajectory of emergent methodological approaches that aim to subvert the "masculine common sense" that underpins much academic writing and research work in organisation and leadership studies (Rhodes, 2019, p. 34).

Readings of SF texts and other literary forms on the terms presented in this chapter further serve to disrupt 'masculine common sense' by pushing at the boundaries of what is seen to 'count' as academic research work and scholarly knowledge production. Feminist speculative fiction works to "reassemble polluted histories" through its distinct storytelling practices and so deals in the possible by revising the 'real' (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 132). In working this potentially luminous 'seam,'[71] speculative literary texts become knowledge producing sites that reroute current trajectories and present viable alternatives via the transpositions embedded in the stories. This mirrors a proposition made by De Cock, et al. (2021) that "literature and different forms of writing" can be engaged to "reimagine and question the dominant view of the world," as well as to "make conceivable what would otherwise remain hidden" (p. 471). Feminist SF, however, is not just a "methodological tool,"

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[71] I borrow this term from De Cock and Land (2006) who refer to the intersection between the literary mode and organisation studies as the 'organization/literature seam,' arguing that "'organization' (and organizational processes and practices like leadership) and 'literature' are mutually co-articulating and interdependent concepts and fields of enquiry" (p. 517).

but can also serve as "creative inspiration" for leadership and organisation scholars (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 112). We might, for example, employ the strategies of SF writers in our own work to generate even more creative and transgressive transpositions. The feminist leadership scholar *as* speculative fiction writer, and the speculative fiction author *as* leadership scholar is therefore a productive avenue for further exploration and dialogue.

As demonstrated in feminist literary criticism, the kinds of writing strategies found in feminist speculative fiction destabilise traditional (masculine) narrative forms and make space for marginalised voices (Lacey, 2014). While it has been beyond the scope of this thesis to experiment with dramatically different styles of writing and their transgressive potential, I see SF texts as offering a plethora of possible models for feminist researchers that align with current movements toward embodied, 'feminine writing' in organisation and leadership studies (e.g., Bell, et al., 2019; Lipton, 2017; Rhodes, 2019; Vachhani, 2019).[72] To give a short example, in *The Winged Histories* by Sofia Samatar (introduced in Chapter 1), the character named Tialon can be read as illustrating strategies of creative mimesis and embodied writing that interrupt the expectation that rational, objective writing is gender-neutral. Tialon's father is a religious scholar, and at first, she hopes to follow in his footsteps by copying everything that he does:

> Write. Write. One day he would teach the child [Tialon]: Writing is power. He leaned
> on the table and added a scrawl to the page…He was tearing down walls. He was
> trampling their starry chains and cashews and peppercorn trees. (p. 127)

Through writing, the scholar-priest attempts to control his topic and to bring forth a perfect knowledge of how to "live simply and with grace" (p. 126). But the book is only perfect "because it admits no contradictions" (p. 139), because half of it is missing. Like other Western civilizations, language in Olondria is premised on a phallogocentric logic (it is a 'negative kingdom,' as Tialon puts it). Samatar creates an evocative rendering of this fact in her mythic imaginings of what is referred to in Olondrian history as the 'War of the Tongues.' During this period, the daughter of the king was sacrificed to ensure victory over

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[72] In addition to creative mimesis, relevant strategies demonstrated in speculative fiction include meta-narrative framing (e.g., presenting events as an alternate, 'real' history), hybrid forms (e.g., blends of fantasy, mythology, science-fiction and magical realism), polyvocality (e.g., the use of multiple female voices and diverse perspectives in conversation), non-linearity and temporal displacement, and an array of unconventional storytelling techniques (e.g., diary entries, fragmented reflections, poetry, songs, 'historical' artefacts and records, maps and letters).

all that was (and is) marked as 'monstrous.' Yet, as Tialon reflects, everyone has forgotten the sacrifice – the (female) body drowned in the 'Sea of Songs' (p. 169). Everyone that is, but her. Tialon makes the mimetic claim that her writing is 'objective,' and in several instances it does indeed appear to be, but her own body makes its way in into the text: she is at once her father's daughter, but also her mother, living knowingly in the time of flesh and blood. Her writing moves between these realms, materialising as a purposefully unfinished text that incorporates all that her father's excludes, that which is different, 'other,' and excluded from the 'perfect book.' Taking a lesson from Tialon, we might also aim to write our texts in a similarly plural fashion, probing the productive interminglings of mind-body, nature-culture, feeling-rationality, male-female, human-nonhuman and so on in our writing and knowledge production practices.

What can these knowledges do?

Having defined the parameters for feminist leadership knowledge and discussed some of the ways in which they can be brought forth and/or created by feminist thinkers and writers, my final question concerns what they can do in the social realm and for leadership practice. Specifically, what are the broader political, conceptual and ethical implications within a new feminist materialist perspective? Because feminist knowledges of/for leadership are qualitatively different than those supporting contemporary and dominant gendered leadership imaginaries, they contribute directly to the development of an alternative imaginary for leadership. This includes the introduction of new images, ideas, identities and terminologies that reflect new materialist notions of the subject as embodied, embedded and relational. The imaginary is relevant to leadership practice, and the situated experiences of individual human actors, as it provides "the leverage we need to implement changes in the social realm, as well as in the depths of the subject" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87). Shifts in the imaginary can produce disruptions in everyday acts of dis/identification, as well as contributing to the formation of different and less repressive leadership subjectivities (via formations of power).

Empowering or positive social images can also prompt other ways of engaging with or inhabiting one's own leadership subjectivity by "bring[ing] out aspects of our existence, especially our own implication with power, that we had not noticed before" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 16). This might take the form of small permutations, like questioning the assumptions one holds regarding leaders and leadership, or more substantial adjustments, such as a move from entrapment to empowerment that escapes the representational schemas predicated on

stereotypes and gendered expectations (see Chapter 4). The alternatives brought forth in this chapter – becoming selfless, alternative heroism and response-ability – could potentially act as reference points for "alternative ways of embodying and experiencing our sexualized selves" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 220) in leadership relations "via perversion of standardized patterns of interaction" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 141). As I have demonstrated in this chapter, these alternative images and knowledges are not counteridentities "but rather dislocations of identities" (or disidentifications) that free the subject to understand themselves and others as affective, relational entities (p. 141). To think about oneself on these terms is to "create new conceptual tools that may enable us to both come to terms and actively interact with empowering others…[and] the actualization of our increased ability to act and interact in the world" and in assemblages (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 286-7).

Furthermore, feminist leadership knowledges can contribute to the development of the conceptual politics of leadership and the social advancement of alternative formulas for acting (praxis) in leadership assemblages. The imaginative outcomes of the transpositions presented in this chapter are characterized by a "concern for our historical situation" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 227) and a desire to redress existing inequalities, injustices, and power asymmetries. Politically speaking, they are not concerned with ensuring the 'Great Woman' is rendered equivalent to the 'Great Man,' and hence entitled to the same privileges which align with discriminatory Western neo-liberal principles of individual superiority and meritocracy. The path towards equality and better outcomes for women requires moving beyond the achievement of sameness and towards radically different ways of behaving and acting in relation with others, as well as heightened responsivity to and ethical accountability for the effects of our individual and collective actions (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of this point).

Elaborating on the implications for praxis opened up by feminist knowledges and theory is also important because any emancipatory idea or image can easily become re-integrated into dominant systems of thought or associated with characteristic formulas for acting via habits of recognition and representation. This is especially the case in capitalist societies which prioritise "maximization of…quantitative options" for practitioners to pick and choose from (Braidotti, 2019, p. 90). Resisting these tendencies is a task for both leadership practitioners and scholars. One way to do this is by shifting the focus from the identification of properties and/or attributes that we might associate with an image like 'alternative heroism,' which is to risk making this into a prescriptive model for practice, to instead align

our understanding in accordance with the *effects* of its enactment, or its material realization. For example, an increase in the group's ability to adapt and respond creatively to their circumstances on account of changes being made in their environment, such as the forging of new connections or the spread of other narratives, ideas and images of leadership. In this sense, there are no pre-determined or identifiable characteristics of 'alternative heroism.' Rather, we know when enactments of embodied heroism of the kind described in this chapter have occurred because of the nature of the changes it engenders in/for the collective.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have engaged with Braidotti's concept of transpositions to disrupt normative approaches to knowledge production in leadership studies. As an epistemological practice enacted by creative agents, such as feminist researchers and fiction writers, transpositions involves revisiting and reworking events, ideas, concepts, and social phenomenon from radically different perspectives (Braidotti, 2011b). Feminist resources are engaged not in terms of *a posteriori* application to what we 'uncover' in our inquiry, but as a method to revisit and remake masculine knowledge and associated structures of power (Lykke, 2010a). Sexual difference is situated as a primary component or strategy in the event of escaping and remaking phallic knowledge, allowing us to open other horizons for leadership knowledge through work on situated power formations, such as the image of the hero or the selfless female leader. What emerges from this process are inventions, which are also interventions that can be engaged to pursue alternatives to dominant imaginaries and revitalise practice (Braidotti, 2011a). This is important because masculine knowledge continues to dominate leadership studies (Lipton, 2017; Liu, 2020). As I have shown throughout this thesis, the gender binary informs the social imaginary of leadership, the discursive and nondiscursive practices enacted in leadership assemblages, and the formation and inhabitation of leadership subjectivities, regulating and limiting thought and action in ways that disproportionately disadvantage women and other minorities. Consequently, in addition to critique one of the primary aims of feminist and critical leadership scholars must be to bring forth, collate and convey alternative knowledges that are not dependent on, nor perpetuate, gendered dualisms or a static and individualist notion of being. This kind of feminist knowledge challenges the domination of masculine and humanist leadership knowledge by "opening generative cracks" in these systems and in the social imaginary (Braidotti, 2019, p. 127).

By repositioning researchers and fiction writers as knowledge producing agents, transpositions opens out leadership studies to more creative forms of knowledge production which have, for the most part, been left untapped. The feminist leadership knowledges brought forth and conveyed via these methods comprise a foundation for developing alternative modes of feminist and ethical praxis within the context of leadership situations. As Braidotti (2019) explains, political and social engagements with alternative knowledges hold "the potential for large impact [that] can…move [us] towards more sustainable social systems and practices" (p. 81). Up to this point I have not discussed ethics explicitly. However, it is an undercurrent that runs through all the chapters thus far through a focus on becoming, relationality and the desires and intentions that motivate social action. In the following chapter I turn directly to the question of ethics in leadership through engagement with the notion of *potentia*. *Potentia* in a new materialist framework resituates the discussion of leadership ethics in terms of forces and social relations of power, rather than individuals and moral imperatives (Braidotti, 2011b, 2018). Furthermore, it "rests on an enlarged sense of a vital interconnection with a multitude of others (human and nonhuman)," thereby rejecting "dualistic oppositions" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 221). Through *potentia* we arrive at an understanding of ethics which is capable of accounting for the multi-layered ethical sensibilities of leadership in an assemblage framework.

Chapter 6 An ethics of *potentia* for leadership assemblages

This chapter builds on the theoretical and conceptual work of all prior chapters to propose an alternative ethics for leadership assemblages built on the pursuit of *potentia*, defined as the desire to persevere and endure (Braidotti, 2011b). *Potentia* is not an ethical system that we impose on leadership nor is it a set of clearly defined moral guidelines for action, rather it is a concept that advances an ethics understood to unfold in time and through bodies-in-relation (Braidotti, 2011b, 2018). Ethical relations in this model are those that increase people's ability to connect and relate to the world and to others, and which consequently serve to enhance their *potentia*, whereas unethical relations decrease people's joy and their capacity to interrelate. Drawing on examples from Octavia E. Butler's seminal dystopian novel, *Parable of the Sower* which is set in the not-so-distant future in the United States,[73] I begin by providing a discussion of the philosophical grounding for this new materialist ethics and its political vision. Closely associated with power, an ethics of *potentia* concerns the nature of the forces at work in social relations which, reflecting my discussion of power and subjectivity in Chapter 4, are understood to be productive and affirmative or confining and negative (Braidotti, 2011b).[74]

Parable of the Sower (henceforth referred to simply as '*Sower'*) functions as a tool for elaborating on the philosophical and theoretical dimensions of an ethics of *potentia* for leadership. Using the novel in this way rests on the supposition that speculative narratives, particularly ones where the authors are informed by feminist and new materialist ideas, serve to illuminate the theory by connecting it to concrete practices and social realities, and that the theory likewise illuminates the text by revealing the (un)ethical nature of unfolding processes and relations in leadership situations. In *Sower*, the main female character, an African

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[73] *Parable of the Sower* (1993) is the first novel in a duology that opens in the year 2024 in a small, multiracial town named Robledo located near Los Angeles, and is followed by *Parable of the Talents* (1998). *Parable of the Talents* picks up where the first novel ended but covers a much longer time span (ending in 2090) and follows other characters. Notably, in highlighting the social and political impact of climate change and diminishing natural resources, it makes an uncanny prediction in its portrayal of an American President named Andrew Steel Jarret who adopts the slogan 'Make America Great Again.' Butler had intended to write the 'parable' novels as a trilogy, but her untimely death meant the third book, tentatively titled *Parable of the Trickster*, was never completed.

[74] These aspects – subject positions (Chapter 4) and social relations (this current chapter) – are of course intertwined (see Braidotti, 2011b), but for the purposes of this chapter I focus primarily on power and ethics in terms of encounters.

American teenager named Lauren Oya Olamina (known as 'Olamina' for the duration of the novel), is trying to develop a new philosophy for living in the face of climate change, and corresponding pressures related to ecological breakdown, social upheaval, inequality, and rampant corporate greed and control. Conveyed in a series of detailed journal entries, Olamina elaborates on the shifts in thought and action she believes are necessary to live and work well with others. These ideas are expressed in 'Earthseed verses.' Earthseed is a belief system and activist philosophy framed by the notion of continual change (becoming) and the necessity of increasing our awareness of the changes we induce in ourselves and others through encounters, and the possible futures that unfold because of relations.[75] For Olamina this is expressed in the adage: "All that you touch, you change. All that you change, changes you" (p. 195). Being open to, and accountable for, the kinds of changes and forces of power released in encounters is a key dimension of an ethics of *potentia*, as I explore in this chapter.

Following this general discussion, I situate *potentia* in relation to my conception of leadership as an assemblage, arguing that this ethics is vital to, and always already embedded in, leadership practice across multiple interacting levels. An assemblage model of leadership offers an important extension of current engagements with the notion of *potentia* (see Munro & Thanem, 2018), and relational, new materialist-informed leadership ethics more generally, by reframing the discussion of leadership ethics in terms of the social relations between the 'parts' of an assemblage, and between the 'whole' and the environment. A particular advantage of the assemblage framework in this instance is that it provides the necessary framing for ethics by allowing us to identify and trace positive forces of power, as well as negative ones, which are referred to using the term *potestas* – the forces that decrease our individual and collective powers of relating – within the specific parameters of the assemblage (Ruddick, 2008, 2012). As such, this ethical system strongly emphasizes the link between the personal and the social, the assemblage and society, from a stance that is concerned with the integration of feminist neovitalist politics and ecological considerations into leadership ethics.

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[75] As Melzer (2002) explains, Earthseed "transcends the definition of religion as well as philosophy by combining elements of spirituality with political and social issues, echoing religious principles in "Buddhism, existentialism, Sufism" (*Sower*, p. 239)" (p. 37). Literary scholars have further argued that Earthseed reflects new materialist ideas (Stark, 2020), feminist thought (Melzer, 2002), and Foucauldian notions of power (Lacey, 2008, 2014), all elements I highlight in my own discussion of *Sower*.

As stated in Chapter 3, collective, collaborative and/or coordinated action directed toward a shared intention, which are the constitutive powers of a leadership assemblage, are not directed by nor originate in an independent agent. Instead, they are jointly produced by a heterogeneity of material and immaterial entities that come together for the purpose of enacting this function via activities like decision-making, organising, directing, collaborating, influencing, and so on, across the duration it takes to either achieve, remake or abandon the shared intention(s) of the group, community, or organisation. In *Sower*, a leadership assemblage forms when, after Olamina's small community is devastated by an arson attack, she and a few others begin to travel on foot along the Californian highways toward an unknown destination. On the road, Olamina shares her vision for Earthseed with her traveling companions – the establishment of cooperative communities where everyone is encouraged to learn from one another and the collective is actively engaged in shaping more sustainable futures (p. 221) – and invites them to join her in the work of realizing this vision (p. 275). Achieving this aim requires leadership (rather than management) because the activities required to bring about its eventuation cannot be clearly specified or known in advance. Instead, they are progressively revealed over time as other events and actions unfold, both on account of collective and coordinated efforts and the social relations and practices that make them possible.

In a new materialist perspective, "ethics is not morality" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 343). Instead, it is concerned with the "forces, desires and values that act as empowering modes of becoming" (p. 343). So instead of appearances and set protocols, a new materialist framework for an ethics of *potentia* includes consideration of the *nature* of forces and their qualities and outcomes in the context of social interactions. The demarcation of morality and ethics also serves to contest the idea that the horizon for ethical leadership moves in only one direction, that is, toward the democratisation of *all* social relations in leadership (c.f., Munro & Thanem, 2018, 2020). Singular strategies are at risk of becoming prescriptive and controlling, albeit in a different, and some might argue, more positive manner. An ethics of *potentia* read into an assemblage view of leadership, however, eschews maxims of this kind and adds greater situational complexity to, and clarification of, discussions of leadership and its ethics as I demonstrate throughout this chapter.

Cultivating this ethics requires work and forethought. While there are multiple lines of possibility for maximising *potentia*, and so no single strategy, in this chapter I highlight sexual difference feminism as a mode of 'transformative practice' (Braidotti, 2011b). This

further connects to feminist leadership knowledge and politics – and hence the social imaginary – as crucial in fostering ethical relations and enhancing *potentia* (Braidotti, 2011b). Feminist speculative fiction plays two significant roles in this regard. First, it functions as a source of illuminative examples where certain characters can be read as embodying approaches that cultivate feminist enactments of *potentia* within the context of stories of leadership. Second, SF texts function as a potential tool for learning, which I link to two distinctive features found in the speculative genre – defamiliarization and critical imagination (Atwood, 2011; Braidotti, 2019). Feminist speculative fiction takes seriously the fact of our interconnectivity and hence the social and political necessity of developing better relations and greater ethical accountability, both personally as well as within and for the assemblages of which we are a working (and hence responsible) part (Iovino, 2018b; Sayers, et al., 2021). In these ways, feminist SF read through a new materialist ethics of *potentia* connects leadership to the critical ethical issues confronting organisations, communities and societies in the twenty-first century.

Laying the groundwork for an ethics of *potentia*

To properly understand *potentia* and its implications for leadership ethics we need to frame this notion in relation to new materialist conceptions of becoming and power, which are integral elements of all social relations and life in general (Braidotti, 2011b). I have discussed the concepts in previous chapters,[76] but resituate them here as the ontological grounding for this ethics. This takes as its starting point a key observation made by Olamina in *Sower*, which has grown out of her own frustration with normative ways of thinking about and conceiving life:

> Consider: Whether you're a human being, an insect, a microbe, or a stone, this verse is true: *All that you touch, You Change. All that you Change, Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change*…someday when people are able to pay more attention to what I say rather than how old I am, I'll use these verses to pry them loose from the rotting past, and maybe push them into saving themselves and building a future that makes sense. (*Sower,* p. 79)

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[76] In Chapter 4 I discussed power, and formations of power specifically, in terms of subjectivity and subject formation, exploring how external and internal flows of power shape women's experiences of their leadership subjectivities and are further realized in instances of entrapment and/or empowerment.

This perspective aligns with the new materialist definition of becoming, where interconnections are understood to be "part and parcel of his/her nature," and are both internal and external to each subject (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 310). So as Olamina also observes, "[c]hange is ongoing. Everything changes in some way – size, position, composition, frequency, velocity, thinking, whatever…I don't claim that everything changes in every way, but everything changes in some way" (p. 218). In Chapter 2, I referred to this as a process of 'molecular flows,' a term which denotes the constant flow of immanently experienced relations that animate every dimension of our lives in "patterns of repetition and difference" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 28). These processes of becoming occur, as Olamina puts it, "with our without our forethought, with or without our intent" (p. 25). It is simply the nature of all life to become and to keep on doing so through the embedded and embodied relations that produce affects. Affect, as discussed in Chapter 3, refers to the "change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact" (Colman, 2010, p. 11). Consequently, becoming (which re-orients our notions of the self) challenges the "illusion of human independence, autonomy and sovereignty by coming to grips with the myriad ways in which agency is enmeshed in, and inseparable from, a world of multiple interacting systems" which are productive and open-ended (Bowden, 2018, p. 136). By emphasising the fundamental significance of relational encounters as the motor of change, we arrive at a deeper understanding of the interdependent and reciprocal nature of all things (Braidotti, 2013a).

The fact of continual change as a reality of becoming is vital to understanding the notion of *potentia*. Braidotti (2011b) explains that the subject of relations is "activated by a fundamental drive to life: a *potentia* (rather than *potestas*)" (p. 306). In other words, becoming is not premised on negation or lack as "the driving force of social transformation" (Ruddick, 2008, p. 2589).[77] Instead, all life is shaped by affirmation, "or *potentia* – that is, the impulse to preserve and expand our powers to act" (p. 2589). It is a tendency shared by "each thing" (Ruddick, 2008, p. 2593) and so part of a "common nature" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 169). Olamina expresses this impulse in one of her Earthseed verses: *"All successful life is / Adaptable, / Opportunistic, / Tenacious, / Interconnected, and / Fecund"* (p. 124). She recognizes that it is not only her conscious engagements with the world that matter, but also

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[77] This moves away from the Lacanian notion of 'desire as lack' as the basis for all relations (Braidotti, 2011b). Instead, Spinoza offers the notion of 'conatus,' which Ruddick (2008) explains is "the tendency of things to want to preserve and enhance their being" (*potentia*) (p. 2595). I have chosen not to use the term 'conatus' in this chapter in favour of 'becoming,' given that these ideas closely resemble one another and can even be said to be interchangeable (Ruddick, 2008).

the affective, and hence constitutive, nature of the changes arising out of the meeting of all kinds of bodies – of plants, microbes, animals, insects, humans, institutions, concepts and other nonhuman forms of life with the earth, and with her own body. Each encounter presents an opportunity to increase our abilities to interrelate and connect (our *potentia*) (Braidotti, 2011b). This inherent positivity "is part of life, of existence" (*Sower*, p. 27). However, as Olamina also points out, "I don't believe we're dealing with all that that means. We haven't even begun to deal with it" (p. 27). To begin to 'deal with it,' especially what it might mean to participate in and experience ethical social relations in leadership situations, we must revisit the notion of power.

In Chapter 4 I discussed power in terms of subject formation and subjectivity, but as Braidotti (2013a) explains, conditions of power also "include the power that each and every one of us exercises in the everyday network of social relations, at both the micro- and macro-political levels" (p. 12). Power in this view is understood to be productive of social relations and the distinct forms such relations take within the context of dynamic processes of co-construction. Consequently, "ethics and power do not lie in opposition to each other, but are mutually bound together as our constitutive *potentia* increases both our freedom and our ethical capacity for action" (Munro & Thanem, 2018, p. 55). However, we are often separated from this in-built drive toward *potentia* and ethical living by forces described in terms of *potestas*.

Potestas is "a form of domination or alienation, which exploits and separates things from what they can do," which is to interrelate and sustain connectedness (Ruddick, 2010, p. 25). Ruddick (2008) further explains that *potestas* is "only a force *that can come from outside*" (p. 2596), that is, in the convergence of social interactions with, to give some examples, practices of subjugation, the institutional systems and ideas that support domination, capitalist ideologies and individualist values, and the gendered leadership imaginary, which then serve to contain, restrict and limit our existence. *Potestas* is thus described by Braidotti (2018) as "the restrictive face of power" (p. 221). In their discussion of leader-follower relations, Munro and Thanem (2018) give the example of the authoritarian powers of command and control as "diminish[ing] what we [the collective] can do" (p. 56), insofar as this composition of relations enforces obedience to another and limits the group's capacity for free-thinking and active involvement. However, even seemingly positive ideas, such as a feminist 'ethics of care,' can manifest as *potestas* in organisational settings when this notion is premised on the "assumption that the people who are in need or receipt of care

are lacking or inadequate in some way" (Ciulla, et al., 2018, p. 9). In both these contexts, power is exercised and experienced as a centralized force of control and autocratic governance that can serve to perpetuate inequalities by separating people from their *potentia* (Braidotti, 2006).

However, forces of power can also be positive (Braidotti, 2011b). Values like friendship, an expectation of non-hierarchical modes of relating, and democratic practices of shared decision-making, for example, contribute to the facilitation of 'joyful encounters' (Munro & Thanem, 2018). These are forces of *potentia* that in the context of social relations can serve to enhance our essence, that is, both our inner and collective *potentia* expressed as an increase in "one's…ability to take in and on the world" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 169). This doubled use of a single term is very typical of new materialist thought. To clarify further then, in a new materialist understanding of ethics, *potentia* is both a potential outcome of any set of social relations (which serves to make them into ethically empowering relations) *and* a positive force at work in the composition of these same relations which, like *potestas*, come from the outside (Braidotti, 2018).[78] What we can say in summary then is that:

> What is positive about positive passions is not a 'feel-good' sort of sentimentality, but rather a rigorous composition of forces and relations that converge upon the enhancement of one's conatus/*potentia*. That is, the ability to express one's freedom as the ability to take in and sustain connectedness to others…What is negative about negative passions is a decrease, a dimming or slowing down effect, a dampening of the intensity, which results in a loss of the capacity for interrelations with others (and hence a decrease in the expression of conatus/*potentia*). Ethics is consequently about cultivating the kind of relations that compose and empower positive passions and avoid the negative ones. (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 95)

Clearly, this ethics is *not* located within individuals, but rather within the relations *between* actors which are conditioned by a multiplicity of forces (Braidotti, 2011b). In other words, being ethical (e.g., being an 'ethical leader' or an 'ethical collaborator') is not a state that pre-exists interactions. Connecting power to ethics in this way presents a framework for determining and evaluating the ethical (or unethical) nature of social relations, including those in leadership, which we assess according to their effects (Braidotti, 2011b, 2018). That

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[78] An important point here is that *potestas* is not doubled in the same way as *potentia*; it is not inherent to our nature (essence) so there is no becoming/*potestas* or conatus/*potestas* (Ruddick, 2008).

is, whether they enable and empower or disable and restrict the various players involved, to what degree, and with what positive or negative outcomes on our individual and collective *potentia* (Braidotti, 2011b). Importantly, designations like "negative and positive, are not to be understood as dialectical opposites, but rather as negotiable and reversible points of encounter with others" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 221).

Sexual difference is particularly important in this regard as the foundation for a form of neo-vitalist politics connected to ethics via processes of becoming (Braidotti, 2011b). The notion of neo-vitalism is underpinned by a new materialist philosophy "of flows and flux" and so "presupposes and benefits from the philosophical monism that is central to a materialist and non-unitary vision of subjectivity" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 199). In Chapter 2 I outlined the implications of this vision, explaining that each subject is engaged in "a complex process of differing which is framed by both internal and external forces [of power] and is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 56). With regards to feminist politics, neo-vitalism "stresses the creative potential of social phenomena that may appear negative at first" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 200), including the ethical potential of feminine sexuality as a force of *potentia* (positive passions) in social relations. The gender system – which designates behaviors, attributes and values as gendered according to an array of other closely interlinked binaries (e.g., mind-body and culture-nature) – acts as a force of *potestas,* or negative and repressive power. This is because it constrains thought and action according to a view of difference as 'different-from-the-same,' the implicit universal (and hence male) standard (Braidotti, 2011a). As Pullen and Vachhani (2020) explain, defining or thinking about leadership in terms of "particular [gendered] virtues negates alterity because it limits, controls and rationalises expected moral action. For women, this binds them in a set of relations that symbolically and materially violates them" (p. 8).

However, in a new feminist materialist lens, social categories like gender are also understood to be processes, practices and embodied modes of relating (Kinkaid, 2020). As I have already argued at various points in this thesis, this makes sexual difference into a "robust and essential starting point" for "transformative practice" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 143).[79] Those elements of human life that in Western thought have been distributed to the side of

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[79]As discussed in Chapter 2, it is because the feminine is positioned as 'other' to the disembodied, self-regulating, rational, and purportedly universal male/masculine referent the subject, that in the context of interrelations, purportedly 'feminine' practices have the potential to induce other forces and values that might lead to the transformation of ordinary experience and of our values (Braidotti, 2013b).

'Woman' and 'femininity' are thus not confined to the dialectical, prescriptive schema of thought advanced in humanist philosophies of the subject. To give an example, in *Sower* the stereotypically feminine practice of 'mothering' emerges as central to the group. However, in the novel 'mothering,' a concept and behavior linked directly to women in Western contexts, is disassociated from "the white stereotypical ideal of the nurturing, self-sacrificing mother within patriarchal society" (Melzer, 2006, p. 31). Instead, it is grounded in "immanent relations" and so resists these designations "by the same means" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 200). The result is that mothering, in the Earthseed community, "embodies involvement and commitment to the community at large that in principle is independent of gender" (Melzer, 2002, p. 31). As one character puts it, "people look out for each other and don't have to take being pushed around" (*Sower,* p. 223) and there will always be "people," that is, all the members of the community/assemblage rather than a leader figure, "who care about you and want you to be alright" (p. 277). Mothering is thus something everyone can participate in, and empowers connection and *potentia*: "taking care of other people can be a good cure for nightmares," as Olamina observes (p. 235). What is modelled in this example is a form of sexuality that "undoes the actual gender of the people it involves in the process of becoming" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 166), and hence an ethical mode of relationality that "is not modelled on the dialectics of masculinity and femininity" (p. 165) even as it originates in sexual difference. In other words, 'mothering' in this instance is "postgender but not beyond sex" (p. 167) because it is grounded in the "immanent relations" of sexed subjects (p. 200).

How does this all apply to leadership and its ethics? To date, an ethics of *potentia* has only been explored by Munro and Thanem (2018) who employ this notion as a framework for understanding leadership relations from a Spinozist-Marxist interpretation of this concept.[80] Munro and Thanem (2018) argue for an ethics of *potentia* to replace leader-centric approaches that link ethical leadership directly to individualist practices of care, generosity, authenticity and responsibility. To develop an alternative ethical system, they present a vision of leadership as located in the spread of ideas and affects (Munro & Thanem, 2020), a view I contested as unduly reductive and ambiguous in Chapter 3.[81] By relocating an ethics of

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[80] Munro and Thanem (2018) draw primarily on the interpretations of these concepts by Antonio Negri. Marxism emphasizes structures and systems over emergent and assembling forms (Fox & Alldred, 2018). As such, these interpretations of Spinoza's ethics present a limiting and limited vision, although not without relevance, given that they do not consider in any depth the emergent and embedded nature of forms (Braidotti, 2006).

[81] As per Chapter 3, I am not arguing that affectivity is not central to leadership, but rather that the direct association of leadership with affect, and consequently with the practices that increase our

potentia in an assemblage framework for leadership we avoid centering discussions of ethics on the purportedly moral or ethical leader, as Munro and Thanem (2018, 2020) also advocate, but further complexify (and in doing so, clarify) the role of power and ethics in what are localized, deeply contextual and socially conditioned relations. This includes the relations between the component 'parts' of a leadership assemblage, as well as the relations between the 'whole' and the the wider environment in which social action takes place. My approach is consequently dependent on a Deleuzean rather than a Marxist interpretation of an ethics of *potentia,* and informed by my reading of Ruddick (2008, 2010, 2012) and Braidotti (2006, 2011b, 2018, 2019). In considering *potentia* from a new feminist materialist perspective (informed by Braidotti), forces related to sexual difference and gender are also brought to the forefront. I explore these implications for ethical leadership practice after elaborating on the general parameters of this framework below.

Situating *potentia* in relation to leadership assemblages

The purpose of this section is to rearticulate leadership ethics through engagement with new materialist notions of power and assemblage. While this offers a potential theoretical framework for assessing the ethics of leadership in diverse settings, and hence a tool for empirical inquiry, my primary aim in this chapter is to provide the necessary framing for discussion of how to cultivate ethical relations and foster *potentia* in leadership assemblages. I focus on what constitutes an increase or decrease in *potentia* in the context of leadership assemblages through a discussion of power as a multi-layered force in social relations that either restricts and coerces (*potestas*) or affirms and enables (*potentia*). Social relations of power are obviously integral to leadership's enactment. Not only do they engender collaborative or coordinated efforts towards the achievement of a shared aim or goal, but are also central to the materialisation of discursive (collective assemblages of enunciation) and nondiscursive (machinic assemblages) practices within a leadership assemblage. Given these dynamics are interwoven and multiple across the duration of any leadership assemblage, in this and the following sections I do not distinguish between relations that are directly or indirectly implicated in the mobilisation of collective and/or coordinated action. However, I do prioritise certain kinds of encounters in my discussion,

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collective powers of acting (*potentia*), is problematic as it reduces what is a complex social phenomenon ('ethical leadership') to *potentia*. Employing the notion of assemblage to define and describe leadership creates space between these associations without decreasing the relative importance of affect and *potentia* within any discussion of leadership.

namely the interactions between human members of the assemblage.[82] Also of direct concern are the numerous relations between the 'whole' (that is, the conjunction of elements that make up an assemblage) and the environment in which this contingent order operates. I discuss both internal dynamics and external relations in the ensuing paragraphs.

Ruddick (2008) notes that "we experience sadness when we are constrained or limited in what we can do, when we are subjugated by the power of another, *potestas*" (p. 2597). As demonstrated at different points in this thesis, particularly in my discussion of Acting Commander Danner, practices of subjugation are frequently exemplified in traditional leader-follower relationships. This is because the leader-follower dynamic is often underpinned by an implicit assumption that followers *require* someone to direct and guide them from above – the exceptional individual (Munro & Thanem, 2018, 2020). Of course, we already know that this is a patently false image of leadership. Nonetheless, the social and cultural popularity of this presumption has meant that even recent turns to more 'feminine' ways of being and acting in social relations, such as caring for others, play out within the context of unequal and hierarchical relationships. Simply replacing 'masculine' values with purportedly 'feminine' ones is therefore not an ethical move if social relations in the assemblage continue to operate according to "a centralized, mediating, transcendental force of command" that is "dogmatic and autocratic" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 147). The harm this does goes two ways. On one side, it fosters *reactive* forms of engagement on the part of those in the less dominant position. This results in a decrease in one's "ability to inter-relate to others" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 222) as obedience and acceptance are prioritised (Munro & Thanem, 2018). The potential points of connection between multiple 'parts' of the assemblage, such as between 'followers' and their ability to positively shape and be shaped by the intentions toward which their action is exerted, are prematurely cut off. Individuals in the dominant position are also negatively affected by this system through a "loss of relational power, self-awareness and inner freedom" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 169), as they repeat normative patterns of behavior which separate them from the other actors in the assemblage.

If negative or unethical social relations emerge from domination, then the opposite is deemed to be true for democratic social relations and the resultant effects, such as shared

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[82] As discussed in Chapter 3, new materialism and assemblage thinking emphasize a much broader spectrum of relations than just those between human actors. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I focus primarily on human-oriented relations. Future discussions of ethical leadership assemblages might prioritise instead the inter-corporeal and productive nature of human-nonhuman interactions in leadership assemblages.

decision-making or consultation, which mark an increase people's relational capabilities (Munro & Thanem, 2018). It is for this reason that Munro and Thanem (2018, 2020) highlight social movements as exemplars of an ethics of *potentia*. The Occupy Movement or Black Lives Matter, for example, are directed by many bodies working collectively without one being valorised over all the rest, a system of relating which also doubles as resistance against normative institutional structures and the inequalities built into vertical social relations and exclusionary organisational politics (Braidotti, 2006). While Munro and Thanem are careful to note that the multitude may not always make good decisions simply on account of their adherence to democratic principles, they read this unity as an expression of joy, and hence *potentia*. Ethical leadership is therefore understood to be predicated on self-organisation by and for the 'multitude' and linked to the kind of 'good' encounters that are democratic, horizontal, participatory, and take place on equal footing. This leads Munro and Thanem (2018) to conclude that "there is no place for an ethics [in leadership] which permits obedient followers" (p. 58) and "any investment of leadership in a certain organizational position," because it involves "an effort to exercise the power of decision over others" (*potestas*), is a form of exploitative interference that diminishes our *potentia* and collective joy (p. 57).

Munro and Thanem's conclusion reflects a common tendency in discussions of *potentia* and relationality, that of focusing on a single "scale of spatial and temporal operation" (Ruddick, 2012, p. 208), which, as demonstrated above, is the specific form the relation takes in the event of interaction between entities. The ethical ideal is therefore to level the playing field, giving equal voice and weighting to each (human) member participating in leadership. However, what this view fails to consider is that democratic social relations are not always plausible or workable in the context of leadership assemblages. Fast-changing environments and unforeseeable events often necessitate more immediate decision-making, alongside decisiveness and even the use of authority and control. To give an example, in *Sower* Olamina sometimes finds herself in situations where she must act authoritatively. Although there is no formal structure of command and control, Olamina is generally recognised by the group as the de facto 'leader' figure given her knowledge and passion for their purpose (creating a new community).[83] In certain moments this results in Olamina exercising her positional power over others by subjecting them to *her* decisions:

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[83] As one character comments, "this is a crazy time…Maybe you're [Olamina] what the time needs – or what we need" (p. 325).

"We've got to watch for strangers and fire. Give me a yell if you do see anything unusual."

"Give me a gun," he [Mora] said. "If anybody comes close, I can at least use it to scare them."

In the dark, sure. "No gun," I said. "Not yet. You don't know enough yet."

He stared at me for several seconds, then went over to Bankhole. "Look, you know I need a gun to do any guarding in a place like this. She doesn't know how it is. She thinks she does, but she doesn't."

Bankhole shrugged. "If you can't do it, man, go to sleep. One of us will take the watch with her."

"Shit." Mora made the word long and nasty. "Shiiit. First time I saw her, I knew she was a man. Just didn't know she was the only man here."

Absolute silence. (p. 310)

Considering this event of interaction in isolation, Olamina's authoritative gesture (as *potestas*) appears to decrease both hers and Mora's *potentia* because it refuses the possibility of anybody else's input and is controlling. Mora further reinforces the negative passions at work in this situation by playing on traditional gender norms. While we might deem Olamina's actions as necessary given the circumstances, following Munro and Thanem (2018) this is an unethical relational encounter structured by negative forces and passions that are constraining.

Ruddick (2012), however, proposes another way of looking at this event and of assessing the various forces of power that are at play. For Ruddick (2012), "what is brought into play in each multiplicity" (p. 208) and *how* different elements are engaged, is just as important as the immediate form the relationship takes. This includes what gives shape to and informs the open processes of interaction between heterogenous parts in what are always unstable and constantly changing environments. These multiplicities or modalities of power are expressed in responses, memories and belief systems, economic and ecological conditions, events and happenings, as well as the shared and evolving imaginaries that form the basis for the negotiation of identities, routines and meaning in the group, community and/or organisation (Lorraine, 2011). Maintaining the security and well-being of the group is Olamina's main concern. Mora has only recently joined them on their journey and has limited experience and knowledge. As a result, he is more likely to put the group, and thus the leadership assemblage, at risk. In the context of this event, the difficult physical conditions

and the concerns for their collective safety, combined with the fact that certain social forces at work in the group vest Olamina with the power to speak on behalf of others when required, I would argue this is *not* an interaction predicated on domination nor does it result in a decrease or blockage of *potentia*. In fact, the effects of this particular social relation are more likely to *increase* their collective powers of acting in the long run. The positive aspects of this relational event are further demonstrated in how Olamina and Bankhole respond to Mora's gendered diagnosis of the situation – that Olamina is the only 'real man' present because she acts in an assertive and decisive manner. There is the potential for this statement to function as a force of *potestas* within the assemblage (e.g., as a discursive practice that informs processes of identification, subjectification, and meaning-making), restricting how people see one another based on traditional gender stereotypes that further serve to deride the 'feminine' and associated ways of behaving. However, this assertion is countered by Bankhole's statement that they are not a "macho group" (p. 311), which is also exhibited in the actions of the collective up to that point (e.g., 'mothering'). The potential negative effects of this statement are further minimized when Olamina reminds Mora that "[e]veryone's tired and everyone's hurting…Everyone, not just you. But we've managed to keep ourselves alive by working together and by not doing or saying stupid things" (p. 311).

My discussion demonstrates that refusing to grant any ethical impetus to instances where certain individuals exercise the power of decision over others presents a limited view of the (un)ethical nature of social relations of power in leadership. It is, of course, often the case that encounters governed by institutional expectations, rules and norms that separate 'leaders' from 'followers' are indeed negative (in the sense of decreasing people's capabilities to connect and relate) and we might even conclude, largely unnecessary. However, in considering the varying compositions that surround and are at work in social relations, which are also conditions of the leadership assemblage, we can identify other contributing lines of *potentia* and *potestas*. When these forces are engaged in an active manner, which is to say, consciously and with forethought (as is the case for Olamina), rather than reactively and without consideration of their potential negative and positive effects, as shown by Mora, then we expand our potential for ethical engagement in our situated context and as part of the assemblage. Importantly, this also allows space for "divisions, conflicts or divergent agendas in this process" (Ruddick, 2010, p. 40), alongside active negotiation with power differentials rather than a flattening out of all subject positions and relations. This adds an important layer to the discussion of *potentia* and the ethics of leadership because in

identifying the conditions that give rise to certain kinds relational dynamics, assemblage thinking helps us avoid a common practice found in the leadership ethics literature: a preoccupation with surface-level appearances (e.g., the immediately obvious form and effects of relationships), and the concomitant assessment of different compositions as either 'good/bad,' 'right/wrong,' and 'ethical/unethical' in alignment with pre-determined moral protocols.

Having outlined the criteria for *potentia* between human actors within leadership assemblages, I now consider the social relations of power between the assemblage as a provisional 'whole'[84] and the social and natural setting in which it operates. As stated in Chapter 3, a leadership assemblage forms when a specific function – the mobilisation collaborative, coordinated and/or collective efforts – becomes necessary for an organisation, community or group to achieve their shared purpose, and so it "transpires as a set of forces coalesces together" (Livesey, 2010, p. 18). Because an assemblage is "a provisional formation composed of a diversity of human and non-human parts that act together" for a limited period of time (Anderson, et al., 2012, p. 173), it is "destined to produce a new reality" (Livesey, 2010, p. 19). This extends beyond the resolution of the aim or intention to include the "numerous, often unexpected, connections" that have the potential to affect the material and/or symbolic lives of those the assemblage comes into contact with across its duration (Livesey, 2010, p. 19). In other words, the capacities of any assemblage always "exceed their [internal] relations" (Ruddick, 2012, p. 208) and, in the case of leadership, their specific intentions, *because* social processes are "immanent and open-ended" (p. 208).

Because the 'whole' is always immanent to other bodies and things in the world, the actions of the assemblage materialise as repressive (*potestas*) and/or positive (*potentia*) and have an impact on a broad array of 'stakeholders.' The emancipatory or ethical gesture is to extend the *potentia* or the "constitutive powers…as far as possible [of] those parts it [the assemblage] encountered that were external to it" (Ruddick, 2012, p. 209). These 'parts' are never exclusively human, but may also include animal and earth others, the environment and nature, other institutions and communities, and culture (Braidotti, 2011b). Increasing the constitutive powers of culture, for example, might involve the conscious effort to talk differently about 'leadership' on relational and processual rather than individualistic terms,

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[84] An assemblage is an order that "endure[s] across differences and amid transformations" and has a specific duration that is dependent on its specific conditions of formation and dissolution (Anderson, et al., 2012, p. 173), which is why we refer to it as a provisional 'whole.'

thereby challenging the masculine bias of much mainstream leadership discourse and the collective preoccupation with so-called exceptional individuals. This has the potential to make a difference because the "knowledge produced in the encounters of specific times and places" circulates in the social field, and can contribute to the creation of 'shared fictions' that might then become background ideas informing the discursive and nondiscursive practices of future leadership assemblages (Lorraine, 2011, p. 148).

Restrictive or oppressive leadership assemblages, on the other hand, are closed off from or unaware of these responsibilities as they remain invested in the immediate and pre-existing concerns of the organisation and/or group. This is not to say that certain actions and effects might impact positively on the bodies external to the assemblage. Rather the lack of accountability for and investment in external effects mean there is likely to be little movement in the direction of sustainability, equality, social justice and/or freedom. It is reasonable to speculate that this is more often the case when the people, forces and intentions guiding the actions of the assemblage are focused on maintaining the status quo or advancing organisational and/or political interests that contribute to unsustainable environmental outcomes or have harmful social impacts (see Benschop, 2021; Collinson, 2020). Furthermore, in an anthropocentric, capitalistic, organisational-oriented gaze, human concerns and the interests of selected (dominant) stakeholders are prioritised (Braidotti, 2013a). In summary then, what leadership is directed toward (its purpose or intention), what the assemblage encounters on the way toward achieving this aim, and *how* social relations unfold between differently positioned human actors within situated locations are all central elements in the discussion of leadership ethics.

The underlying interconnectedness between all forms of life constitutes the ethical and political basis for leadership practice through recognition of the fact that "the harm you [*or* the organisation, community, group] do to others" is understood to be "immediately reflected in the harm you do to yourself" and the multiple ecologies you are dependent on to flourish and live well (Braidotti, 2018, p. 223). As Olamina reminds the budding Earthseed community: "We'll have to be very careful how we allow our needs [and intentions] to shape us" and the resultant actions unfolding from these needs (*Sower*, p. 224). In addition, "joyful expressions" are "a way of writing the prehistory of possible futures, that is to say to take care of the unfolding of possible worlds" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 209). So as Braidotti (2006) further explains, "futurity or possible futures are built into the logic of sustainable affirmative interrelations" (p. 209). These ethical injunctions might seem self-evident, yet individuals and

organisations frequently act against their own self-interest and (long-term) preservation (Collinson, 2020). For example, the outcomes of ethically empowering social relations *within* an assemblage can be channelled toward the direct or indirect spread of negative effects experienced in the harmful impacts the assemblage as a 'whole' has on the wider environment. Conversely, dysfunctional modes of control and subjugation in leader-follower interactions could potentially be a driving force in the eventuation of positive outcomes for some of an assemblage's external parts, insofar as the demands of the 'leader' ensure close attention is paid to enhancing these external relations and/or mitigating negative impacts.

The ethical ideal, however, is to cultivate "the kind of relations that compose and empower positive passions and avoid the negative ones" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 95) across both dimensions (internal dynamics *and* external relations). In doing so, we increase our individual and collective capacities to connect, interrelate and endure, which are the foundations for joyful living (Braidotti, 2018). But because the two 'faces of power' – *potentia* and *potestas* – are often at work simultaneously in any assemblage (Anderson, et al., 2012b), and our actions often have "multiple, unintended and unforeseeable effects" (Bowden, 2018, p. 136), cultivating ethical relations in/for leadership is no easy task. The situation demands of us "new way[s] of combining ethical values with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 223), as well as the development of adequate understanding and knowledge so as to productively negotiate with negative forces and release positive ones in the myriad social relations that make up events of leadership. In other words, "to fulfil its inherent positivity," *potentia* needs to be "'formatted' in the direction of sustainability" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 217). In the next section I read *Sower* and *Air*[85] as a source of feminist-informed insights into some of the "dosages, rhythms, styles of repetition, and coordination or resonance" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 217) required on the part of individuals to engage in the process of fostering *potentia* in/for leadership.

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[85] To briefly reiterate the key plot points, in *Air* the narrative centers around the much-anticipated arrival of a global technology, also called Air. A leadership assemblage begins to form when the question is raised of how they (the community) will make themselves ready for Air's global integration in a year's time. I read Mae as a key player in the assemblage, as she, more than anyone else in the village of Kizuldah, realizes that this technological shift is going to change their lives in dramatic ways that they must prepare for in order to maximize opportunities and minimize threats (see Chapter 4 for further details).

Fostering *potentia*: Some lessons from feminist SF

Feminist speculative novels like *Sower* and *Air* write into existence examples of ethical leadership practice that are productive and positive across multiple layers. In these texts, ethical relations that increase *potentia* and minimise *potestas* are shown to be made possible by internal changes, conditioning the environment for alternative ways of relating, careful questioning of dominant norms and values, and attentiveness to environmental and social obligations. In the segments that follow, I offer a brief exploration of some of the ways in which the main female characters in both novels – Olamina (*Sower*) and Mae (*Air*) – make changes and enact strategies that have a bearing on the leadership assemblages they are involved in. Of relevance is the fact that both characters develop an alternative ontological understanding of themselves and the world that reflects a new feminist materialist orientation toward life. As Lacey (2014) notes, "[a]ll of Olamina's revisionings are about responding to what is wrong with the dominant discourses, changing what needs to be changed, and reclaiming what is useful" (p. 150). Likewise in *Air*, Mae's openness to change, which is prompted by the blurring of technology, nature and culture, leads her to dis-identify from normative ways of thinking about herself and how she relates to others.

As already demonstrated in this chapter, in *Sower* Olamina aims to challenge the illusion of stability, fixity and separateness that underpins Western images of the subject and their relational capacities by reimagining the world, and everything in it, as in a constant state of change. Her inspiration for Earthseed is, in part, brought about by what she recognizes as a failure to perceive and attend to change as an affective and productive force in *all* events of interaction (p. 17). Taking a different view than her community and family, Olamina adopts an understanding of herself as an "open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed, transspecies" subject-in-becoming (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 221). What concerns Olamina, however, is not simply adequate understanding in and of itself, but how this knowledge connects directly to action and consequently to the ethics of our engagements. She writes in her journal: "Belief [or understanding] / Initiates and guides action – / Or it does nothing" (*Sower,* p. 47). Becoming more attuned to one's affective capacities as "self-aware, questing, problem-solving flesh" (*Sower*, p. 151), will not necessarily result in ethical leadership relations that increase *potentia*. This is because "humans tend to be transported by passions and prejudices" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 132), as is clearly made evident in *Air* in an encounter between Mae and her brother, Ju-Mei.

Building tensions in the village offer Ju-Mei, who is jealous of Mae, an opportunity to undermine the projects she is involved in by taking her to court. As Siao, another close relative, tells Mae: "All he [her brother] sees is power-grabbing sister who is always, always, always ahead of him" (p. 289). There is, of course, a gendered dynamic at work in this relationship, with Mae's traversal of traditionally male and female roles – as an initiator of change in the village, and as a mother figure nurturing them to life – presenting a threat to men like her brother who yearn "to win" (p. 289). As Lorraine (2011) points out, "an individual's power to affect and be affected is mediated by the many flows (e.g., physiological, organic, and social) of which she is a part" (p. 151). Mae's immediate response is to fight back, driven by negative emotions like anger and disdain that ultimately decrease her *potentia* by separating her still further from her brother: "I will never talk to him again…A toad has more of my notice than that city suit of pretension and jealousy" (p. 289). However, Siao suggests instead that she look at the situation from a different angle. How might she begin to rework (rather than simply accept) the negative forces circulating in this situation, which include "actions, passions and bodies reacting to one another" (nondiscursive practices) and the statements and interpreting activities of each character (discursive practices) that are framed by an array of background suppositions relating to gender, leadership and social status (Lorraine, 2011, p. 148)?

This advice aligns with a key idea put forth in *Sower*. Because 'all that you touch, you change' (p. 195), as Olamina contends, "each individual has the power to manipulate and change existing conditions" to some degree (Melzer, 2002, p. 45) (see also Chapter 4). As such, change (expressed as a process of becoming in relations) can be "seized as a tool of empowerment" (Melzer, 2002, p. 37). In the situation described above, Mae activates this possibility by responding to her brother in an unexpected way. Rather than trying to intimidate him or control the situation to benefit herself, she acts from the understanding that they, in fact, need each other and can help one another toward realizing the aims of the leadership assemblage – preparing the community for the arrival of Air – which will benefit them both. What results (after much negotiation) is an event of mutual empowerment – an increase in *potentia* – which also allows Mae's brother, Ju-mei, to respond differently in turn: "I did not understand before how much of what you do is done for the village. I thought you did it to make money…I thought you had given yourself a different kind of air and grace, that you had set yourself up as something" (p. 296). In this instance Mae demonstrates an active form of negotiation with negative passions – distrust, control, jealousy, etc – and through

work on their causes (the forces of power operating as *potestas*), which include gendered assumptions and conflicts over identity, the potential to materialise more productive outcomes in her encounters. As Braidotti (2011b) further explains, the effort of "transcending the negativity" and "transforming it into something positive" is an act of creativity because "one needs to provide precisely what one does not immediately dispose of: positive passions" (p. 164).

While Mae embodies a strategy of immediate response, Olamina demonstrates an equally, if not more, effective approach for fostering *potentia:* priming the environment for positive and hence empowering relations. This involves engaging different resources and creating new habits, languages, ideas, patterns of relating, and so on, that can then be drawn upon later in the context of a leadership assemblage (see also Chapter 5). In other words, positive passions and forces are "created in a process of patient cultivation of and efforts toward the kind of interaction with others that is likely to generate productive ethical relations" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 165-6). One way to do this, as demonstrated by Olamina, is to revise selected disciplinary regimes and shared fictions related to leadership. As discussed at various points in this thesis, knowledge (including leadership knowledge) is often "flawed and contains errors and failures" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 132), but it acts with force in social relations and in the formation of leadership subjectivities. For example, through the enduring appeal of the leader figure, especially in times when "apparent stability disintegrates /As it must…[and] People tend to give in / To fear and depression" (*Sower,* p. 103) and so look for a 'strong' leader "Who will define, /refine, / confine, / design, / Who will dominate" (p. 94).

Olamina aims to undo these conditions by disseminating different ideas and knowledge; "I'll adapt where I must, take what opportunities I can find or make, hang on, gather students, and teach" (p. 125). I have already discussed in this chapter the kinds of non-dualist, post-gender, emancipatory ideas and language Olamina aims to share with others. Importantly, this has a bearing on leadership because these shifts are generative, allowing for the creation of "new collectivities, bodies, congruences" (machinic assemblages), as well as "new ideas and understandings of the world" (collective assemblages of enunciation) (Ruddick, 2008, p. 2600). In *Sower*, the machinic assemblages of leadership often take the form of lively debate and argument during decision-making (p. 325), but in a setting where "the ordering principles are not hierarchies and a division of labour, but mutual respect, responsibility and, formed by their current surrounding, the security of others" (Melzer, 2002, p. 31). Such conditions produce positive affective states such as feelings of amity and

community that can assist in tearing down barriers and/or disrupting habitual patterns of relating and projections of desire (e.g., desire for the leader who will save us).

As Olamina discovers, actualising alternatives is a tenuous process, always at risk of being overrun by dominant (*potestas*) forces in events of relation. Neither can we control how other people (re)act: "I [Olamina] gave to Harry, and through him to Zahra, thoughts I wanted to them to keep. But I couldn't prevent Harry from keeping other things as well: His new distrust of me, for instance, almost his new dislike" (*Sower,* p. 199). The point, however, is not that Olamina needs to be recognised as doing the 'right thing,' or be identified as an 'ethical' member of the leadership assemblage. Action is interdependent and so what matters are the quality of the forces and affects that will be released through the "non-proprietary bonds of trust and friendship" that are "formed by and acted through" the community and the leadership assemblage (Stark, 2020, p. 167). This includes, for example, instances of inclusivity, justice, fairness, openness, joy, strength, agency, and so on, all of which are associated with, and can result in, an increase in *potentia* for the actors involved (Braidotti, 2011b).

An ethics of *potentia* also requires accountability for and attention to the broader impacts and effects of the material practices of leadership which shoot off in many different directions at once. In *Air*, leadership practice is directed toward the dual concerns of business survival (including financial gain) (p. 57, 76) and resolving the general lack of preparedness in Mae's village (p. 77, 110, 121). But as the novel demonstrates, these intentions are not at odds with developing sustainable practices and contributing to the overall wellbeing of the community which, in this case, overlap with post-colonial concerns regarding the commercialisation of non-Western cultures and the impacts of globalisation (Kurtz, 2015). Mae, in collaboration with others, links the intentions guiding the assemblage to other "mutually embedded nests of shared interests" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 312), with a specific focus on the alleviation of division, inequalities and exploitative practices. "How were things to get better if no one fought?" (p. 248). For Mae, utilising technological change on the community's *own* terms is necessary to resist the controlling benevolence exerted by Western powers and corporations: "I want to know about this GE stuff. And what these Gates are. And what will really happen inside people's heads. What the great powers are using Air for, what they are going to get out of it" (p. 190).

Air, alongside other technological advances, also presents an opportunity for redressing the regimes of power and control that have resulted in the virtual disappearance of Eloi culture in Karzistan (p. 248).[86] Together, Mae and Kwan start up the 'Circle,' a business enterprise involving many of the women in the village and which produces traditional Eloi clothing and accessories for sale in the West. The Circle is an outcome of the leadership assemblage, which at once contributes to the economic success of the community by harnessing Air's unique benefits (e.g., instant connectivity to Western markets, increased access to information, financial services, and so on), while simultaneously celebrating Eloi culture in a subversive way that goes against governmental mandates. In addition, it gives the women in Kizuldah greater agency in what is a traditionally male-dominated culture (p. 280). This leads to the radical feminist suggestion that every leadership assemblage could *simultaneously* be involved in the "project of constructing an ecologically accountable, feminist, classless, sex-egalitarian, and anti-racist society" (Braidotti, 2016, p. 680). Given that ethical leadership in this framework is associated with acting in a responsive and accountable manner that increases the 'constitutive powers' (*potentia*) of parts external to the assemblage (Ruddick, 2012), like Mae, we would do well to keep in mind the adage that one has to 'think global, but act local' (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 354).

Learning across complexities with feminist SF

Readings of feminist SF like the ones presented above have the potential to become "political manifestos for action" on the part of "intervening organizational agents" (Ferreira, 2001, p. 86-87). However, direct engagement with speculative novels is also beneficial, as not only do selected texts convey broadly applicable strategies through the compelling medium of fictional narrative, but they can also assist us in thinking and learning across complexities. By encouraging empathetic engagement with fictional characters and identification with the alternative viewpoints and positions they represent, literary texts suspend the need for immediate resolution or judgement on the part of the reader (Michaelson, 2016). De Smedt and De Cruz (2015) claim that this "reduces the need for cognitive closure…[and] allows for richer exploration of philosophical positions than is possible through ordinary philosophical thought experiments" (p. 59). *Sower* and *Air*, for example, provide a close examination of new materialist notions of change, interconnectivity and power through their storytelling practices (Kurtz, 2015; Lacey, 2008). However, these

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[86] The Eloi are a minority group in the region to which Kwan, Mae's close friend, belongs.

texts are also concerned with assessing "systemic ordering and exploitation," alongside imagination of alternatives that aim to 'stay with the trouble' (Stark, 2020, p. 166; see also Haraway, 2016).[87] To elaborate on these arguments and connect them to the role of leadership in the twenty-first century, I focus on two key elements that are unique to the SF genre: defamiliarization and critical imagination. I then conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the role book clubs in learning about and advancing ethical leadership practice, and the benefits of these methods for female leadership practitioners.

Braidotti (2019) describes defamiliarization as a strategy for "retraining readers to think outside anthropocentric and humanistic habits" (p. 133). Feminist SF plays an important role in this process because it is not subject to the delimitations imposed on realist thought and literature, and so can engage directly with "the complex theoretical metaphors of the subject suggested by contemporary feminist theory" (Hollinger, 2003, p. 131). The defamiliarizing powers of SF are clearly evident in *Air* when, as a consequence of the Test going awry, Mae's life becomes "hinged with that of another" (p. 373). In Air (the mind-body-culture connective technology featured in the novel), there are "two of them there [Mrs Tung and Mae], entwined like a ginger root" (p. 184), feeding into one another as the past and present collide: "Mrs Tung was a weaving blur around the landscapes of three villages lost in forgotten hills. Mrs Tung was a serpent-weaving pattern of someone's entire life, a sinuous wild shape through time, folded in on itself. Folded in on Mae" (p. 380). As Kurtz (2015) observes, the imbricated relationship between Mae and Mrs Tung as it is portrayed in the novel enacts a disruption of "theories of embodiment that consider the relationship between self and other as primarily antagonistic or possessive" (Kurtz, 2015, p. 39). Instead, and as I discussed at some length in Chapter 4, *Air* invites readers to consider how we become subjects through our entanglements with one another and things in the world, and what this could look like in the fast-paced, constantly changing techno-nature-cultures of the twenty-first century, where the delineations between human and non-human, nature and technology, masculine and feminine are already disintegrating (Braidotti, 2013a, 2019, 2020).

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[87] Butler (1993) inserts her own desire to 'stay with the trouble' into *Sower*, having Olamina reflect in her journal on the tendency of social narratives and science fictional representations to situate 'heroes' as the solution to crises associated with capitalism and big business: "Cities controlled by big companies are old hat in science fiction. My grandmother left a whole bookcase of old science fiction novels. The company-city subgenre always seemed to star a hero who outsmarted, overthrew, or escaped 'the company'" (p. 124). Olamina recognizes the impossibility of this outcome and the need for smaller, more localized actions that will bring about change from the ground up.

The importance of defamiliarization is further reflected in the idea that SF texts can assist readers (and researchers) in building different kinds of "narratives about the world that are therapeutic against the isolation of the human self" (Iovino, 2018b, p. 233). As a pedagogical tool, defamiliarization is linked to the idea of SF as the 'literature of cognitive estrangement,' a concept originally proposed by the Marxist science-fiction scholar Darko Suvin (Parrinder, 2000). As Parrinder (2000) explains, estrangement refers to the felt-experience of the reader as they enter realms that are 'not-quite-possible' or 'not-quite-human,' at least not 'human' as we normally know it. Consequently, it is through active engagement with the philosophical re-imaginings, disruptive knowledges and alternatives realities that can be found in the strange and fantastic, that "we come to see our own conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective" (Parrinder, 2000, p. 4), which then frees us to envisage different ways to act and be in the world (Sayers, et al., 2021; Thomas, 2013).

In *Sower*, for example, Olamina is portrayed as a 'hyperempath.' Hyperempathy syndrome, or sharing as Olamina also refers to it, is a (fictional) condition where seeing the pain or pleasure of others causes an individual to share in and feel the same experience. Sharing makes Olamina more vulnerable, but also more intuitive and sensitive since it "prohibits the disconnection and alienation from others" (Melzer, 2002, p. 44).[88] In her discussion of sharing as a learning device, Melzer (2002) writes that "[s]haring blurs and shifts boundaries and discloses a stable, autonomous identity to be a myth – sharing becomes a symbol against the binary construction of self and other and thus constitutes a crucial metaphor for re-defining social relations" (p. 44). This is further demonstrated in the questions it prompts Olamina (and hence the reader) to ask: "But if everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain? I've never thought of my problem as something that might do some good before, but the way things are, I think it would help. I wish I could give it to people" (*Sower*, p. 105-6).

As well as being a mode of critical intervention into common liberal humanist understandings of the subject, speculative narratives also share a concern with critiquing social issues, like sexism and racism (Hood & Reid, 2009; Imarisha, 2015), and exploring

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[88] Olamina explains further: "I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe they feel. Hyperempathy is what doctors call an 'organic delusional syndrome.' …Thanks to Paracetco, the small pill, the Einstein powder, the particular drug my mother chose to abuse before my birth killed her, I'm crazy. I get a lot of grief that doesn't belong to me, and that isn't real. But it hurts." (p. 12)

alternative forms of social organisation in times of climate crisis (Atwood, 2011; Haraway, 2016; Sayers, et al., 2021). For Olamina: "It isn't enough for us to just survive, limping along, playing business as usual while things get worse and worse. If that's the shape we give to God [change], then someday we must become too weak – too poor, too hungry, too sick – to defend ourselves. Then we'll be wiped out. There has to be more that we can do, a better destiny that we can shape. Another place. Another way. Something!" (p. 76). Because in SF ordinary reality is displaced, it becomes possible to both ask and answer: 'what if? if only? and, if this goes on?' (Pough & Hood, 2005). Through Olamina's story, Butler considers the implications of the growing rich/poor gap and the consequences of continuing environmental degradation in a not-so-distant future, but at the same time, envisions how the world might be different if women (and men) engaged leadership towards the betterment of society. Feminist SF thus poses the question: "What do we want to do for the future?" (*Air*, p. 77). This is a question directly connected to leadership given its potential role in organising responses to crises and engendering better futures via the projects it enables (Kempster & Carroll, 2016; Satterwhite, et al., 2015). As such, reading SF provokes us to ask (and answer): What ethical and political projects should leadership be directed toward?

Benschop (2021) offers some key suggestions in this regard in her discussion of the three 'grand challenges' facing organisations today: inequality, technology and climate change (p. 1), which are also features of the 'posthuman condition' (Braidotti, 2013a).[89] *Sower*, and other novels like it, for example Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* and *The Windup Girl* by Paolo Bacigalupi, do not "allow readers to ignore the conditions of poverty and the warming global climate that create the world Olamina [and other characters like her] inhabit" (Lacey, 2008, p. 387). These and other closely related themes found in SF, including intersectional inequalities, are now more prescient than ever given the continuing outfall of Covid-19. As Olamina observes in *Sower*:

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[89] In referring to society and subjects using the language of posthumanism, Braidotti (2013a) aims to acknowledge the effects of technological and scientific developments, invasive surveillance and increased connectivity, advances in bio-genetics and genetic engineering, new forms of warfare and techno-military production, rampant globalisation and growing economic disparity, and the biopolitical control and commercialization of all that lives for trade and profit in shaping the global economy, and relatedly, modern forms of human and nonhuman subjectivity. It has been beyond the scope of this thesis to fully explore Braidotti's (2013a) notions of the posthuman and the emergent 'posthuman condition.' Future conceptual and empirical inquiry might build on the insights of this and other chapters in relation to the notion of the posthuman that Braidotti advances in her work.

Things are changing now, too. Our adults [and most organisations] haven't been wiped out by a plague so they're still anchored in the past, waiting for the good old days to come back. But things have changed a lot, and they'll change more. Things are always changing. This is just one of the big jumps instead of the little step-by-step changes that are easier to take. People have changed the climate of the world. Now they're waiting for the old days to come back. (p. 57)

For Butler (1993), the solution is not located in heroic actions or grand gestures, but rests on a simpler and arguably more realistic premise: "our only way of cleaning up, adapting, and compensating for all this…is to use our brains and our hands – the same tools we used to get ourselves into so much trouble" (p. 338). The critical imagination found in feminist SF enables new constellations in feminist and critical debates on questions of ethical praxis and leadership for social justice, social change and climate action in the posthuman present. The point, however, is not that leadership is *the* solution, but rather that we (communities, organisations, businesses) need to engage in the project of what Haraway (2016) refers to in her own discussion of *Sower* as "wounded flourishing" (p. 120).

As demonstrated above, feminist SF is a potential site of becoming for readers, offering lessons in resistance that are characterised by both macro- and micro-changes, thoughtful acts of subversion, and careful questioning of dominant social imaginaries (Lacey, 2014). Because fiction tends to frame its concerns around questions of 'how we should live,' rather than 'what to do,' it presents an important tool for learning and ethics education (Michaelson, 2016, p. 590). As Grenier et al. (2021) have recently noted, book clubs and readings groups "that read fiction can foster social processes and help employees in search of more critical and emancipatory forms of learning" (p. 1). Long (2003) contends that reading, as a collective and organised activity, is "quite literally productive" as it allows participants to "not merely reflect on identities they already have, but…to bring new aspects of subjectivity into being" (p. 22). There are further benefits of engaging book clubs specifically for women's consciousness-raising and learning. Such groups afford women a safe and supportive environment in which to name oppression (Bierema, 2003), explore their lived experience (Kooy, 2006) and the specific needs and interests related to their positioning (Howie, 2011), and in doing so, potentially "remake themselves in dialogue with others and literary texts" (Long, 2003, p. 22).

Grenier et al. (2021) further envision the possibility of engaging book clubs in organisations to bring forth "new knowledge, praxis, dialogue and reflexivity" that will enable practitioners to "engage in cultural change work" and "critical public pedagogy within organizations" (p. 10). It would be naïve, however, to claim that simply reading 'good' fiction will produce such results (see Lacey, 2014, for further discussion). From my own experiences of running and participating in book clubs, to do the kind of feminist work described above and to contest the underlying humanistic and anthropocentric assumptions that inform our thinking, it is necessary to combine theory *with* fiction and fiction *with* theory. With regards to leadership learning, I would recommend reading and discussing selected speculative novels with the assistance of the frameworks and tools introduced in this thesis, such as the notion of leadership assemblages, the practice of cartography, and the idea of figurations, and not to mention an ethics of *potentia*. In the meeting of theory with fiction we discover the potential that exists for thinking in a new train, of rejecting the 'closed and shining logic' of ordinary dualisms, and what it might mean to become, as Braidotti (2011b) puts it, 'worthy of the times.'

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on developing an alternative understanding of the ethical dimensions of leadership by drawing together insights from Braidotti's interpretation of the notion of *potentia* and the novel *Parable of the Sower*. As demonstrated in my discussion of new materialist understandings of change, becoming and power, ethics is not located in the individual and neither is it reducible to pre-determined and calculable moral imperatives. Instead, ethics emerges in encounters between individual and collective 'bodies,' and is consequently concerned with "cultivating the kind of relations that compose and empower positive passions and avoid the negative ones" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 95). Given that we, and the assemblages we form, are all part of the same immanent and interdependent network, the ethical and political motivation for an ethics of *potentia* is to increase our powers to inter-relate (Braidotti, 2011b). As such, "[t]he ethical behaviour is what can activate and increase relational capacities (*potentia*) and the unethical is what restricts or hampers them" (Braidotti, 2018, p. 221). In connecting this ethical framework to my conception of leadership as an assemblage, I have aimed to build on discussions of an ethics of *potentia* that have only recently made their way into leadership studies (see Munro & Thanem, 2018). An assemblage approach to ethical leadership is multi-faceted and open-ended while demanding a strong form of accountability for the forces at work in the relations between the 'working

parts' of an assemblage, as well as between the 'whole' and the environment in which it operates.

Utilising an ethics of *potentia* to rearticulate the ethical dimensions of leadership in an assemblage framework opens out onto a more complex, and I would argue, more adequate understanding of everyday reality. First, it highlights the complex workings of power in social relations, including the role of sexual difference as both a force of *potestas* and *potentia* in encounters. *Potestas*, or negative passions, are also understood to be expressed as "a power to dominate" in social relations (Ruddick, 2008, p. 2589). However, as I argued in this chapter, a Deleuzean inspired reading takes a more complex view of these dynamics that goes beyond the specific form the relationship takes to consider the conditions of the situation. In the second instance, an assemblage view of leadership and *potentia* highlights the multiple points of connection between the practices of a leadership assemblage and the social and natural realms in which it is located. Importantly, this framework refuses the false separation of organisations, communities and groups from the social and natural environs in which they operate by emphasizing the interdependent nature of social action. Furthermore, an ethics of *potentia* highlights the fact that it is through "affirmative ethical relations," which take place in a "web of sustainable interconnections," that we "construct possible worlds" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 96), an aspect of leadership practice that remains largely unexplored (see Collinson, 2020). The framework I have presented in this chapter thus provides the theoretical grounding for future discussions and study of the connection "between leadership and the health and well-being of the planet and its eco-system" (Collinson, 2020, p. 14).

In the latter half of this chapter, I examined strategies for fostering *potentia* as they were portrayed in *Sower* and *Air*. As demonstrated in these examples, we need now, more than ever, strategies and conceptual frames of reference that will help us to bridge the false divide between ourselves and others (human and non-human both) (Braidotti, 2013a). Feminist SF is particularly helpful in this regard because it purposefully challenges conventional practices and philosophical presuppositions through its story-telling practices. I noted two additional benefits of engaging with feminist SF texts as leadership practitioners and researchers: defamiliarization and critical imagination. Although the scenarios portrayed in this genre are unlikely to occur in real life (at least not in the near future), as Lacey (2014) explains, "[w]hen our current reality is defamiliarized in fiction, it becomes much more possible to see both the destructive aspects of how we live in the world now and the potential to live in other ways" (p. 118). Consequently, in its playfulness and strangeness, selected

feminist SF texts could lead readers to recognise, resist and even renegotiate their understandings of the ethical dimensions of leadership and its practice. In feminist SF particularly, the 'future is the issue' (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 132), as it is (or should be) for all feminist endeavors and practices, including leadership. This is not a matter of trying to predict the future, but of asking what a more equitable future might look like and how we might begin to bring it about (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013). My hope is that in connecting 'visionary fictions' to leadership, we might begin to engage more consciously with the broad array of issues that define feminist discussions of leadership, from power inequalities and social disparities to climate change and collective initiatives directed toward the creation of more sustainable futures (Imarisha, et al., 2015). On this note, we arrive at last at the concluding chapter for this thesis.

Chapter 7   Epilogue

We are nearing the end of the dance. In this final chapter I cover four key areas, with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of the many spaces and places I have traversed on my journey toward reimagining leadership studies. I begin by revisiting one of the foundational ideas for this thesis – doing 'thinking-as-research.' In the introduction I engaged the metaphor of the dancer to describe this process, with the inquirer-as-dancer understood to be engaged in experimentation *as* inquiry. Experimentation in this thesis has involved the careful 'transmigration of notions' (Braidotti, 2011b) from feminist studies and new materialist philosophy into leadership studies for the purpose of extricating leadership theory, practice and inquiry from some of the places it has been trapped. I follow this discussion by outlining the contributions of my feminist lens as a tool for both critique and creativity in leadership studies, and as the basis for my political and ethical engagements with selected concepts. As part of this discussion, I highlight two limitations of my current approach and make recommendations for future engagements with new feminist materialist thought in leadership studies. This is followed by a summary of the key theoretical contributions made by this project to the leadership literature and the broader implications for leadership practitioners and scholars. Finally, I discuss the value of the speculative fiction genre to leadership studies, highlighting the opportunities such inter-disciplinary engagements present for critical and feminist-oriented leadership projects. In closing this thesis, I turn once again to the speculative fiction writer, poet and essayist Ursula K. Le Guin to make some final remarks on the research process.

Thinking-as-research

The application of new materialist thought and concepts in our disciplinary locations is often referred to as 'practical philosophy' because it situates thinking work *as* research work (Braidotti & Regan, 2017; Truman, 2019). The aim of inquiry in this framework, however, is not to advance our knowledge of a topic by 'filling-in-the-gaps' or adding another typology to the current line-up. Instead, it is an approach that engages philosophy to "do something to what we already know by interrogating what it is that we know" (Spoelstra, 2018, p. 6). Because the concepts I work with in this thesis are drawn directly from new materialist scholarship, they redirect all our "idea[s] according to…[their] new sense of orientation" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 13). As Coole and Frost (2010) note, this orientation is "nothing less than a challenge to some of the most basic assumptions that have

underpinned the modern world, including its normative sense of the human and its beliefs about human agency" (p. 4). As demonstrated in this thesis, new materialist philosophy enables a move beyond the post-structuralist inspired 'linguistic turn' (and relatedly, de/constructionism) without abandoning its insights by relocating them in a monistic relational ontology (Braidotti, 2011b; Lykke, 2010a). From a monistic perspective, discourse and materiality are understood to be interactive structures, rather than oppositional dichotomies, and the human subject is reconceived as 'rooted but in flow' (Braidotti, 2002). These shifts in thought engender major ontological and epistemological changes, as well as working toward the dismantling of repressive power structures, due to their rejection of established dualistic, humanistic, and phallogocentric assumptions in leadership studies.

By grounding my research project in this philosophical paradigm, I have aimed to intervene in the hegemonic systems of thought that underpin discussions of women, gender and leadership, a domain which is characterised by paradoxes, problems and exclusions. Most notable is the persistence of oppositional dichotomies and individualist ontologies, even in approaches that aim to free women (and men) from the trap of gender binaries. Developing workable, non-dualist and potentially emancipatory alternatives has involved "going in between different discursive fields, [and] passing through diverse spheres of intellectual discourse" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 173) to explore nascent and, for the most part, unexplored potentialities for my disciplinary location. The ideas and concepts I chose to work with were those that emerged as most relevant and interesting to me as different problems, concerns and questions presented themselves across the duration of this project. Needless to say, there are numerous other new materialist (and posthumanist) concepts that would further contribute to the ongoing work of reimagining leadership studies.[90] My 'thinking-as-research' approach as it is demonstrated in this thesis will be of particular interest to leadership scholars and doctoral students aiming to engage in different ways with philosophical ideas and concepts in their projects, particularly those associated with new materialism. I have provided a strong exemplar here of how to do this kind of work as a large-scale project, rather than as a set of discrete journal articles. A project-oriented approach is particularly advantageous as it allows for multiple connections to be made across concepts, theory, and ideas in a cascading series of insights that build on each other.

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[90] In addition to the ones engaged in this thesis, concepts I think are particularly worthy of attention include becoming-minor/woman/animal/earth, bodies-without-organs, *Aion/Chronos* (as reconfigurations of our notions of time), diffraction, matter-realism, transversality, and of course, the posthuman.

Transformative projects of this kind require "a radical repositioning on the part of the knowing subject," which Braidotti (2011b) notes "is neither self-evident nor free of pain. No process of consciousness-raising ever is" (p. 219). As I noted in my reflective journal:

> [In this approach] *'getting lost' is a methodological imperative. It's nice to write things like 'getting lost' and 'wandering about' as it conjures an image of the researcher as a free-spirited nomad. But it is also daunting and difficult. I can only go on trying. The 'trying' involves writing; writing as you wander, writing without order and stability.* (Excerpt from reflective journal – April 2019)

The work of "unsettling established assumptions" is integral to 'thinking-as-research,' and runs alongside another key concern – engagement with feminist politics (Truman, 2019, p. 10). As Braidotti (2012) contends, new materialism is also always a "political stand" (p. 21) as it challenges the fundamental presuppositions of humanist and Enlightenment thought. A feminist orientation serves to further extend the political and ethical motivations of this paradigm through consideration of the power asymmetries being reproduced in organisations and societies and their effects on women and other minority subjects.

Feminism: Critique and creativity

In this thesis I have shown how purposeful engagement with feminist philosophy and sexual difference theory comprise a vital step toward escaping the essentialising and/or universalising gestures of gendered leadership binaries and opening possibilities for developing alternate tools for critical and feminist leadership scholarship. These contributions are important because leadership studies, for the most part, continues to rely on a theoretical tradition that negates and excludes those marked as 'other' (Knights, 2021; Painter-Morland & Deslandes, 2014; Pullen & Vachhani, 2017). Working within a new feminist materialist paradigm reframes our view of reality and the nature of being in terms of becoming, embodiment and immanent forms of relationality (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b). As I have taken care to show in this thesis, the shift from dualism to monism that is built into this approach enables us to think differently about the effects of the dialectical gender schema on leadership theory, practice and knowledge production. Furthermore, it brings sexual difference to the forefront of discussions as both an element deserving of critique *and* a potential site for creativity and transformation.

With regards to critique, there are two crucial elements for leadership that I have highlighted in this thesis: asymmetry and the force of the gendered leadership imaginary.

Asymmetry takes account of the fact that the image of the 'human' that underpins representationalist modes of thought and traditional ontologies has served to position the sexes in society and in culture in ways that have overwhelmingly advantaged men (Braidotti, 2011a). This perspective further acknowledges the fact that there is no pre-existing symmetry that can be accessed through strategies of inversion or universalism. Instead, we must begin from where we are, accounting for the power differentials and gendered dynamics that are at work in the construction of subject positions, including those related to leadership. In addition, a new feminist materialist orientation takes seriously the impact of discursive and material power formations in the social relations that serve to facilitate events of leadership, and which I have argued are frequently gendered, racialized and hierarchical (see also Liu, 2020).

However, sexual difference in this perspective is not only a premise for critique or a problem that requires 'solving.' It is also a site of "counter-memories" and "alternative political practices" that can be activated by researchers and leadership practitioners alike to "escape the dialectically binding location" of Cartesian thought (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 344). This is dependent on the fact that new feminist materialism engenders other "ways of knowing, other ontologies and epistemologies that enable the subject's relation to the world, to space and to time, to be conceptualised in different terms" (Grosz, 2005, p. 173). Of particular importance is the reconfiguration of the attributes and characteristics associated with the 'feminine' and 'Woman' as positive forces, methods and paths that can be activated in the context of social relations and as the basis for emancipatory and ethically empowering feminist leadership knowledges (Braidotti, 2011a). In these ways, sexual difference presents an important element of my engagement with concepts.

Before discussing the contributions related to the conceptual and theoretical developments presented in this thesis, I first want to highlight two key limitations of my engagement with new feminist materialist thought as it is presented in this text. First, I have predominantly focused on gender and issues related to sexualization. However, as Braidotti (2011a, 2016) contends, sexual difference feminism is both intersectional and posthuman. The time and space constraints of a doctoral thesis have meant that I have not been able to engage as deeply as I would have liked with intersecting issues of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and so on, particularly in my discussions of leadership subjectivity and knowledge production where these social categories are most relevant. Nonetheless, the ideas, theories and concepts introduced and developed in this thesis are capable of

incorporating intersectional concerns and an anti-racist feminist agenda into analysis. I have also signalled the potentiality for greater pluralisation in my discussions of assemblage, cartography, figurations and transpositions. A second limitation concerns the fact that I have employed a predominantly Euro-centric body of work in my discussion of new materialism. Yet as Truman (2019) points out, indigenous scholarship has long emphasized a vitalist and monistic perspective on matter and the embedded, relational and processual nature of all life. Incorporating post-colonial, decolonial and indigenous feminist insights on becoming, difference, subjectivity and the emergent posthuman condition would serve to add greater richness to future work on the junctures of new feminist materialism with leadership theory, practice and research.

Contributions to the leadership literature

Conceptual engagements have formed the basis for this research project, with the aim to chart new paths in leadership studies through engagement with key philosophical and political issues in the discipline relating primarily to subjectivity, power and sexual difference. Following new materialist philosophers like Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012), I have worked from the view that theory, practice and research are ineluctably connected, and a contribution in one area, materialises a change in another. The concepts I have engaged – assemblage, cartography, figurations, transpositions, and *potentia* – consequently engender multiple lines of possibility for thought and action in leadership studies. In the following paragraphs I summarize the four main contributions this project makes to leadership theory and research, as well as noting general implications for practice. I also consider some future directions for inquiry, with emphasis placed on those trajectories that align with the broader social interests, passions and values of my feminist-oriented position.

Leadership assemblages

Building on relational and practice-oriented approaches, this thesis makes an important contribution to the leadership literature by developing a new way of thinking about and theorising leadership as an assemblage. To date there has been limited engagement with the notion of assemblage in leadership studies (see Oborn, et al., 2013, and Sergi, 2016, as notable exceptions), and to the best of my knowledge, no connections made between an assemblage approach and the interwoven effects of gender, power and subjectification on leadership practice. Furthermore, current understandings still separate assemblage from leadership, whereas I have argued for use of the term 'leadership assemblages' to frame and describe this social process, a position informed by my reading of the work of the feminist

Deleuzean scholar, Tamsin Lorraine. This conception is underpinned by three key elements – determining the conditions for the emergence and dissolution of leadership, understanding the heterogenous processes of assembling that engender social action, and accounting for the interplay of machinic assemblages (nondiscursive practices) and collective assemblages of enunciation (discursive practices).

With regards to the first element, I have argued that an assemblage approach grounds our understanding of leadership in terms of the capacities it enables and the function it serves, that is, what this socially enacted process can *do* and the corresponding effects. In the case of leadership, this involves the mobilization of collective, collaborative and/or coordinated efforts towards a shared goal or intention. Situating the discussion of leadership in terms of intentions allows us to distinguish this social phenomenon from other everyday management activities on the basis that the 'success conditions' of the actions aimed at achieving the intentions guiding the leadership assemblage "cannot be specified in advance but only within the situated and temporally unfolding action itself" (Bowden, 2018, p. 123). This perspective also defines leadership as durational. An assemblage forms when a function emerges (which is dependent on the nature of the intention and its embrace by a group, community, organisation, etc.), and dissolves when this function is no longer necessary (Livesey, 2010), either on account of the shared aim being resolved, abandoned or reworked. Redefining leadership on these terms resists the reductionism and ambiguity I have identified as characteristic of relational theories of leadership, while simultaneously incorporating the key insights of these approaches. Consequently, like those relational conceptions that emphasize the material, embodied, and processual nature of leadership, thinking leadership as an assemblage displaces individualist and proprietary views by highlighting the role of other human and inhuman forces, affects and intensities in making things happen (Lorraine, 2011). In other words, it is the assemblage of "objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time" (Livesey, 2010, p. 18), rather than an individual entity or thing, that serves to activate collective and collaborative efforts through their interactions.

Most significantly, however, is that the explanation of assemblage I work with in this thesis acknowledges the role of machinic assemblages (nondiscursive practices) and collective assemblages of enunciation (discursive practices) in leadership. Discursive practices, which include meaning-making and signifying activities, processes of identification, speech acts and linguistic practices, and nondiscursive practices, such as

normative and routine patterns of relating, habitual practices, and connections forged between bodies, operate in a non-linear, interactive fashion in situated locations where specific assemblages, like leadership, form and endure (Lorraine, 2011). These two kinds of assemblages are 'mutually implicated' "with a whole context of, respectively, nondiscursive and discursive practices" that circulate in culture, organisations and society at large (Lorraine, 2011, p. 13). Due to the prevalence of binary logic in leadership discourses, alongside commonplace material conditions, such as the division of roles and resources in organisational settings, these practices are frequently gendered. As such, power asymmetries and symbolic regimes premised on the negation of 'Woman' and the 'feminine,' continue to underwrite the machinic and enunciative assemblages that emerge in conjunction with a leadership assemblage. This marks an important contribution to leadership studies by relocating issues related to gender and sexual difference to discursive and nondiscursive practices rather than associating them with leadership directly (e.g., her '*feminine* leadership' or 'women's leadership'), which is a problem even in critical social constructionist perspectives as I argued in Chapter 2. It also challenges an assumption made in many relational theories of leadership: that there is, underneath it all, a "generalized symmetry [between] actors and objects" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 56), including between the sexes. By employing the notions of machinic assemblages and collective assemblages of enunciation in our research, we can study and account for multiple other factors at work in leadership's occurrence, not only the direct interactions between assembled parts. This includes critical analysis of the reality of women's asymmetrical positioning in the social realm and the role of socio-historical constructions of gender, alongside other social categories like race and class, in shaping (and being shaped by) the dominant imaginary of leadership.

An assemblage framework for leadership is also a valuable tool for (re)conceptualizing the theory and practice of ethical leadership. Building on the work of Munro and Thanem (2018), I have combined assemblage thinking with new materialist ideas on becoming and *potentia* to offer a more complex picture of what constitutes 'ethical leadership' and ethical behavior. In the view presented in this thesis, what leadership is directed toward (its purpose or intention), what the assemblage encounters along the way toward achieving this aim, and the nature of the social relations that unfold between differently positioned human actors within an assemblage are all seen as integral elements in the discussion of leadership ethics. Because we, and the assemblages we form, are all part of the same immanent and interdependent network, the ethical and political motivation for an

ethics of *potentia* is to increase our powers to connect and inter-relate (Braidotti, 2011b). This offers a framework for theorising the multiple points of tension between the internal relations and external dynamics of leadership assemblages, which include social, economic and ecological responsibilities. Given the compounding nature of current crises, future conceptual projects might draw on the insights of this thesis to consider what constitutes an 'adequate response' on the part of individuals and organisations to "the negative conditions" of the present, such as Covid-19, alongside other "social and environmental inequalities and…[our] collective responsibility towards exposed or vulnerable populations" (Braidotti, 2020, p. 469), and the role of leadership in addressing these concerns. As Braidotti (2006) explains, "futurity or possible futures are built into the logic of sustainable affirmative interrelations" (p. 209), which signals the positive potential of leadership to produce better realities and more equal societies (or alternatively, to materialise inequal, exploitative realities). An ethics of *potentia* consequently demands a strong form of accountability on the part of individuals who comprise a 'working part' of an assemblage. As I have argued here, ethics is not located in the individual and neither is it reducible to established moral protocols (Braidotti, 2013b). Instead, it concerns the forces of power released in encounters between individual and collective 'bodies,' the specific contributions of which I establish in the following section.

Rethinking power: Subjectivity and social relations in leadership

The second major contribution this thesis makes to the leadership literature is located in its multifaceted engagement with new materialist notions of power. Power is usually only addressed at a surface level in leadership studies, primarily connected with individuals and/or identity, that is, power as a commodity or possession (Knights, 2018), which in the critical literature is also seen to be a tool of domination (Collinson, 2020). The result is a limited theoretical conception of power that is dependent on a fixed and unitary image of the individual as a relatively self-contained, independent entity. These assumptions serve to disguise the complicated workings of power as a multilayered force in both social relations and subject formation (Braidotti, 2011b, 2013a). Braidotti's (2013b) conception of power builds on the work of Foucault by marrying his definition of power as a process or situation, rather than a property or essence, with Deleuze's understanding of power as "both bound historical categories and flows of boundless energy" (p. 355). By engaging with Braidotti, this thesis has introduced a more complex approach to thinking power in its relationship to leadership, with a distinct focus on the role of gender and related socio-symbolic differences as both restrictive *and* empowering forces. This holds implications for our understanding of

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the role of power in social relations, and hence as an integral feature of (un)ethical leadership, as well as in subject formation and individual negotiations with internal and external forces of power, the theoretical and practical contributions of which I outline below.

In terms of social relations, we each exercise power (as individuals and as collective 'bodies' working together) in the context of our everyday encounters with other entities and things in the world (Braidotti, 2013a). Power, in this view, is understood to operate in a network. This means the power we exercise in events of interaction intersect with other forces and formations of power, including narratives and belief systems, economic and institutional conditions, as well as the shared and evolving imaginaries that form the basis for identities, meaning-making and related actions. As I have explored in this thesis, these everyday networks of power are productive of social relations and their distinctive outcomes in each event (Braidotti, 2013a). Following Spinoza and Deleuze, Braidotti (2011b, 2018) distinguishes between those forces of power that affirm and enable (*potentia*) our individual and collective powers of relating and those that decrease and disable these capabilities (*potestas*).

By applying this view of power to leadership, I have provided a conceptual schema able to account for both the quality and complexities of power at work in the interactions that serve to make up events of leadership. This contributes to recent advances in the leadership literature that aim to overcome "the individualism, universality, difference and rationalism found in leadership ethics" (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020, p. 8). My framework also offers valuable insights into practice by looking at the different ways in which we might foster 'positive passions' (*potentia*) and reduce negative effects in alignment with an assemblage view of ethical leadership. Further study of the ways in which we can 'format' power to ensure sustainable outcomes for all parties involved in and/or effected by leadership is a key direction for future research. We also need to collectively work toward the development of alternative ethical values and strategies for negotiating with and remaking negative forces of power (Braidotti, 2018). A feminist politics of neo-vitalism will be particularly helpful in this regard as it "stresses the creative potential of social phenomena that may appear negative at first" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 200), including the ethical potential of feminine modes of sexuality as a force of *potentia* in social relations.

I have further argued in this thesis that power is linked directly to subjectivity. Power, in this perspective, is understood to be a "situation or process" through which social subjects

and leadership subjectivities are collectively constructed along an immanent plane of interacting forces (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4). This enacts a departure from post-structuralist and de/constructionist views on subjectivity which prioritise discourse over materiality and mind over matter, and which share a tendency to reduce subjectivity to identity. In a new materialist perspective, the creation of subject positions is a "relational and outside-directed" process, which occurs both above and below the level of individual consciousness (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 216). As mentioned above, power is implicated in this process because "power relations act simultaneously as the most 'external,' collective, social phenomenon and also as the most intimate or 'internal' one" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 4). In highlighting these multiple modalities of power, I have shown how leadership subjectivities are constituted through productive and regulative flows of power and becoming in situated locations, which result in unique configurations in each instance. There are, however, recognisable patterns of subject formation for certain social groups due to the repetitious nature of these processes and material conditions (Lorraine, 2011) (see following section for discussion of this point).

Through this more complex view of power, we also arrive at a more adequate understanding of how individuals move about within systems of power. This was shown to be premised on a view of agency as contingent and embodied. A subject, in other words, is not the agent of her own subjectivity, but an active participant in the processes and power relations that construct her various subjectivities (Lorraine, 2011). This participation takes the form of either entrapment or empowerment, which are understood to operate on a continuum (Braidotti, 2011b). Entrapment and empowerment concern the epistemological and political practices of the subject in their implications with power, which are contingent on self-knowledge and (in)adequate understanding. Degrees of entrapment and empowerment are thus a matter of orientation in an ontological sense, and hence a way of responding to what is given in experience (Braidotti, 2011b). Entrapment refers to a leadership subjectivity inhabited in a conventional way that repeats normative habits of knowing and doing. Whereas empowerment follows a different line of possibility that strategically experiments with power formations. In this thesis I have shown that sexual difference is a crucial factor in both entrapment and empowerment. With regards to the latter, the feminine enacted as a practice (and hence treated as a verb) has the potential to manifest in a 'politics of acts' that open up new ways of relating to human and nonhuman others.

My work on entrapment and empowerment makes an important contribution to the leadership literature by refuting the idea that the subject is a "mere victim of the way she or

he is positioned" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 38). Or as Muhr (2011) puts it, is "caught in the gendered machine" with no way out (p. 354). However, I have taken care to explain the difficulties in actualizing empowerment due to the prevalence of dualisms and humanist assumptions in shaping how we make sense of our bodies, identities and gender. Empowerment and the release of positive external forces of power are contingent on disengaging from "the dominant normative vision[s] of the self" we are used to (Braidotti, 2019, p. 139). Providing people with the tools and frameworks to experiment with other possibilities thus comprises a necessary future direction for leadership development programmes. A feminist perspective on power also highlights the fact that how subjects experience their sex and gender in society and in the context of different social formations and social practices, such as leadership, is strongly influenced by an individual's "location in the social field" (Lorraine, 2011, p. 27). This leads to my next contribution – an alternative approach to studying women's situated experiences using cartography and figurations.

Studying women in leadership

Cartography and figurations offer a strong response to the question of how we can study women in leadership in ways that refuse dichotomous modes of thought, but are simultaneously attuned to and can account for the effects of the binary gender system and the collective imaginary on the construction, acquisition and enactment of leadership subjectivities. Informed by the pluri-faceted view of power discussed in the previous paragraphs, leadership subjectivities are understood to be mediated by the productive intersections of social structures, physical encounters, discursive forces, and other power formations that gather around human actors both prior to and during the formation, maintenance and dissolution of leadership assemblages. The feminist lens I have worked with in this thesis adds an important layer to this discussion by taking account of the localised effects of the "degrees of differentiation" between sexed subjects (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 216). The pre-existing and historically mediated dialectical relationship between the sexes is thus understood to be implicated in the production and enactment of what are "gender-specific patterns" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 182) for social subjectivities in leadership situations. These patterns are not static, however, but characterised by paradoxes and contradictions that reflect changing social and material realities. Furthermore, because sexualisation is a "dynamic variable" rather than a "unitary categor[y]" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 129), it will be experienced somewhat differently by each embodied subject as per the three levels of sexual difference.

Cartography, as a politically motivated approach for studying women's experiences in leadership, enables researchers to account for diversity and difference within each subject's situated location, including their personal implications with power, while also identifying the shared experiences and gendered effects emerging from the interplay of already existing formations of power. This includes discursive elements, such as ideologies, narratives, representations, images, terminologies, and so on, as well as material forces of power, such as institutional hierarchies, technological change, and structuring principles like the designation of formal positions and roles, all of which tangle together to produce specific and temporary social subjectivities. In mapping those forces involved in the creation of individual leadership subjectivities, the cartographic method overcomes sterile and classificatory ways of thinking that presuppose a limited array of options based on likeness-to or difference-from an implicit normative standard (e.g., 'masculine' and 'feminine,' 'leader' and 'follower'). This makes cartography into a valuable tool for the study of individual experiences in leadership situations and can also be applied to a diversity of subject positions as they arise in leadership situations, not only those associated with formal leader roles.

Given that cartography is a process-based methodology, it refuses the delimitations imposed by conventional representational methods which rely on binary logic and a static notion of the human subject. Instead, Braidotti proposes figurations as an alternate representational device. A figuration is an image that serves to illuminate in a concise way the network of "in-between states and stages" that are constitutive of specific and contingent subjectivities for human actors (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 217). Importantly, figurations assist us in conveying the specific gendered dynamics that are built into women's asymmetrical positioning in leadership situations and their current and changing status in contemporary leadership settings. However, figurations do not aim to make "universal claims," but function instead as "sign-posts for specific geo-political and historical locations" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 164). In other words, they are "localized, situated, [and] perspectival" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 136). What this means for research inquiry is that we do not start with a figuration and then search for 'evidence' of this figuration in the empirical realm. Rather, we trace the emergence of figurations from our cartographies. This differentiation, which is dependent on employing the cartographic method, adds an important extension of current uses of figurations in leadership inquiry (e.g., Bolsø, et al., 2017; Muhr, 2011) and situates their use more directly in a new materialist schema of thought (Braidotti, 2013a). To date, there has been little consideration of cartography and figurations as methods for conducting more accurate

analysis of power and subjectivity in leadership. My discussion of Braidotti's cartographic method thus offer an important contribution to leadership studies through detailed elaboration of the specific dimensions of this approach and the potential role of figurations.

The production of feminist leadership knowledges

The final contribution to the leadership literature I discuss in this section concerns the feminist approach to knowledge production that I have explored in this thesis. This includes the method of transpositions as a challenge to the 'masculine common sense' that underpins much research and writing work in the leadership field (Lipton, 2017; Rhodes, 2019). I have argued that to make the leap from either critiquing or producing masculine or phallic knowledge to generating feminist leadership knowledges, scholars must work with an alternative vision of the subject and of sexual difference. This enacts a disruption of "white supremacist ways of knowing" (Liu, 2020, p. 150), which have produced ideas, images, representations, terminologies and narratives for leadership that are predominantly based on detachment, hierarchies, dualisms, and notions of individual exceptionalism. Masculine knowledges, which are exclusionary and often oppressive, exert a strong influence on the social imaginary, and hence on discursive and nondiscursive practices in leadership assemblages and on processes of subject formation. Redemptive leadership knowledges, on the other hand, offer empowering alternatives to these dominant ideas, reflecting feminine-feminist values of empathy, affinity, openness, embodiment, immanence, and so on. This materialises new possibilities for leadership practice on the basis that in an assemblage view, social formations are always open-ended and incomplete (Anderson, et al., 2012).

Importantly, new feminist materialist approaches to scholarly knowledge production emphasize the situated nature of our research practices and the politics of our positions as thinkers and writers (Lykke, 2010a). This perspective is premised on a post-constructionist theory of knowledge production that highlights the epistemological significance of both seeing and (re)writing the world from radical, self-conscious feminist and posthumanist standpoints (Lykke, 2010a). I have demonstrated the applicability of this idea to leadership studies through the introduction of Braidotti's notion of transpositions. In transpositions, feminist resources are engaged not in terms of *a posteriori* application to what we 'discover' as part of our inquiry, but as a method to revisit and remake existing ideas, concepts, and locations from radically different perspectives (Braidotti, 2011b). In other words, the "new is created by revisiting and burning up the old" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 161). I gave two examples of this method in this thesis: theoretical reconfigurations and fictional reworkings. The

outcome of these approaches are images, ideas and constructs that transform, rather than repeat, the repressive power structures embedded in dominant leadership discourses. One example being the reconfiguration of 'being selfless' – a stereotype and regulative identity imposed on and adopted by women leaders – as 'becoming selfless.' 'Becoming selfless' presents an alternative vision for thought and action premised on the embodiment of selflessness as the full experience of becoming-*with* others via openness to what will change us in encounters. By remaking critique as creativity (Braidotti, 2011b), this method engenders new points of reference for leadership practice and its politics, including processes of (dis)identification.

Transpositions also positions feminist thinkers and fiction writers as creative agents in the research process who can intervene in and imagine alternatives by extending analysis beyond that which is given in actual experience, an important point given the difficulty in accessing the kinds of empirical examples conducive to the academic production of feminist leadership knowledges. I hope my elaborations on creative methodologies, which are philosophically grounded in new materialist suppositions, will encourage future applications of transpositions and similar methods, like diffraction and fabulation, by researchers as they work with empirical data, or in their own readings and writings of feminist SF.

Feminist speculative fiction and leadership studies

An integral element of this thesis has been its engagement with the feminist speculative fiction genre. In this regard I join a marginal yet vibrant body of work that employs the literary mode as a resource in leadership studies (e.g., Gosling & Villiers, 2013; Śliwa, et al., 2012) and in organisation studies more generally (e.g., De Cock & Land, 2006; De Cock, et al., 2021; Fotaki & Harding, 2018; Pick, 2017; Śliwa & Cairns, 2007). The value of these cross-boundary engagements lies in the fact that "the literary provides us with new modes of form, content and expression as well as alternative registers of thinking, new ways of asking questions about organization and, consequently, new ways of theorizing" (Pick, 2017, p. 816). As demonstrated in this thesis, the speculative genre is particularly well-suited to these tasks because it enacts a displacement of our normative habits of thought, as well as constructing reading positions and approaches to inquiry that "shatter the flat repetition of the protocols of institutional reason" in our disciplinary locations (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 169). Selected texts and authors, such as Ursula Le Guin, Sofia Samatar and Octavia Butler, have also proven to be valuable companions as I have done the work of experimenting with theory and concepts, offering insights into new feminist materialist ideas on sexual difference and

the qualitatively different view of the subject and of subjectivity this philosophical stance puts forth. Feminist SF is thus an invisible presence in the text as it constituted another 'layer' of the research process. However, this narrative genre has also functioned as an illustrative device, an alternate form of empirical data, a site of knowledge production, and a tool for thinking and learning. In the paragraphs that follow I provide a short summation of the contributions of each of these modes of engagement, noting the distinct ways in which they advance feminist and critical approaches to leadership studies.

In the first instance, I have emulated feminist thinkers in the humanities who engage literary texts to elaborate on the nuances of different philosophical and theoretical lenses in relation to their chosen topic. This follows Melzer (2006) who argues that speculative texts provide "spaces of abstraction for theorizing" (p. 3). By working in the realm of the 'not quite real,' SF displaces our normal ways of conceiving the relationship between discourse and matter, culture and nature, human and nonhuman, masculine and feminine, and so on (Hollinger, 2003). While other literary genres can be put to the same task, speculative fiction is particularly well-suited to illustrating new materialist and related feminist insights in relation to our chosen topics. Furthermore, by treating speculative narratives as 'stories of leadership,' they can be engaged to create illuminating parallels and analogies between literary depictions and lived experience (see Gosling & Villiers, 2013; Śliwa, et al., 2012). Selected SF texts can also be used as a surrogate to other kinds of empirical data, as demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5. Fiction is particularly adept at revealing the interconnective nature of reality (Iovino, 2018b), and the impact of power as a force in social relations and in the construction and inhabitation of subject positions in leadership. While I do not propose that fiction replace other kinds of empirical data, it is a valuable addition to conventional approaches to research inquiry, offering "fitting cultural illustrations of the changes and transformations that are taking place at present" (Braidotti, 2002, p. 182).

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, feminist SF authors are often engaged in 'feminist worlding' (knowledge production) through their storytelling practices. Narratives and characters that subvert 'masculine' and heroic strong plots are often foregrounded and played with in 'alien' worlds and societies. Subsequently, entrenched power structures and hierarchies supported by dominant imaginaries are subject to displacement and reworking on feminist and new materialist terms (Braidotti, 2019; Lacey, 2014). In this way, feminist and posthuman literature can serve as "ethically transformative inquiry which is not bound to economic imperatives or coercions of advanced capitalism," as well as "complement[ing]

scientific inquiry less prone or open to processes of becoming or differentiation in a Deleuzian monistic ontology" (Lau, 2018, p. 347-8). This offers an important future direction for critical and feminist leadership inquiry, where readings of SF texts are treated as a mode of cultural production conducive to the advancement of leadership knowledge that is non-dualist, emancipatory, pragmatic, future-oriented, etc. Through the way the stories are written, their characters and their themes, selected SF narratives enact the feminist epistemological practice of transposing masculinist images, narratives and ideas that inform contemporary organisational processes and practices. This could lead to the actualization of more workable and socially just alternatives for leadership.

Finally, in this thesis I have explored the use of SF as tool for thinking and learning in a new feminist materialist vein. This proposition is premised on recognition of the dialogic relationship between the SF genre and poststructuralist feminist theory, as well as feminist posthumanism and new materialist thought (Braidotti, 2002, 2019; Hollinger, 2003; Haraway, 2016). In Chapter 6 I showed how selected novels illuminate and develop feminist-oriented insights that challenge humanist and anthropocentric assumptions. In doing so, they "move readers to imagine alternative ways of being alive" (Thomas, 2013, p. 4), and as such, provide learners (researchers and leadership practitioners alike) with "rich and complex avenues for reading and rereading the world, writing and re-writing the world" (p. 4). As Braidotti further explains:

> Reading literary texts is looking at the world through colliders: they are vectors or navigational tools…We need to introduce different approaches and defy theory fatigue, not because we disrespect current methodologies, but because the world is beaconing at us. In the age of the Anthropocene, we need all the help and inspiration we can get. (Braidotti & Regan, 2017, p. 180)

The future orientation of the SF genre, along with its focus on posthuman themes and ethical concerns such as the impact of human actions on the earth and the climate, as well as inequalities arising from power disparities, make it ideally suited to probing the role of leadership and its (un)ethical effects in contemporary settings. *Feminist* SF narratives are particularly adept at traversing a broad array of intersectional issues and exploring the dynamic relationship between bodies, materiality and discourse (Lacey, 2014; Melzer, 2006). To date, however, there has been little engagement with feminist SF and women writers in leadership studies or in leadership learning and development (see Martin, et al., 2018, and

Sayers & Martin, 2021, for further discussion of this elision). The exemplar readings in this thesis present a strong case for future engagements with this vital genre by critical and feminist leadership scholars.

Final reflections: The writer at her work

Having reflected at some length *on* my work, its aims, contributions and future trajectories, I feel it is only appropriate to end this thesis with a final comment on the feminist writer-researcher *at* her work. To do so, I turn once again to Le Guin. Le Guin (1995/2018) eloquently expresses what is required, and what results, when we refuse to take the well-travelled path and make deliberate detours into open, unknown thinking-writing spaces:

> The Writer At Her Work: / I see her walking / on a path through a pathless forest, / or a maze, a labyrinth. / As she walks she spins, / and the fine thread falls behind her / following her way, / telling / where she is going, / where she has gone. / Telling the story. / The line, the thread of voice, / the sentences saying the way. (p. 227)

As I have argued in this thesis, the 'pathless forest' in leadership studies is that which lies beyond the 'map' as it currently exists; a map which is ordered according to dualistic logic, humanist assumptions and well-established social science methods. While feminist ideas have undoubtedly influenced leadership, often in positive ways, feminist interventions and inventions that move beyond the parameters of this map remain a largely unrealised potential in leadership and organisation studies (Bell, et al., 2019). In spinning these fine feminist threads as we walk (however tentatively) outside the boundaries of western, Enlightenment systems of thought and power, we begin to create possibilities for the new; the 'fine threads' join up with other lines, they are woven into a pattern, a path. The writer-researcher at her work is part of a collective project, one that is open to all subjects (Braidotti, 2019). But we must keep in mind that these are still "hostile landscapes" (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 165). Liu (2020) notes that "[o]ur theorising is continually at risk of being co-opted by hegemonic systems of power and our activism domesticated into tame organisational practice" (p. 161). Le Guin (1995/2018), of course, knew this already: "Her [his, their] work / is never done" (p. 228). We must keep walking, unspooling new threads, picking up those of others, and joining with them on the way to better, more socially just worlds.

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