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The answer lies in our humanity: Research and methodologies that facilitate healing and hope

Transpositions as a hopeful methodology for organizational studies

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Abstract

In this paper, we introduce Braidotti's notion of transpositions as a methodology and strategy for 'hopeful disruptions' in the context of organizational inquiry. Transpositions consist of six interwoven practices—(1) embracing alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world, (2) assessing and critiquing imaginary forms, (3) preparing to make the 'creative leap', (4) accounting for locations and positioning, (5) storying the 'in-between' space, and (6) developing new frames of resonance for existing cultural formations, such as heroic leadership. Underpinned by feminist posthumanist thinking, transposition practices produce 'generative cracks' in hegemonic systems and in dominant social imaginaries, as well as bringing forth affirmative alternatives for thought and practice. As a feminist approach, it is also concerned with engaging gender differently and strategically to chart paths out of restrictive categories and reductive, individualist notions of being. Playing with the inherently subversive nature of this approach and tapping into our desire to disrupt the masculine 'common sense' of much social science research, we draw on the insights and writings of feminist speculative fiction authors to elaborate on the six practices and their implications for researchers. We further

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demonstrate the potential for transpositions in organizational studies through a discussion of radical empiricist approaches to inquiry and collaborative research projects.

KEYWORDS

feminist methods, feminist posthumanism, innovative methodologies, relational ontology, Rosi Braidotti, speculative fiction

[I]t is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story.

(Le Guin, 1988/2018, p. 166)

1 | INTRODUCTION

Transposition is a term used in music to indicate “variations and shifts of scale in a discontinuous but harmonious pattern” (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 226). Like the philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2006, 2011a), we see transposition as a valuable metaphor for feminist and posthumanist scholars concerned with confronting damaging social imaginaries and “engendering other, alternative ways of knowing” and being in the world (Braidotti, 2006, p. 6) via their empirical research.¹ This is important because traditional Western and humanist imaginaries do not adequately equip us to confront the challenging conditions of the Anthropocene, continuing inequalities and emerging vulnerabilities (Braidotti, 2021; Niccolini & Ringrose, 2020). Drawing on Braidotti’s oeuvre, and specifically her writing on transposition as an approach for revisiting, reworking, and reconfiguring imaginary forms and worlds,² we propose and develop transpositions as a methodology for feminist inquiry in organization studies that aims to “promote the life, and growth, that helps us flourish as individuals and communities” (Harré et al., 2017), and as members of multiple *posthuman* ecologies (Braidotti, 2019, 2021).

The imaginary is of direct concern to human and nonhuman flourishing because “[t]he content of our imaginary world is...made manifest in our actual and potential responsiveness to it” (Lennon, 2004, p. 114). As Williams (2007) points out, it “gives rise to particular determinations of social being, and its transformation and reconstitution underscore every change in relations between bodies” (p. 359). Imaginary forms act as anchoring points for this content; that is, the collection or web of interconnected and socially mediated images, narratives, ideas, terminologies, values, identities, representations, practices, and so on that hold meaning (even if only temporarily) for individual and collective bodies (Lennon, 2004).³ Popular cultural formations like ‘heroic leadership’ or ‘sustainability’ convey how people “fit together with others,” including non-human others, “how things go on between them and their fellows, [and] the expectations that are normally met” (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). In other words, imaginary forms symbolize and generate patterns of association that are recognizable to us, influencing how we think and feel our way around the world (they have affective power), which is in turn future-forming, albeit at a small, though not insignificant scale (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999; Lennon, 2004). And so regardless of their supposed ‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ in different paradigms (e.g., positivist vs. post-structuralist), they have ‘real’ effects in the context of interactions between different bodies and in bodily transitions.

The expectations associated with an imaginary form may change over time as new or different images, narratives, terms, values, practices, and so on connect to become points of reference for identification and action in

specific “historical, sociocultural, material and bodily contexts” (Åsberg et al., 2015, p. 153). Yet despite being mutable, the “deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” remain largely intact (Taylor, 2004, p. 23). Our individual and collectively shared imaginary worlds tend to adhere to and are organized through largely unquestioned ways of knowing and conceiving our existence (including a particular image of the human) that have been conditioned over time and become “embedded in social practices and institutions” (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 37). This includes an ongoing reliance on Western humanist conceptions of the ‘human’ as a self-contained, unitary entity, alongside the binary gender system and other damaging dualisms, such as the conceptual separation and privileging of humans over nature (Braidotti, 2006, 2011a, 2021; Calás & Smircich, 2023). We propose and develop feminist posthumanist transposition as a methodological approach for interrogating inadequate imaginaries and the social and cultural formations they sustain, and for generating emancipatory alternatives that disrupt the limiting ways of thinking and being human they effect and which have the potential to foster hopeful outcomes. It does so through attention to empirical experience, not in a flight away from it, expressing a concern with realities as they are lived and how they could be lived differently.

Transposition 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 and dominant in the collective social imaginary but refuse to end with critique by creatively reworking the very dynamics that have proven most entrapping and/or repressive within organizational contexts, especially for women⁴ and other minority subjects. Transposition 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). The outcome are images, ideas, and modes of being that transform, rather than repeat, the repressive norms embedded in dominant imaginary formations. As such, they create new points of reference for organizational practice that take their distance from the hegemony of ‘Man.’ Such work is important because the imaginary provides “the leverage we need to implement changes at the in-depth level of the self,” as well as in society and organizations more generally (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87). We situate ourselves as researchers as actively aligned with the affirmative possibilities in Braidotti’s feminist posthumanism and consider organizational research studies to be a critical site for the generation of methodologies that facilitate healing and hope.

Playing with the inherently creative nature of this approach and tapping into our desire to disrupt the masculine ‘common sense’ of much social science research (Rhodes, 2019), we draw on the insights and writings of feminist speculative fiction authors to illustrate the six practices in action and their implications. 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 myths and fairy tales, alternative histories, and all manner of blends between. Those texts we (and others) consider as ‘speculative’ are not equivalent to the generic ‘hard sci-fi’ that depicts dystopian scenarios for humankind and celebrates the one lone heroic character saving what is left of the remnants of society. Nor are they “a disguise or falsification of what is given” (Le Guin, 1980/2018, p. 88). Instead, speculative narratives can be seen 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” (Le Guin, 1980/2018, p. 88). They are, as Donna Haraway (2016) puts it, “wonderful, messy tales to use for retelling or reseed[ing], possibilities for getting on now, as well as in deep earth history” (p. 119), as we demonstrate in our exemplar section.

The article is composed of four main parts. First, we establish the context for transpositions as a feminist posthumanist approach centered on the imaginary. We highlight the connection between the dualistic organization of gender categories and Western notions of universal ‘Man,’ defined as a separate, self-contained, and superior being, and the difficulties these systems of thought pose to feminist researchers looking to do more than critique. We then outline our six methodological practices for transpositions, which are a product of our ongoing engagement with the work of Rosi Braidotti as organizational scholars. Our elaboration of the practices of transposition is followed by an extended example to illustrate their application in a close reading of work by award-winning feminist speculative fiction authors Ursula K. Le Guin and Nicola Griffith. This section centers on ‘heroic

leadership,' a particularly salient and resilient imaginary form in contemporary organizations and culture. We further demonstrate the potential for feminist transpositions in organizational studies in our final section where we discuss its application in action research projects and in radical empiricist approaches to inquiry.

2 | TRANSPOSITIONS AND GENDER

The overarching aim of feminist transpositions is to disrupt the status quo and enable movement toward more inclusive, equitable futures by offering "different ways of responding to and acting in relation to our environment" (Lennon, 2004, p. 114). Disrupting and moving beyond the male-normed status quo, however, is not as straightforward as simply bringing forth 'new' images, narratives, ideas, and terminologies to replace the 'old' ones, the reasons for which we unpack in this section. Take the example of 'heroic leadership,' a particularly resilient cultural formation in the west that resonates in times of crisis and is impregnated with stories and images of the exceptional (white, male) individual (Ford, et al., 2008; Liu, 2020; Liu & Baker, 2016). This includes imperialistic, hegemonic images of the 'Great Man' who takes control (Liu, 2020) and the 'corporate savior' who single-handedly manages the transformation of an organization and its people (Ford, 2016; Spoelstra, 2018), alongside patterns of practice that take the form of "rational, disembodied, and highly instrumental performances that reflect and reproduce homosocial bonding and social exclusiveness" in organizations (Knights, 2018, p. 90). In the contemporary context of advanced capitalist societies, new leadership imaginaries are being forged that exceed traditionally masculinist norms to include ostensibly feminist additions (Braidotti, 2011b). Essentialist and liberal conceptions of 'feminine' behavior, identities, and attributes, for example, facilitate the ideation of women as *superior* leaders because they are perceived to be more compassionate, empathetic, communicative, and closely attuned to nature than their male counterparts, and will supposedly show us the way to better, more enlightened futures (Braidotti, 2011a). Yet despite the circulation of new images, ideas, and even (counter-)identities in relation to 'heroic leadership,' the content that structures and gives it meaning remains contingent on and (re)produces a humanist, anthropocentric vision of social existence that places "Man... as subject, at the center" (Willmott, 1998, p. 94); the "central element of the Universe" (Willmott, 2014, p. 24; see also Calás & Smircich, 2023). Such expectations, which often remain unarticulated, go on to facilitate the treatment of leader figures "as if they were 'masters of the universe' with the ability to predict and control the future" (Collinson, 2020, p. 8) whether for good or ill.

From a feminist posthumanist perspective, commonly held assumptions of human mastery, exceptionalism and bounded individualism are problematic on several fronts, including reinforcement of the binary gender system on which they depend (Braidotti, 2011b, 2021). As Niccolini and Ringrose (2020) point out, such thinking "has positioned particular visions of the human as lively and agentic and other human and nonhuman bodies as unagentic" (p. 3). Also of deep concern for feminist posthumanist thinkers is the very notion of the 'human,' which is not a neutral concept. In the Western philosophical tradition, it is 'Man'—an image closely associated with white, property-owning, educated, heterosexual men—who serves as the unit of reference for this ahistorical, autonomous, and disembodied humanist ideal of the subject (Braidotti, 2013a). The gender, of course, is not a coincidence (Braidotti, 2021). Positioned as the 'civilizational standard' since the eighteenth century (Braidotti, 2013a), the humanist subject (otherwise known as 'Man') is defined not by what he *is*, but by what he *is not*. This is because our dominant thought systems are dualistic in nature, premised on practices of privilege and negation. In terms of privilege, feminist thinkers working from within and beyond the poststructuralist tradition have shown that man/male/masculine have been privileged over woman/female/feminine due to patriarchy's history (Braidotti, 2011a; Grosz, 1994), the direct consequence of which has been the denigration of everything associated with the lesser, 'inferior' terms, the effects of which we still feel today.⁵

In a dualistic schema of thought, difference is not only constructed as 'less-than', but also always functions according to a process of negation (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). As explained above, dualism works by positioning the "two polarized terms [for example, 'Man' and 'Woman'] so that one becomes the privileged term and the

other its suppressed, subordinated negative counterpart” (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). Grosz (1994) continues, explaining that “the primary term [then] defines itself by expelling its other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders” (Grosz, 1994, p. 3), for example, the boundaries and borders of ‘masculinity.’ What is expelled, as Oseen (1997) puts it, is everything “men do not want themselves to be; or to have” (p. 173), which historically has been anything considered to be passive, weak, domestic, natural, carnal, abject, dark, and chaotic in all kinds of patriarchal cultures. Our culturally shared ideas of ‘femininity’ have necessarily been constructed from these fragments, which have then functioned as the object for Man’s self-definition. Consequently, the binary gender system props up (while also being determined by) our vision of the human subject (Braidotti, 2011b), privileging particular ways of knowing and being in the process. Imaginary forms like heroic leadership are consequently gendered and individualized (i.e., reflective of and dependent on culturally stabilized categories for their operation), as well as gendering and individualizing (i.e., impacting on thought and action in empirical experience in delimiting ways that further serve to perpetuate dominant representations in the collective imagination).

While social and cultural shifts mean we may no longer conceive so-called ‘feminine’ attributes, behaviors and identities as inferior, passive or weak (quite the opposite in some cases!) nor, as in the past, are sexualized differences understood to directly coincide with sexually differentiated bodies (Braidotti, 2011a), the core implications of privilege and negation run much deeper. As Grosz (2005) explains, the institution of ‘femininity’ has always been subject to “containment...by other definitions and other identities” (p. 175). Namely, that of universal ‘Man,’ defined as a separate, self-contained, and superior being. The containment of the ‘feminine’ means that even if the hierarchy of privilege is inverted and those identities and attributes categorized as ‘feminine’ become more highly valued than those that are ‘masculine,’ the underlying asymmetrical relationship of privilege and negation remains unchallenged. For example, ‘post-heroic leadership’ has been proposed as an alternative to heroic expectations and is closely aligned with so-called ‘feminine’ characteristics (Fletcher, 2004). Yet it does not challenge the fundamental system of thought that is at play and in fact serves to *legitimize* and *reinforce* the dominant ideas, symbols, terminologies, and so on that are attached to heroic leadership in the process of its own establishment. Furthermore, because the underlying ontology implies an autonomous and ultimately knowable individual, dynamic processes and transpersonal forces are fixed and categorized into “stable, self-referential forms” (Kinkaid, 2020, p. 460). This is problematic for organizational researchers and participants alike because it “captures and blocks the many potential alternative ways we may be able to think about our environment and ourselves” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87), and consequently how we relate to the world around us (Calás & Smircich, 2023).

It is precisely these difficulties that lead feminist OS scholar Muhr (2011) to conclude in her study of contemporary female leadership in Scandinavia that, at least in most organizational and social contexts, we are all “caught in the gendered machine where it seems impossible for her [the female leader/manager] to get out and others to get in” (p. 354). Muhr, likewise, cannot escape the disciplining ‘machine’ as her analysis of gendered experience using the image of the ‘cyborg’ adheres to the same (patriarchal, anthropocentric) order of thought she is critiquing. That is to say, she codes the ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ as stable, knowable forms that rely on the Western notion of the human as their referent. It might seem, then, that the only options for the feminist researcher are to end with critique of the ‘gendered machine (imaginary)’ and its effects, and/or in the search for alternative imaginaries, move *beyond* the production of images, narratives, and terms associated with gender and the human altogether.

Braidotti and her contemporaries, however, propose that overcoming what is marked as negative, restrictive or entrapping in a feminist posthumanist perspective is dependent on reworking, rewriting, and reconfiguring the roots on which concepts and practices are ‘grafted.’ The result is “a deflection and broadening, an opening up rather than a closing down and replacement of existing forms and structures” (Grosz, 2005, p. 165), which we explain in detail in the following sections. This is an important task because collectively imagined forms, like ‘heroic leadership’ or ‘individual responsibility’ are “constitutive of our experience of the world, bearers of affective significance, the means by which we not only think but feel our way around the world. They carry our affective relations to the world and to others” (Lennon, 2004, p. 111). Reworking, reconfiguring, and modifying them from different angles and using different coordinates is thus a way of ‘staying with the trouble,’ to borrow Haraway’s (2016) salient expression of feminist and posthuman politics.

In the section that follows, we make our main contribution by presenting and outlining our six practices for those wanting to engage in this work, which we refer to as ‘feminist posthumanist transpositions.’ Transposition is a methodology that works on and through our imaginary worlds and the imaginary forms that its content—which includes an array of connected images, ideas, representations, terms, values, attitudes, practices, and so on—gives rise to and are supported by. The six practices for transposition are not prescriptive rules to follow, nor should they be understood as creating hope and healing in a cause–effect manner. Rather, they are “generative, creative and open-ended” practices that, like other feminist posthumanist methodologies, affirm “other possible ways of thinking–saying–doing with the world” (Calás & Smircich, 2023, p. 25). As a feminist approach, it is also concerned with engaging the feminine differently and strategically, shifting the point of reference from individual identities and properties to relations, forces and flows, and the *qualities* of these movements (Braidotti, 2013b). We illustrate how this produces alternative narratives, images, values, and practices for imaginary formations in our exemplar section.

3 | SIX PRACTICES FOR TRANSPOSITION

3.1 | Practice 1—Embracing alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world

The first practice of transposition requires the researcher–thinker embrace an alternative, relational way of seeing and understanding the world (and everything in it) as a world of becoming. This reorientation constitutes a different way of coming to and envisioning the empirical realm prior to inquiry. An ontology of becoming implies that it is the nature of all life to become and to keep on doing so *through* the embedded and embodied relations that produce affects. Affect refers to 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, pp. 11–12). It is not only human bodies that are “endowed with the capacity to affect and be affected, to interrelate” (Braidotti, 2003, p. 57). The capacity to induce movement and transformation is a feature of *all* life, both material (e.g., organisms and nonhuman animals) and immaterial (e.g., thoughts, memories and human constructs) (Fox & Alldred, 2018). The notion of becoming 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, open-ended (Bowden, 2018, p. 136), and infinite. In other words, we have never lived in the kind of stable, controllable world that is presupposed in humanist thought and Western knowledge systems (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). Thus, as philosophers like Braidotti (2006) take pains to point out, the idea that life is rule-driven and operates according to a pre-determined schema or order, and invariably with ‘Man’ at the center, is simply a fiction we impose on life, a consequence of our ability to perceive ourselves as autonomous entities through the attribute of thought. Nonetheless, these frameworks and fictions—and the social imaginaries they sustain and are sustained by—continue to act with force in the context of everyday organizational relations. Dualisms and a unitary vision of the human as an autonomous subject function as shorthand for how we make sense of and represent the world on a day-to-day basis; they have affective power (Braidotti, 2019). For the feminist posthumanist scholar of transposition, inquiry thus begins with critically assessing these ideas in terms of what they make possible and what they inhibit in different empirical contexts (Lennon, 2004) and in relation to specific imaginary configurations as they are experienced and felt (Braidotti, 2006; Dawney, 2011).

3.2 | Practice 2—Assessing and critiquing imaginary forms

Imaginary forms act as anchoring points for identification and activity in our empirical locations, conveying expectations of ‘how things fit together’ or ‘how they ought to fit’ (Taylor, 2004) in our experiences of and with organizational phenomena, people, and events. As argued in the previous section, these expectations are frequently

underpinned or informed by Western humanist notions of the liberal individual combined with a dualistic view of gender even if the “explicit beliefs associated with those images and fictions are not consciously endorsed” (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 4). They may be expressed instead in the stories people tell, the terms and language that are used, and the identities that are valued. This is of concern because, as Gatens and Lloyd (1999) point out, “different ways of knowing always imply correlative ways of being” (p. 104).

A feminist transposition approach aims to identify and assess the “choreography of constraints and entitlements” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 86) that such imaginary forms (and the constellation of images, ideas, values, representations, narratives, and so on that shape and are shaped by them) ‘materialise’ for *differently historied bodies* in specific contexts (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999). We are thus not assessing or critiquing an imaginary form directly, but rather tracing the *effects* of the representations, ideas, discourses, values, practices, and so on, clustered around and given life through them when they are embodied. For example, the ways of relating they endorse or preclude and the identities they confer or regulate, and how these coordinates activate and increase or restrict and hamper the relational capacities of subjects within their empirical locations. A feminist posthumanist stance is concerned by the fact that we are not living as joyfully and effectively as we could be (Braidotti, 2021), as we frequently adhere to regulative, exclusionary ideas. For example, the neoliberal humanist image of the ‘human in control’ that is so popular in organization theory and research and serves to separate self from environment (Calás & Smircich, 2023). But, as we unfold in our explanations of the following four practices for transposition, radically different ways of knowing and thinking the nature of human being and existence have the potential to “yield a restructuring” of the collective imaginings circling and giving meaning to imaginary forms, “and of the passions organized through them” (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, pp. 35–36).

3.3 | Practice 3—Preparing to make the ‘creative leap’

If we think of different imaginary forms as pieces of music (composed of various ideas, images, orientations, practices, values, and expectations) played on one scale, then transposition is the discursive operation of playing the *same* piece but on a different register; that is, in a different chord, tone, or melody. The effects of this movement are the disclosure of other rhythms—sets of practices, expressions, and expectations—for already existing imaginary forms. 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). By ‘the new,’ Braidotti is not referring to the inversion or replacement of, for example, the stereotypical ‘masculine,’ patriarchal content of heroic leadership with purportedly ‘feminine,’ inclusive content. Such strategies are limiting and limited because the images, ideas, identities, terminologies, and narratives they draw on continue to circulate within the delimiting confines of a system drawn and colonized across the span of our patriarchal history; a system 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, 2011b). Instead, ‘the new’ to which Braidotti refers only unfolds according to different ontological premises (e.g., relational, monist, and immanent) and so calls into question the very foundations of humanist metanarratives. For thinkers of immanence, there is nothing outside or prior to relations that govern or determine everything else (Fox & Alldred, 2018). Yet it is precisely because immanence affirms that reality is *not* derived from or subordinate to a higher or external (transcendent) reality, but rather is self-differentiating and creative, that there is no prescriptive format, frame or set of tools that must be used to engage in the process of transposition. Instead, a fertile imagination and a clear ethico-political stance are keys (Braidotti, 2011b).

Preparing to make the creative leap requires cultivating “generative cross-pollination[s]” across multiple, and often seemingly unconnected theoretical domains, genres, modes of apprehension, and discursive communities (Braidotti, 2017, p. 83).⁶ This actively works against the idea of the classic ‘hero-researcher’ with a singular weapon (method/theory) and a clear, pre-determined destination (Sayers & Martin, 2021). Instead, the researcher-thinker embodies the identity of the nomad. She is a traveler whose key imperative is to “suspend all attachment to

established discourses and...resist mainstream discourses" on her journey (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 47), and so follows a 'map of her own making' (p. 165). However, as Braidotti (2011b) points out, the 'degrees of difference' between subjects is a determining factor for "the sort of political maps and conceptual diagrams we are likely to draw" (p. 261). The fourth practice of transpositions thus involves accounting for where we are thinking/writing from as embodied and embedded subjects.

3.4 | Practice 4—Accounting for locations and positioning

Transposition is also critically reflexive, eschewing the widely accepted image of the researcher-thinker as an objective and rational entity. Instead, it emphasizes the situated nature of our research practices and the politics of our positions as thinkers and writers (Braidotti, 2011b). Braidotti (2003) uses the phrase "history tattooed on your body" (p. 54) to describe the multi-faceted embeddedness of our historicity, which is characterized by different forms and experiences of oppression, empowerment, and difference. 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 (Braidotti, 2011b). A feminist politics of location, then, requires insisting on the multiplicity of intersecting differences within and between subjects who have diverse experiences and differing, sometimes contradictory and ambiguous, points of view. Nonetheless, the creation of alternative feminist and posthumanist imaginaries for established cultural formations comprises a shared concern and aspiration (Braidotti, 2006). The political dimension of transpositions thus involves becoming accountable for the paradoxes and complexities within our own locations, alongside engagement with the broader social interests, passions, and values guiding our creative endeavors.

Our own feminist posthumanist stance outlined at the beginning of this article aims at reconfiguring the coordinates of existing imaginary formations so as to increase our ability to relate to and take in the world (Braidotti, 2013a), and ultimately orientate ourselves and others toward organizational processes and practices differently. This is possible because different constructions of who and what we are, give rise to different forms of embodiment (e.g., different modes of being in and responding to the world) (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999). For the posthumanist thinker, the human is understood to be "*part of*, rather than *sovereign over*, a vibrant ecology of active matter and systems" (Niccolini & Ringrose, 2020, p. 2, emphasis added). A subject is always 'outward bound' and relationally constituted, but at the ethico-political level a posthumanist stance emphasizes the importance of becoming attentive and "open to being affected by and through others," and not only human others (Braidotti, 2006, p. 162), a move which requires giving up the image of the 'human-in-control' and the idea of an inherent separateness, and hence superiority, between human and non-human. Likewise, for *feminist* posthumanists the 'feminine' is not only a delimiting social category and identity (knowable via certain attributes attached to individuals or groups) but can also be engaged as a "recipe for transformation" (Braidotti, 2011b, p. 114). That is, a tool for transforming some of the gendered, racialized, and human-centric coordinates (e.g., key beliefs, ideas, values, images, etc.) that structure and give meaning to imaginary forms like heroic leadership and individual responsibility, as we demonstrate in the exemplar section. Importantly, and what a politics of location highlights, is that the dimensions we choose to focus on will be influenced by our positioning and specific concerns.

3.5 | Practice 5—Storying the 'in-between space'

The fifth practice of transpositions involves experimentation and creation. Lorraine (2011) explains that the "intuitive subject experiments with the intensities of her situation," or more broadly, the empirical context, "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). It is here that the researcher brings out her “hybrid mixture of codes, genres, or modes of apprehension” (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 225) (see practices 3 and 4) to story different, more empowering rhythms (possibilities) for existing cultural and social formations that move beyond Western humanist, anthropocentric and dualistic beliefs and modes of being in the world. To do so, she brings forth new or little known ‘coordinates’ (e.g., images, ideas, narratives, terminologies, practices, etc.) that enable “a deflection and broadening, an opening up rather than a closing down and replacement of existing forms and structures” (Grosz, 2005, p. 165). As the feminist speculative fiction (SF) author Ursula K. Le Guin (2000/2018) explains, we must learn to “take off from immediate reality and return to it with new understanding and new strength” (p. 260).

It is here that feminist SF and the writers of this genre provide significant guidance and inspiration for organizational scholars. Storying is how an alternative imaginary ‘comes to life’, and speculative settings and devices are tools that defamiliarize our normative conceptions of existence, nature and the human (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013). Grebowicz and Merrick (2013) note that feminist SF is often concerned with:

...finding absent but possible presents—whether presented as elsewhere or othertimes. They are not (at least, not all) utopian escapes from the problems of the “real world” but attempts to imagine... different ways to “do” gender, sexuality, and race that do not entail a “return to the garden” or the evocation of non-innocent origins.

(p. 113)

Like feminist, and more recently, posthumanist organization studies (c.f. Calás & Smircich, 2023; Gherardi, 2019; Sayers, et al., 2022), feminist writers of speculative fiction are “always working with non-innocent tools and histories” that reflect the neoliberal, capitalist organizational complex (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 113). However, they recognize the potential to craft “different worlds and possibilities from previously fixed words, metaphors, and concepts” (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 128). As we demonstrate in the next section in readings of selected works by Nicola Griffith and Ursula K. Le Guin, the transposition practices presented in this article are embedded in feminist speculative fiction narratives. In the space of the speculative text, various values, notions, images, memories, and practices are critiqued and reworked from qualitatively different angles. Which is to say, in ways that are not based on detachment, hierarchies, dualisms, or notions of individual exceptionalism. This frees the authors to envisage different ways to act and be in the world (Braidotti, 2021; Sayers, et al., 2022) that are “therapeutic against the isolation of the human self” (Iovino, 2018, p. 233). This leads to the description of our final practice for transposition—setting up adequate frames of resonance for such reconfigurations, revisions, and creative reworkings.

3.6 | Practice 6—Setting up adequate frames of resonance

Our final practice for transpositions involves developing and/or proposing more adequate ‘frames of resonance’ (Braidotti, 2011a) for imaginary forms that reflect the creative leaps that have been made in the imaginary realm and via the acts of storying. This is important because as Truman (2019) points out, “the concepts and words...[we] use to describe and understand something have material affects and create worlds” (p. 7; see also Gatens & Lloyd, 1999). Whether or not the new or alternative words, terms, or frames we write into existence become commonly used or widely known, they serve a purpose by unsettling the ‘old’ or accepted meanings and practices associated with an imaginary form, like heroism or individual responsibility, and signal the possibilities for other ways of thinking, acting and responding that are enabled by the kind of transpositional re-imaginings described above and exemplified in the following section.

3.7 | Reading feminist posthumanist transpositions in SF

Engaging further with the subversive nature of this methodology, we have chosen to engage with feminist speculative fiction (SF) writers and their work to illustrate transposition practices in action. Thinking about and reading speculative fiction as a mode of inquiry is a growing movement, including in OS (e.g., De Cock, et al., 2021; de Freitas & Truman, 2021; Sayers, et al., 2022). Not only does it “shatter the flat repetition of the protocols of institutional reason” in our disciplinary locations (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 169), but SF can also help us to more readily “think outside anthropocentric and humanistic habits” (Braidotti, 2019, p. 133), which are rampant in how we think about and do organizing (Calás & Smircich, 2023). The two texts we discuss below—‘Sur’ by Ursula K. Le Guin and *Ammonite* by Nicola Griffith—take place in alternative past and future histories where all the men have (temporarily) disappeared. For Griffith (2002), the trope of the all-female world enables her to think outside normative constructions of gender and difference, where women are seen as either “inherently passive or dominant, maternal or vicious” (p. 376). At the same time, it serves as a stark reminder of the power of popular cultural formations that draw on masculinist imaginaries, such as heroism, individual responsibility, and heroic leadership, even in settings where man is physically absent.

Practice 1: Embracing alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world. Griffith and Le Guin bring into sharp relief the ways in which anthropocentric and humanistic perspectives are embedded in our collective social psyche, and the urgency of learning to see and think differently. In other words, they have long been engaging in the first practice of transposition by rejecting dualistic modes of thinking that position ‘Man’—a self-contained, unitary entity—at the center of the universe. In ‘Is Gender Necessary (Redux)’ Le Guin (1976/2018) writes:

Our curse is alienation, the separation of yang from yin [and the designation of yang as good, of yin as bad]. Instead of a search for balance and integration, there is a struggle for dominance. Divisions are insisted upon, interdependence is denied. The dualism of division that destroys us, the dualism of superior/inferior, ruler/ruled, owner/owned, user/used, might give way to what seems to me, from here, a much healthier, sounder, more promising modality of integration and integrity.

(p. 44–45).

For Le Guin (2003/2018), “humanity is not lord and master, is not central” (p. 318). Instead, she conceives the universe as a “vast sack,” where people, because they are jumbled together with everything else, are constantly in a state of relation. The universe is a “womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, [an] unending story” rather than a linear, progressive arrow (Le Guin, 1988/2018, p. 168, emphasis added). Likewise, Griffith (2002) views the world as a place of continual connection and becoming, where the important question is not *who am I*, but of *what am I a part?*

In this ‘vast sack’ or womb, people are understood to relate to sets of loosely connected ideas, images, representations, myths, stories, terminologies, and patterns of practice, that are expressed in imaginary configurations, like ‘heroism’ and ‘heroic leadership,’ both of which are of direct interest to Le Guin and Griffith in their writings. Thought of in terms of the imaginary outlined at the start of this article, these formations are a “means by which we not only think but feel our way around the world” (Lennon, 2004, p. 111). In other words, they present generally accepted “ways of responding to and acting in relation to our environment” (p. 114). As a modality of response, heroic leadership is linked to risky endeavors and to seemingly unachievable or insurmountable tasks that ‘normal’ individuals might be afraid to confront. In Le Guin’s (2012) short alternative history titled ‘Sur: A Summary Report of the Yelcho Expedition to the Antarctic, 1909–1910,’ a group of nine South American women are inspired by the explorer Captain Scott’s account of the British National Antarctic Expedition of 1902–1904, to travel to the South Pole ‘to go and see’ the polar snows. The anonymous narrator asks at the beginning of the narrative: “Well, if Captain Scott can do it, why can’t we?” (p. 318). The narrator has read and 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). In this speculative and female-centric recreation of the 'hero's journey', the narrator and her companions traverse the continent for several months on their own, 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.

Whereas 'Sur' is set in a speculative past, *Ammonite* (2002) presents a speculative future where a powerful mining and settlement corporation, Durrallium Company, have set up operations on a newly discovered planet, Jeep. 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 plot navigates recognizable territory in the form of the ongoing corporatization and commercialization 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). However, since the discovery of a deadly influenza-like virus by Company personnel, or more accurately, since the virus discovered them and killed off all the biologically male staff, they are in crisis: "What 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" (p. 32). Their original mandate—establishing 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 5 years earlier.

Practice 2—Assessing and critiquing imaginary forms. In *Ammonite*, Griffith assesses the constraints and entitlements associated with heroic leadership and what it 'materialises' for specific bodies, namely the character Hannah Danner who, as a result of all the men being killed off by the virus, suddenly finds herself the formally recognized leader of the Company. Located in an organizational context that resembles most large, hierarchical organizations, Danner and her subordinates unsurprisingly gravitate toward the leader–follower dichotomy and associated discourses that support the idea of a single individual being responsible for protecting the welfare of the group (pp. 32, 79) and giving orders (p. 171). Griffith unpacks how this results in Danner seeing her subordinates as having only limited agency, while she is vested with hyper-agency (both by herself and others) in her idealized role as a kind of hero-leader. This belief of Danner's is shown to be 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 serve to shore up her conviction that there are situations "only she could handle" (p. 79). The disruptive and threatening physical circumstances caused by the virus further reinforce the desire for an organizational savior figure who others can depend on (or blame) in what is a "situation [that] scares us all" (p. 171). The shared assumption is that the 'hero'—an independent and superior entity—will make the "smart moves" and decisions that will return them to the status quo (p. 77).

As a piece of feminist analysis, the 'coordinates' for heroic leadership are shown to intersect with Danner's sexed female body and culturally informed understandings of how she should be and act as a *female* leader. The dominant shared imaginary creates an expectation that Danner will balance those attributes historically and socially coded as 'feminine' and 'masculine.' That is, the highly individualistic, masculine-male hero and the selfless, sensitive feminine-female leader who puts others' needs before her own. Selflessness, in this instance, means carrying the burden of responsibility whatever the personal cost, which 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 organizations 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). Griffith further shows how selfless responsibility and heroism remain heavily invested in liberal humanist conceptions of the self, which manifests as a form of detachment that serves to cut Danner off from open relationship with both human and non-human others: "Command isolated her more effectively than a deadly disease" (p. 77). It is a negative mode of relationality premised on the idea of separability of self from other, and self over other, which can lead to aggressive forms of disempowerment or even erasure on the part of those designated as 'followers' (p. 99).

Practice 3—Preparing to make the ‘creative leap.’ One of the key reasons we’ve chosen Griffith and Le Guin to illustrate our version of feminist posthumanist transpositions in action is their deliberate aim to make a ‘creative leap’ toward the new through consumption of the old (Braidotti, 2011b). As Le Guin (1986) notes in her essay, ‘Heroes,’ she wants to lose the dominant myths so she “can find what is worth admiration” (p. 161) when it comes to heroism and heroic leadership. That is, a different rhythm for this imaginary form that, on the one hand, displaces the central images of ‘(wo)Man against Nature’ and the human-in-control, and on the other, does not exclude differently historied bodies or necessitate a delicate balancing act. Both Le Guin and Griffith chart alternative lines of possibility by drawing on a “hybrid mixture of codes, genres, or modes of apprehension” (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 225) that are based on different ontological premises (e.g., fluid rather than rigid boundaries between subjects-in-becoming). Le Guin, for example, draws together strands of feminist and posthumanist thinking, postcolonial theory, anthropology, and Taoism, to name only some of her influences (Haraway, 2016; Sayers & Martin, 2021). Likewise, Griffith brings material-ecocritical and posthumanist perspectives together with disability studies and gender and queer theory (Griffith, 2017). These transdisciplinary combinations provide the tools to imagine and story alternatives that work through dominant images, ideas, and narratives and toward new possibilities for imaginary forms and their embodiment in different empirical contexts.

Practice 4—Accounting for locations and positioning. One such tool is a mode of gendered thinking that rests on engagement with a different vision of the feminine premised on an active relational ontology. If ‘I/we’ in any given moment is the fruit of entanglement (Haraway, 2008), then embracing and paying close attention to our bodily entanglements and how the body/flesh allows us to relate to and with the material and immaterial world can be read as a positive affirmation of the feminine and vice versa (Colebrook, 2004). We use the *language of gender* as a consequence of our collective history, where certain elements or tendencies of life—immanence, relationality, affectivity, corporeality, and so on—have been designated in Western cultures as ‘feminine.’ This does not mean that those attributes and practices coded as feminine do not act in limiting and constraining ways when coupled with a reductionist, anthropocentric view of the subject, as the experiences of Griffith’s character Danner demonstrate. Different conceptual treatments of gender in a feminist posthumanist perspective, however, also think the attributes, characteristics and values associated with ‘Woman’ and the ‘feminine’ as *verbs*. That is, as activities and processes (rather than delimiting social categories) emerging in the space between bodies and with the potential to induce more intensive forms of relationality, experimentation, and even pleasure when actualized in and through encounters (Braidotti, 2011a).

The idea of gender embodied as a provocative process informs Le Guin and Griffith’s work, and as we examine in the following section, is integral to reconfiguring the heroic imaginary. In *Ammonite*, Griffith puts forward a feminist posthumanist image of *selfless responsibility*, where the boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘other’ are called into question (see p. 198) and rather than being responsible *for* some situation, thing or person, we are responsible *to* one another, both individually and collectively. In this image, selflessness is not constructed as sacrifice by a single (female) individual but is rather envisioned as a grounded form of connection and cooperation with others premised on acknowledgment of shared affinities and physical and mental interdependence that disrupt the notion of a separate, transcendent ‘self’ who is in control. Likewise, in ‘Sur’ Le Guin presents *vulnerability* as an opportunity to cultivate intimacy with non-human others and as a basis for creative experimentation during the group’s journey. Minorities, animals and other living matter are routinely treated as less able and disposable, as the women in ‘Sur’ are shown to recognize. They know from experience that being seen and categorized as vulnerable can result in the diminishment of their power, that is, their capacities to act and explore (p. 325). But rather than trying to overcome vulnerability, Le Guin presents the women in ‘Sur’ as engaging with vulnerability as a rejection of the myth of the human-in-control and an embrace of the common ground they share with *all* living entities. These emancipatory alternatives act as new coordinates (alongside others not discussed here) in the social imagination to rework and bring to life different meanings for and ways of embodying cultural forms like ‘heroic leadership,’ and with a focus on empowering women.

Practice 5—Storying the 'in-between space'. For Le Guin and Griffith there is still room for heroism, that is, modalities of response and action that require bravery, involve personal risk, and are outside of the ordinary or every day. Perhaps it is even necessary as we face up to the significant challenges of the posthuman present. But for both authors, imaginary forms like heroic leadership need to be storied and embodied differently if they are going to result in positive, life-affirming outcomes. The dominant coordinates of 'Man against Nature' or '(wo)Man as savior' are "no longer acceptable, even as poetic metaphor" (Le Guin, 1986/1988, pp. 159–160). It is beyond the scope of this article to offer a full account of how heroism and heroic leadership are storied differently in the space of each of the texts we use here. Instead, we offer short examples that highlight some features of these other, transposed rhythms.

Reaching the South Pole before the men do is a difficult and dangerous undertaking; the group in 'Sur' persevere through blizzards, snow blindness, and frostbite to achieve their shared goal. They also take risks like abandoning Scott's previously established base, Hut Point, to strike out on their own and experiment with an eco-friendly way of living on the ice. Risk-taking though has little to do with how they see themselves and their roles. Instead heroic, out-of-the-ordinary actions are the result of responsiveness and attentiveness to other living entities, like the Adelie penguins. The narrator recalls how it was the penguins who had "insisted on our going to visit Hut Point" (p. 322) and observe the destruction that has been wrought there. 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. Like the penguins, "women and servants know" that "the backside of heroism is often rather sad" (p. 323); not only exclusionary but also destructive when it prioritizes one species over another even though the harm one does to the environment is a form of self-harm (Braidotti, 2021). They associate their own sense of vulnerability with that of the penguins and seals. Engaging with and processing an idea of shared vulnerability leads the women to pay close attention to their non-human companions. The women are physically and emotionally affected by their interactions with the penguins, affections which are transformed into ideas (e.g., 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 behavior. 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 to abandon the traditional approach and try something radically different, including refusing to have a leader or leave a monument ('we left no footprints even,' the narrator writes) for those coming after.

In *Ammonite*, different characters want to rush in and 'save the day,' including saving their organization. They see themselves as the 'responsible parties' who are qualified to bring order and stability (p. 294) to several highly volatile, threatening situations. Embodying heroic leadership has typically meant, as in the example of Danner, an individual *taking* responsibility, asserting positional power and leading everyone else toward better outcomes through the deployment of supposedly superior knowledge and skills. The idea of *selfless responsibility* explained above, however, suggests other ways of embodying this imaginary form, beginning with attendance to the dynamic relationalities that characterize 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 new connections between groups and entities, challenging or questioning the implicit and explicit rules on which habitual practices are based (e.g., depending on and venerating the 'hero' figure), and even cultivating opportunities for collective experimentation with other ways of leading premised on more radical frames of reference, such as indigenous and ecofeminist philosophies. These options still require taking a risky, unknown path—Danner and other characters cannot predict in advance what will happen, nor is it easy—but they carry different expectations regarding how things should go on between people. For example, how the 'leader' approaches her relations with others: "How will you go to them? As...the one who should have 'done something,'" and will now rush in and 'save the day,' or as one "offering advice and mediation"? in an open, potentially transformative mode of engagement (pp. 294–295).

Practice 6—Setting up adequate frames of resonance. Although neither Griffith nor Le Guin offer a new word or term to describe these alternative ways of understanding and embodying heroic leadership, we propose ‘response-able heroism’ as one possibility. In our reading, both authors refuse to fall into the trap of repeating the binary logic of the heroic/post-heroic debate, which is organized along gendered lines, with the ‘heroic’ being traditionally masculine, independent and active and the ‘post-heroic’ being traditionally feminine, communal, and passive (Fletcher, 2004). Instead, ‘response-able heroism’ is neither ‘masculine’ nor ‘feminine’ in the oppositional sense but nevertheless *affirms* the feminine—thought of here in terms of corporeal and immanent conceptions of selflessness and vulnerability—as a positive and productive mode of response to one’s present situation. The quality and nature of the response is important, in that it goes against the grain or against convention by taking seriously how we are “at stake to each other—across regions, genders, races, species, practices,” and, in the process displacing, the “high-wire acts” and “humanist patriline[s]” that support conventional understandings and enactments of responsibility and heroism (Haraway, 2016, p. 132).

4 | DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR FEMINIST ORGANIZATION STUDIES

Transposition as we have developed it in this current article is a process of “creative mimesis” (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 225) that realizes the significance of both seeing and changing imaginaries from radical and self-conscious feminist and posthumanist standpoints. In other words, affirmative alternatives as described in this article are not simply waiting fully formed to be discovered, observed, and then communicated in clear and disembodied writing by academic scholars. Instead, a transposition approach attends to the individual and collective acts of critique and creativity by knowledge-producing agents in their situated locations. From these guided, layered, and co-constructed speculations, new possibilities *emerge*, and in their ongoing and lived emergence, become “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). Presenting (or even better, *storying*) the outcomes of transposition practices as embodied experimental responses generated within the flux of encounters between, for example, ‘researchers’ and ‘participants’,⁷ thinkers and ideas, and fact and fiction, as illustrated in the above discussion of *Ammonite* and ‘Sur,’ circumvents the pull toward separation (e.g., between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’) and closure which are endemic in conventional research methodologies (Rhodes, 2019). With this in mind, in the final section we reflect on possible applications of feminist posthumanist transpositions in the context of organizational inquiry, proposing feminist action research, radical empiricism, and the reading and writing of speculative fictions as three such modes for applying the six practices for transposition presented in this article.

4.1 | Feminist action research

New social imaginaries “do not readily appear out of thin air” (Braidotti, 2011a, p. 260), and so need to be brought about collectively and from within life (Braidotti, 2006). In her book *Redeeming Leadership*, Liu (2020) notes the strong need for organizational researchers to ‘work together’ with participants so that the social meanings of leadership, and associated imaginary configurations, “may grow to encompass the invisible and forgotten acts of resistance by marginalized people and communities” (p. 139), and empower these groups in the process. Importantly, women and other minority groups have a head start on imagining and enacting alternative imaginaries. This is not classical dialectics of the variety that has informed standpoint feminist epistemologies. 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 corporeality, relationality, and vulnerability, practices which hold the potential to transform masculinist and patriarchal imaginary forms (Braidotti, 2006). For truly emancipatory reworkings to take place, however, we must move beyond

humanist and anthropocentric habits of thought. The six practices for transpositions affirm what it is that participants may already 'know' (e.g., intuitively) and need only recognize as their knowledge to begin remaking relations of power and dominant imaginaries (Braidotti, 2011b, 2021). This is illustrated by the women in 'Sur' who purposefully draw on their situated, multi-generational experiences as mothers, daughters, and wives to embrace vulnerability as a life-affirming practice and tool for reworking traditional notions of the heroic. Consequently, transposition provides a valuable schema to ground and guide collaborative research projects toward hopeful outcomes that facilitate human and non-human flourishing.

The six practices, however, are not prescriptive rules to follow. For example, *practice 1* concerns embracing an alternative way of understanding the world which is discussed in this article in terms of 'becoming' and a 'relational ontology,' which are Euro-centric philosophical terms. But as Truman (2019) points out, indigenous worldviews have long emphasized a vitalist and non-anthropocentric understanding of the embedded, relational, and processual nature of all life. In their guided speculations, action research participants may embrace an array of perspectives that also actively displace the pseudo-universal image of the human, even if the language and ideas are different. Likewise, communities and groups will be animated by "different political economies of affect and desire" (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 355), especially when it comes to gender (*practices 3, 4 and 5*). The images that "might give the concept of gender 'the forces it needs to return to life,'" and to be put to work to story and embody alternatives, or even "the forces to abandon it" (Gherardi, 2019, p. 40), are not limited to that which is presented in this article. While our own desire to experiment (and, in our reading, Le Guin and Griffith's too) has been provoked by what Gherardi (2019) refers to as a 'fleshy mode of thought' that emphasizes bodily encounters and affectivity as a way to conceptualize gender and put it to work, other images might prove just as provocative and productive, such as a vegetal mode, a musical mode or a non-living mode of thought (p. 50).

4.2 | Radical empiricism

A feminist (or even posthumanist) action research approach offers an opportunity to physically experience, embody, and even play with the possibilities opened up by changes in the imaginary realm, which may also lead to further, unanticipated transformations.⁸ However, researchers do not always have the capacity or support to engage in such projects. Feminist posthumanist transpositions can also be used as an approach in more conventional research settings, where the researcher is working with ethnographic and interview data. In this context, the empirical field is repositioned as 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). Such an approach is referred to as an 'empiricism' because thinking itself is recognized as "the conceptual counterpart of the ability to enter modes of relation, to affect and be affected, sustaining qualitative shifts and tensions accordingly" (Braidotti, 2013b, p. 170). In other words, emancipatory alternatives are not dependent on their presence in the 'data'. Nor is the role of the researcher constrained to making sense of and interpreting empirical events and themes in accordance with the particulars of their analytical framework, as per conventional qualitative approaches. Instead, transposition enacted as a *radical empiricist* approach repositions the feminist researcher(s) as a creative agent in the research process who can intervene in and imagine alternatives on the terms outlined in the previous sections. In other words, the creative side of transpositions is "completed through thinking *about and with* theories and concepts" (Truman, 2019, p. 9) (see *practices 3–5*).

Although she does not use the label 'radical empiricism,' Lipton (2017) offers an example of what this can look like in practice. Empirical data from the 'field' forms the basis for Lipton's feminist critique of the institutional power relations and phallic knowledge that shape social formations of leadership in the university setting and their effects on academic women trying to navigate the university organization. However, she is also determined to "think differently" about "gendered structures, processes and practices" in leadership without fixing these dynamics into another repressive normativity (p. 78). Lipton adopts a 'storying' approach to her (auto)ethnographic observations

to 're-imagine women's participation in academia' (p. 66) and create new metaphors (another word we might use for imaginary forms) for women in leadership. She presents her 'findings' as a piece of feminist creative academic writing based on a feminist interpretation of the Greek myth of the Minotaur and the Labyrinth. The purpose of this speculative mode of writing is to access "those hard-to-get dimensions of social life" and open "a multiplicity of meanings and ways of knowing" (p. 67). Here, then, in the final paragraphs we return to speculative fiction.

4.3 | Reading and/or writing SF

Reading and writing speculative texts disrupts the masculine common sense of organizational and leadership studies by pushing at the boundaries of what is seen to 'count' as academic research work and scholarly knowledge production. Feminist SF by authors like Atwood, Le Guin, and Griffith, as well as Afro-futurist writers like Octavia E. Butler and Nnedi Okorafor, work to "reassemble polluted histories" through their distinct storytelling practices and so deal in the possible by revising the 'real' (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 132). In working this seam, 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). As such, we recommend collaborative readings of selected SF texts like Butler's *Parable* series, Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy or Le Guin's *The Unreal and the Real: Outer Space, Inner Lands* (in which the short story 'Sur' is located) prior to or during a feminist action research project. They are potential sites of becoming for readers, offering lessons in resistance that are characterized by both macro- and micro-changes, thoughtful acts of subversion, and careful questioning of dominant social imaginaries (Lacey, 2014) as illustrated in the previous section.

Feminist SF can also serve as "creative inspiration" for leadership and organization scholars (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013, p. 112; see also Sayers & Martin, 2021). We might, for example, employ the strategies of SF writers in our own work to generate even more creative and transgressive transpositions. Le Guin, for example, provides a rich source of techniques, including "spatial and temporal displacement; meta-narrative framing (e.g., framing a story as an alternate 'real' history); polyvocality (e.g., the use of multiple and diverse voices, not always human ones); and a multiplicity of alternative storytelling forms (e.g., diaries, poetry, "historical" records and artifacts, songs, letters, maps)" (Sayers & Martin, 2021, p. 7). As demonstrated in feminist literary criticism, the kinds of writing strategies found in feminist SF destabilize traditional (masculine) narrative forms and make space for marginalized and non-human voices and experiences (Lacey, 2014). The organizational scholar as speculative fiction writer, and the speculative fiction author as organizational scholar is therefore a productive avenue for further exploration and dialog in relation to transposition methodologies.

5 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we have developed a methodological innovation—transposition—that works to contest traditional, gendered, or heteronormative research traditions while also moving beyond critique. Critical analysis of what is, is a vital element of feminist research practice and, in the form we propose in this article (see *practice 2*), enables us to critically account for and assess the effects of collective imaginings and imaginary forms in the experience of differently historied bodies (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999). However, critique without creativity on the terms outlined in this article is unlikely to "promote the life, and growth, that helps us flourish as individuals and communities" (Harré et al., 2017), and as the members of *posthuman* ecologies (Braidotti, 2019, 2021). Consequently, in addition to critique, one of the primary aims of feminist and critical organizational scholars must be to bring forth, collate, and convey alternative images, ideas, practices, and so on that provide "the leverage we need to implement changes at the in-depth level of the self," as well as in society and organizations more generally (Braidotti, 2006, p. 87).

Transposition offers one such innovative approach for opening “generative cracks” in hegemonic systems and in dominant social imaginaries (Braidotti, 2019, p. 127) by actively reworking previously exclusionary images, narratives, and ideas that inform contemporary organizational processes and practices and through their transformation facilitate ways of relating and being in the world that “move [us] toward more sustainable social systems and practices” (p. 81). That is, when they make their way into the social realm and are embodied in organizational contexts, they have the potential to induce meaningful and hopeful outcomes. In this article, we have presented six fundamental and closely interwoven practices for enacting transpositions, drawing on Braidotti’s oeuvre and selected writings of feminist speculative fiction authors to do so. We then discussed this method in the context of radical empiricism and feminist action research projects, showing how hopeful inquiry is not only a politically necessary activity to counter limited and sterile thinking, but is also animated by a strong desire to provide alternative imaginaries where both healing and hope is possible.

Although working with, or drawing on, the speculative fiction genre is not a requisite element of doing this work, it offers “rich and complex avenues for reading and rereading the world, writing and re-writing the world” (Thomas, 2013, p. 4). Selected texts and authors, such as Le Guin, Griffith, Atwood, Okorafor, and Butler, to name a few who have inspired us in our work, prove to be valuable companions in the work of experimenting with different modes of inquiry, offering insights into new ideas on gender and a qualitatively different view of the human subject (Martin, 2022; Sayers, et al., 2022). Fiction and non-fiction writing by feminist SF authors can thus function as an invisible presence in the research process, and as a source of inspiration for how to engage with generative methodologies like transpositions in different research contexts. Feminists and other researchers need to work together transversally to create alliances and move away from reductive games of oppositional ideology, with hope at the center of our work.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ As Gatens and Lloyd (1999, p. 151) explain, the term ‘imaginary’ here is not a reference to “the ‘unreal’ as distinct from the real ‘perceived.’” Rather, when “social theorists talk of an ‘imaginary’ they mean...a connected set of images embedded in social practices, or throughout literary and philosophical texts.”
- ² The term transpositions is also used by Braidotti (2006) in other contexts, including in relation to ethics, subjectivity, and memory. However, it is Braidotti’s (2006, 2011a, 2017) ruminations on the notion of transpositions as a methodological approach that we engage with here.
- ³ Lennon (2004) gives the example of the ‘Angel in the House,’ while one of Braidotti’s (2006, pp. 206–209) notable examples is ‘sustainability.’
- ⁴ Our use of the term ‘women’ encompasses those who identify as women and trans-women.
- ⁵ The privileging of one kind of sexed and gendered body 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, and to the history of ideas (Braidotti, 2011a).

- ⁶ For organizational studies scholars, conceptual diversity might include making connections across science and technology studies, political and social philosophy, feminism, environmental and human rights, anti-racism, speculative and science fiction, and post-colonial and posthuman theory, to give some options.
- ⁷ We use quote marks here to highlight the fact that these are fluid subject positions, and knowledge production is not the sole prerogative of academic researchers. Fiction writers, like Le Guin and Griffith, can also be included in these designations. As Braidotti (2019) points out, “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).
- ⁸ It is important to note that this process is not about “checking an independently accessible reality to see if the representation of it is accurate. It is more like seeing if the world and subject can carry the signification suggested” (Lennon, 2004, p. 119).

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