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5 FEMINIST INQUIRY

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WHY IS FEMINIST INQUIRY AND FEMINIST ACTION STILL NECESSARY?

In 1952, 4 years after the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the UN Council, Simone de Beauvoir observed that "human" was not a universal category, but rather the dominant term in the male/female or human/less-than-human binary:

> Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . For him she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the other. (de Beauvoir, 1952, pp. xvii, xxiii)

And in 2022, despite 70 years of feminist interventions, women's right to be recognized as human, and valued as such, is still precarious. In my own state of New South Wales, Australia, women were legally recognized as persons as recently as 1918 through the Women's Legal Status Act (NSW). And as I will show, legal recognition is insufficient in itself to undo the assumption of her less-than-human status—as one not worthy of a viable life that endures:

> Globally, an estimated 137 women are killed by their partner or a family member *every day*. According to data collected by the United Nations, the number of female victims worldwide in the past twelve months alone runs into millions. The figures are higher for marginalised groups such as LGBTQIA+ people. (McGregor, 2021, p. 19, emphasis added)

What is different now, perhaps, from 1952, is that the violence against women, and the loss of their lives, is documented and reported upon—not being accounted for as simply more of the same, and thus unremarkable, but as a crisis, and in particular as a crisis for those who are marked as different. The World Health Organization describes violence against women as a global health crisis of endemic proportions (Gupta, 2021). That global crisis is fueled, at least in part, by perpetrators' belief that the victim caused their violence: "see what you made me do," he cries (Hill, 2019). In O'Neill's (2021) words, the crisis is fueled by a concerted ignorance—a "structure of concerted if unconscious epistemic occlusion which both stems from and serves to protect male privilege" (p. 1).

The gendered refrains that occlude male privilege while reiterating women's subordination are entangled with multiple binaries, which manifest themselves in black deaths in custody, war crimes in Afghanistan, the sexual molestation of children, sex slavery, the destruction of Indigenous sacred sites, the rise of populism and of far-right groups, corporate greed exacerbating climate change—the list could go on and on. The enactments of all of these acts of oppression are entangled in the systemic misogyny that Beauvoir observed in 1952.

If social change followed a linear trajectory, 70 years of feminist inquiry and feminist action would have made such a difference that Beauvoir's words would no longer resonate. Autonomy for women would have been achieved, and so would the dismantling of the binary that defines women as other to the male essential, Absolute Subject.

- The liberal feminist movement, for example, would have analyzed the social impact of sexist laws and sexist systems of management and governance, and it would either have had them changed or counteracted them with new laws and systems of governance outlawing misogyny, sexual abuse of women, and the systemic abuse of those categorized as other to privileged white men. Indeed, in one jurisdiction after another, such laws have changed, but assemblages that support the systemic abuse of power are extraordinarily resilient.
- The radical feminist movement would have changed the perception of what it means to be a girl or a woman. Women would no longer be subordinate to men or defined by the male gaze—they would no longer be separated off from each other, and in competition with each other, but champions of what it is to be woman and, collectively, women.
- The critical feminist movement would have emancipated women from those discourses and practices that de Beauvoir wrote about; they would have made visible the workings of power, freedom, and agency. Critical reflexivity was central to this movement, though much more difficult to realize than we had hoped (Davies et al., 2004).
- The poststructuralist feminist movement would have made visible the essentialisms lurking in multiple discourses and dismantled our dependence on, and identities constructed with/in, oppositional, hierarchical binaries. Feminist deconstructive writing, as part of that work, would have found ways to "disrupt the grip that binaries have on thought and identity" (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 75). And that is work, I will suggest, that, like the work of each feminist mo(ve)ment, can only ever be partially accomplished.

None of these mo(ve)ments can be set aside. As Kristeva (1981/1986), argued, they all remain relevant, since the conditions that provoked and inspired them are present still.

Gannon and I mourned, in 2007, the way feminist lines of flight are constantly reterritorialized and misogyny renormalized. "The history of feminism," we wrote, "can be read as a series of moments in which wins against patriarchal structures and practices have been achieved, and then subtly undermined by a shifting ground of resistance that negates the wins that have been made and keeps women's subordinate status carefully locked in place" (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 75).

Human rights, even when legally enshrined, do not create a just world. As Bader Ginsberg pointed out, in her capacity as justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, human *rights* are not enough if there are not also the *means*. And for some, in all too many places still, even in pockets of advanced democracies, there are no human rights for women, let alone the means to realize them.

In jurisdictions where there is legal and even institutional support for the rights of girls and women to study and work and play, excuses can always be found to justify their noninclusion in those spheres habitually dominated by men. Ludicrous arguments are assembled—they will distract the boys and men from their study/work/play, or there are no funds that can be found for women's toilets. Or populist spin is used to categorize and dismiss all those who protest against injustice, rendering them powerless by making them appear to be in the wrong even for

protesting. Elections can be fought and won through the cultural wars that such spin gives rise to (Tharoor, 2021). In Britain, Beckett (2020) writes,

> The right has launched a series of culture wars: against remainers, the BBC, the universities, the legal system, the big cities and seemingly anywhere that liberal or leftwing thinking still lingers strongly, despite a decade of Tory rule. . . . The latest culture war is the "war on woke" being waged by the Tory press, and increasingly by the government as well. This campaign caricatures as dangerous extremists those who believe that Britain's power structures, social relations and national identity should fairly reflect the country's diversity. Conservative commentators describe wokeness as a cult, an epidemic, anti-western, totalitarian, and even as "cultural marxism"—an interpretation that began as a far-right conspiracy theory.

In the 2020s, the spin against feminist thought, inquiry, and action is not as subtle as Gannon and I thought, back in 2007. During his presidency, Trump mandated sexual assaults on women, leading by his own example. Taking his lead, broadcasters, such as Sky News, branded feminist, environmentalist, and Black Lives Matters protests as a form of capitulation to "left lunacy."

Other opponents of women's right to be recognized as human call on religion, arguing that it is not God's or Allah's will that girls and women should take part in the public world that properly belongs to men. Some defend that position with extreme physical violence. At the time of writing this chapter, on May 8, 2021, the Sayed Al-Shuhada school in Kabul, where girls were studying, was bombed, with 85 reported dead and 147 injured. The Australian prime minister, in 2021, addressing a national conference of his fellow Pentecostals, referred to feminists and to other groups protesting for justice as engaging in tribalism. Any form of tribalism, he said, is doing the work of the "Evil One." Only God can bequeath an individual's identity, he told the gathering. Without a flicker of irony, he made this dire claim "to loud cheers from his very own tribe" (Boyce, 2021, p. 7), rousing his audience to self-righteous cheers for antifeminism, anti environmentalism, and anti–Black Lives Matter activists.

In his capacity as prime minister, Morrison offered his tribe a Pentecostal version of neoliberalism, in which each obedient unquestioning soul will materially profit and in which none need concern themselves with ethical principles—they being the province of God. God had called him to the prime minister-ship, he told his gathering of the faithful. That version of the world, which lay at the heart of his sermon, has deep roots in the history of colonized countries such as my own, where Christian settlers justified their violence and, in some cases genocide, in the name of God's will (Davies, 2021a, 2021b).

WHAT IS FEMINIST INQUIRY?

Understanding the vicissitudes of social change over spacetime lies at the center of feminist inquiry, asking what is possible, what is desirable, and what forces are at work that run counter to a differently imagined present and future? As the answers shift to those questions, each generation makes its own women's movement (Rowbotham, 2021).

Feminist inquiry has been necessarily multi- and interdisciplinary. It delves into historical and social assemblages, examining the epistemological and ontological forces at play. The disciplines that have contributed to feminist thought include physics, philosophy, biology, environmental studies, linguistics, geography, psychology, literary theory and practice, music, and arts-based forms of inquiry. As such, feminist inquiries are *assemblages* or, in Bennett's (2010, pp. 23–24) words, "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts.

Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within." Those confounding energies come from conflicting elements within and from the normative, normalizing refrains that oppose them and embed them. No inquiry takes place in a social/historical/political vacuum.

In conducting feminist inquiries, then, we do not act independent of those living swarming assemblages that make up the possibilities of inquiry: "an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (Bennett, 2010, p. 21). The institutions we work within, themselves beholden to the directives of funding bodies, often manifest a strong desire to remain pure and unchanged, despite policy and rhetoric that promote gender and other forms of diversity and that celebrate new ideas.

One of the most interesting and radical interventions in that institutional purity has come with the turn to the arts as a mode of inquiry (Thomson & Davies, 2019). Art, Grosz (2008) explains, is no self-indulgent reflection or representation of what is, but gestures toward what is to come:

> Art unleashes, intensifies, and celebrates precisely the creative and destructive impact of vibratory forces on bodies, on collectives, on the earth itself: it protects and enhances life that is and announces life to come. . . . Art is where life most readily transforms itself, the zone of indetermination through which all becomings must pass. In this sense art is not the antithesis of politics, but politics continued by other means. (pp. 61, 76)

Manning (2016) conceptualizes arts practices in terms of what she calls the minor gesture or "the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation . . . a force that courses through [the major], unmooring its structural integrity, problematizing its normative standards" (p. 1).

Whichever disciplines it taps into, feminist inquiry finds itself moving across their boundaries, shifting them, and working beyond their conceptual limitations. Its task is to generate new forms of thought, analyzing and deconstructing what is taken for granted in everyday relations of power and powerlessness, both with/in the disciplines it draws on and with/in the everyday world. It cuts together and apart in its search for the new:

> Creativity is not about crafting the new through a radical break with the past. It's a matter of dis/continuity, neither continuous nor discontinuous in the usual sense. It seems to me that it's important to have some kind of way of thinking about change that doesn't presume there's either more of the same or a radical break. Dis/continuity is a cutting together-apart (one move) that doesn't deny creativity and innovation but understands its indebtedness and entanglements to the past and the future. (Barad, 2012, p. 16)

Indebtedness and entanglements, that is, to and in feminist inquiries that have gone before and the power structures and systems of thought with/in which we work. Feminist inquiry and action might not ever entirely erase what it works with and against, but it must, again and again, clear the canvas, in order to open up breathing space for new thought and action:

> The painter does not paint on an empty canvas, and neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already so covered with pre-existing, pre-established clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 204)

Feminist inquiry takes into account those repetitions of "the same" embedded in the broad structural/political/economic/legal assemblages that form and re-form our lives, *and* it seeks to shred them. It takes into account the specificity of lives lived out with/in those assemblages, all the while seeking the means of opening up spaces that let in that breath of air, that lead to the

line of flight, to minor gestures, to unmooring the structural integrity of those normative assemblages that too often hold us in thrall and too often defeat us.

CURRENT FRUSTRATIONS/ACTIONS/PROTESTS/JOYS

In the 2020s, women of all classes and ethnicities and backgrounds have been out marching on the streets. In 2021, women were rammed by police cars when they protested, as they were in Brooklyn in 2020; they were brutalized by police in 2021 in London when they protested the death of an innocent woman (Haynes, 2021). Some of the older women marching in Australia, who have been fighting feminist battles for decades, can hardly believe that so little has changed. Caro wrote of the protest in 2021, "There's a protest sign I identify with whenever, at the ripe old age of 63, I find myself marching in the streets. It reads 'I can't believe I still have to protest this shit'" (Caro, 2021, p. 6). The prime minister was invited to attend that protest on the steps of Parliament House. He refused:

> Our prime minister's response to the outpouring of anger, solidarity, grief and hope expressed with such passion and conviction on his doorstep was to remind the marchers [from inside the parliamentary chamber] to feel grateful that we could protest safely in this country, without fear of being shot. 'Not far from here, such marches, even now, are being met with bullets, but not here in this country,' he told parliament on Monday. The response to his words has been universally negative. Women feel, yet again, unheard. (Caro, 2021, p. 6)

Cases of bullying, sexual assault, and rape by men in the Australian federal parliament, which had provoked that protest, had been in the news, day after day. After refusing to attend the gathering on his doorstep, and after walking out of the parliamentary chamber when someone read out the words of one of their speeches, the prime minister asserted, shedding crocodile tears, that he cared for his wife and mother and daughters. He found it distressing, he said, that women believed he had not been listening to them. "He claimed he had been doing a lot of listening" (Bongiorno, 2021, p. 15).

And here we come to a crucial question for feminist inquiry: What is it to listen? How does anyone learn to hear what they don't yet know? How does anyone learn to see and to question the destructive force of those ethico-onto-epistemologies that grant them privilege and power? How can we learn to prefer and enact an ethics of response-ability over the maintenance of whatever power the established discourses and practices, the assemblages of power, grant such men?

No matter how many crocodile tears are shed, *listening-as-usual* will not open up such movement of knowing in being. Significant change depends on *emergent listening*, in which the listener is open to being affected by what they hear, capable of being, themselves, emergent:

> Listening-as-usual can ask questions only in the terms of already laid down concepts, and in mobilising them, cement both the concepts' certainties and limitations. [In contrast] Emergent listening is open to what it doesn't know; its borders are open. . . . Agency in such an encounter is distributed and multiple, and within that entangled multiplicity, each participant is emergent and vividly alive—open to being affected, not just by words, or within the terms of existing relations, but by percepts and affects, by things in the world (both human and more-than-human), whose force may be both uncanny and vital. (Davies, 2021c, p. 23)

Even with emergent listening, however, and even when we erase, clean, flatten, or shred existing canvasses, history cycles back on itself, re-turning us to the same: "life, even the simplest organic cell, carries its past with its present," Grosz explains, but that fact is not entirely negative. Rather, "this incipient memory endows life with its creativity, the capacity to elaborate an innovative and unpredictable response to stimuli, to react or, simply to act, to enfold matter into itself, to transform matter and life in unpredictable ways" (Grosz, 2008, p. 6).

Barad (2007) draws on quantum physics to make this same important point:

> The past is never left behind, never finished once and for all, and the future is not what will come to be in an unfolding of the present moment; rather the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter's iterative becoming. Becoming is not an unfolding in time, but the inexhaustible dynamism of the enfolding of mattering. (p. 234)

The doubleness of the past, its capacity to hold us to the same *and* to generate lines of flight, lies at the heart of questions about social change—its frustrations and its joys. The challenge for feminist inquiry is to discover not only those historically embedded structures that underpin gender relations, and not only the conscious and intentional beliefs and practices of men and women, but the embodied ways in which we are formed, and form ourselves, as we grow into the world and become of the world (Davies, 2021c). To understand how "past" problems exist in the present, then, despite earlier "solutions," we need to develop new insights into how gendered identities are formed—how they are constituted and maintained—and how that might be changed. To do so, we need to include not just rational analysis but also emotion, desire, imagination, intensity, sensation, and affect, and we need a rethinking of relationality (Davies, 2021c). We need to generate those minor gestures, those lines of flight, those agential cuts that work with and against the integrity of the normative assemblages that hold things the same.

THE FORMATION OF GENDERED IDENTITIES

In this section, I draw on two stories to tease out this complex doubleness of matter's iterative becoming.

Anna Goldsworthy, a classical concert pianist, explores her own "unconscious epistemic occlusion" (O'Neill, 2021, p. 1) when it came to the femicides in opera. As a young feminist listener, she had been enchanted by them. Over decades of recitals, the music of opera washed over her and through her fingertips. As a young woman, she writes, music had "provided me with a home, identity, meaning, companionship, structure, hairshirt. All the kit required to survive the wretched era of adolescence" (Goldsworthy, 2020–2021, p. 49). Now, she wants to examine the way that opera seduces us and captures us in the gendered status quo: "The laws of the status quo are embedded in its structures: reprisal, return to the norm. . . . Closure is reiterated ad nauseam. . . . Dig deep enough in any cultural inheritance and you will find the putrefaction; usually you don't need to dig very deep at all" (Goldsworthy, 2020–2021, p. 49):

> The irony of all this is that, for me, playing the piano has always felt like a holiday from gender. . . . 'You must be the best of both man and woman,' my teacher always said, and, at risk of appropriating queerness, this is one of the great pleasures of playing the piano. You get to be the resonant bass voice and the radiant soprano; you are both Liszt's 'amorous Faust' and his 'full-blooded village beauty.' (Goldsworthy, 2020–2021, p. 52)

Seduced by the beauty of her cultural inheritance, Goldsworthy's account shows how one can be blind to the ways in which such passion, and such freedom, may nevertheless be in service

to the inevitable death of those women who are too much—too sexy, too beautiful, too powerful, or even too beautiful a singer. She participated in that inevitability even while finding her own liberation from the gendered norms, which dictated that she could not be a concert pianist.

In her foreword to Clément's (1988/1989) *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, McClary explains how music "bypasses the modes of logical argumentation to catch the listener unawares" (McClary, 1989, p. x); "a system as apparently abstract as music can be fundamentally informed by prevailing attitudes of 'how women are' . . . listeners (and performers) get to experience intense emotional narratives without being aware of what is at stake, thus without seeming to be accountable" (McClary, 1989, p. xiv). The work that Clément does in her book is rare, in part, McClary (1989) says,

> because women scholars still feel themselves to hold a precarious position with respect to the discipline: a position that overt criticism might jeopardize. In musicology the feminist work that is produced tends to operate within a marginalized ghetto that adds fragments of information concerning women to the already existing canon but that does not dare tamper with the outlines of the canon itself. (p. ix)

The weight of the academy's onto-epistemological refrains, and the desire to belong, runs counter to feminist inquiry—to its think-ability and do-ability.

And now to my second story, this time from the world of male sport.

Renowned Australian footballer Alex McKinnon became a paraplegic at the age of 22 after a violent tackle (McKinnon & Riccio, 2015). When he lay on the ground, paralyzed, he writes, he was embarrassed to discover he was no longer a man and no longer human. To be crippled was to become an inanimate object. Being a man, he believed, was to be physical, to be strong in the world for yourself and your family, strong in your opinions, having unquestioned strength and dominance, to have a strong presence and be unwavering.

He explained in an interview that these were not qualities his father, also a footballer, had ever spoken to him about (Grant & McKinnon, 2020). He had simply observed, as a boy who loved his father, the way his father was, and how people responded so positively to his strength. Devastated by what he perceived as the loss of his manhood, McKinnon had no model of men reinventing themselves or of being vulnerable. Over time, he discovered a previously unthinkable possibility; he could become "a passionate and caring person." He is ***grateful, he tells his interviewer, for the accident*** that had made the person he now is a possibility.

For McKinnon, the violent tackle through which he lost what he perceived as his manhood, and with it his humanity, led to an agential cut in the normative assemblages through which he had known himself.

WHO WILL COUNT AS HUMAN?

It seems a strange question nowadays to ask: Who will count as human? Yet the normative assemblages that have defined some people as less than human still impact on current understandings of gender, ethnicity, and their related, intersecting binaries. In this Modern era, it has been taken for granted that some categories of people are less than human. Those who were regarded as such could be enslaved, bought and sold, and treated like animals. The documentation of colonial encounters provides many such examples (Davies, 2021a, 2021b; Haritaworn, 2015). For the past decade, at least, Australian refugees have been similarly treated as less than human, stripped of their names, given a number, refused emergency medical treatment, and confined indefinitely without charge (Boochani, 2018).

In the 1700s, slavery was an inevitable corollary to the belief that some categories of people are less than human (Foley, 2020). The outlawing of enslavement, and of the buying and selling of slaves, began in many parts of the world in the early 1800s. But the practices of slavery continue to this day, in particular the trading of sex slaves.

In the past, the laws of coverture made slaves of married women throughout the British Empire, North America, and Europe:

> Because they did not legally exist, married women could not make contracts or be sued, so they could not own or work in businesses. Married women owned nothing, not even the clothes on their backs . . . if a wife divorced or left a husband, she would not see her children again.
>
> Married women had no rights to their bodies. That meant that not only would a husband have a claim to any wages generated by his wife's labor or to the fruits of her body (her children), but he also had an absolute right to sexual access. Within marriage, a wife's consent was implied, so under the law, all sex-related activity, including rape, was legitimate. (Allgor, 2012)

The concept of coverture might sound like it belongs so far in the past that it is irrelevant to current-day feminist inquiry. Yet it still impacts on women's lives; I personally experienced every aspect of it during my violent marriage. While changing the laws of the land is vital feminist work that has been done, and goes on being done, the changing of habituated knowledges and practices is another matter entirely. The knowledge and practice of (white) male superiority and the underpinnings of male identity can be taken up by individuals and groups without knowing either their history or their violent implications in the present—as the stories of Goldsworthy and McKinnon show.

Weinstein (2015) argues it is the category of human itself that we need to think beyond if we are to open up the prospect of new and queer futures:

> We could say that life as we know it is a habit—one that strictly frames the limits of who gets interpreted as Human, and one that must be nervously reiterated in order to reinforce those limits. As such, it may be more apt to talk in terms of the *posthumous* than posthuman, inhuman, or nonhuman, thus deframing the manifold investments in life, breaking the habit, and refuting humanism more exhaustively. . . . We must continue to destabilize our life comfort zone, remain impure and contaminated, and direct our efforts toward the posthumously queer—the queer futurity foreclosed by humanisms, vitalisms, and identity politics of all stripes. (p. 238)

But positions of power are hard to relinquish, and as Halberstam (2015) says,

> The question for now remains whether the human, in all its brutal, colonial, racist glory, can give way long enough to allow for other in/ and out/ human forms to emerge, evolve, appear, perhaps like a new planet in the night sky, twinkling, as Barthes might say, and transmitting new messages of an out/human future. (p. 242)

We must remember to ask, however, "*Whose* conception of humanity are we moving beyond? . . . I have argued elsewhere that, far too often, gestures toward the 'post' or the 'beyond' effectively ignore praxes of humanity and critiques produced by black people, particularly those praxes which are irreverent to the normative production of 'the human' or illegible from within the terms of its logic" (Z. I. Jackson, 2015, p. 215). Not all cultural groups share the Western, Eurocentric view of the (white, male) human as being ascendant over women, the earth, and over more-than-human lifeforms.

SIX PRINCIPLES FOR ASKING QUESTIONS AND DEVELOPING STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY

Both the research questions and the conceptual tools taken up are necessarily emergent throughout the inquiry. The conceptual tools mobilized by feminist researchers make possible the initial question with/in their field of inquiry. As the study progresses or, rather, as it unfolds and re-folds itself, the original question will evolve, and along with it, the means of answering it. Or to put it another way, feminist inquiry in the 2020s tends not to rely on *method*, that is, on a predefined formula for data "collection," where slavish following of a method is claimed to guarantee truth about the data that were found "lying there." Feminist inquiry, rather, thinks with theory (A. Y. Jackson, 2017; Jackson & Mazzei, 2011), and it intra-acts with/in the field of inquiry, both with and against it, working toward the minor gesture, the line of flight, the agential cut.

Data are not inert but intra-active. Koro-Ljungberg and MacLure (2013, p. 219) lay down the challenge to "problematize conceptualizations of data as known, familiar, and inert objects, and to imagine more complex, creative and critical engagements with data in the conduct of research." That is, data do not replicate or re-present a world that is taken to exist already. In Barad's (2007) words, it "refuses the representationalist fixation on words and things and the problematic nature of their relationship, advocating instead *a relationality between specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted . . . and specific material phenomena*" (Barad, 2007, p. 139).

The researcher is also emergent with/in the inquiry—they are a differenciating self.

> Everything repeats itself and at the same time differenciates itself in a continuous process of becoming different. The researcher is *of* that world that goes on repeating itself, and yet becoming different. Our own possibilities of knowing-in-being are opened up through the work we do. We work with our own bodies, our own embeddedness in stratified, codified realities, in order to find and foster the conditions of creative production. (Davies, 2021c, p. 30)

"What is being called into question here is the very nature of the 'self'" (Barad, 2015, p. 158). The selves that we become in our intra-active inquiries are not essentialized identities but selves that are "dispersed/diffracted through time and being" (Barad, 2015, p. 159), selves that are sympathetic, capable of being moved *by* the other, and able to move *with* the other (Davies, 2021c; de Freitas & Truman, 2021).

We do not interact with the subject(s) of our research but intra-act. We exist in relation to others, human and more than human others who affect us, and whom we affect. Our intra-action with each other is driven by desire. This is so for all forms of life; it is not simply a desire to reproduce the matter of oneself, but to become more than oneself, other than oneself in intra-action with another: "Distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (Barad, 2007, p. ix). The concept of intra-action has radical implications for our understanding of agency. Our inquiries are not originated and managed by preexisting selves with preexisting questions and concepts, as we have previously thought, and as our neoliberal masters still think. "Agency is 'doing' or 'being' in its intra-activity" and involves "an ongoing reconfiguring of the world" (Barad, 2007, pp. 178, 141). In the words of Kuntz and St. Pierre (2021), "New inquiry, then, is always not-yet, to-come, a force of pure difference pushing through what has been normalized and stratified as it comes into existence" (p. 475).

Through feminist inquiry, the emergence of the not-yet-known deterritorializes the normative, taken-for-granted world, opening it up to difference and is always vulnerable to reterritorialization.

What is deterritorialized may be reterritorialized, drawn back into the fold from which it emerged. What starts out as a collective radical change, often inspired by feminist writing and art, and by inquiries that open up new thought, is, invariably, drawn back into the larger fold from which it emerges. Mowlabocus (2021) traces the process, for example, through which the gay and lesbian movement lost the disruptive possibility of upending the male–female binary, sweeping difference back into sameness in the interest of social acceptance and in the quest for equality. That normalizing capture of difference, he argues, means that what was radical and new reemerges as a homonormativity that espouses a "neoliberal morality that invests in a philosophy of self-governance, personal responsibility and individual sovereignty" (p. 6).

The dominant social/political waves of thought and action absorb or reterritorialize the smaller waves that run in different directions, sweeping them up and carrying them along in a normative surge. The dominant wave of neoliberalism is one such force, as Mowlabocus observes. Government ministers in New South Wales, for example, recently opposed teachers who were teaching children critical thinking, using as a resource media coverage of Black Lives Matter protests. The Minister for Police accused the teachers of brainwashing children with antipolice propaganda, while the Minister for Education declared that teachers who were found to be politicizing children would be subjected to disciplinary action (Faruqi, 2021). Both ministers were riding a dominant wave of normative, neoliberal, and populist conservatism, which they strengthened by absorbing and negating the protests, along with the teachers and students who were critically engaging with them.

And yet, the deconstructive movement—the challenge to the existing order, even when swamped by the dominant waves of normalization—nevertheless remains, as Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013, p. 676) demonstrate: "The new disturbs, intervenes and calls for attention" even when, and perhaps especially when, it is overridden. The energy for change is dispersed, yet it may, like the ocean waves, rebuild its force, creating subtle shifts that disturb normative gender and sexuality, moving them toward ethical forms of relationality.

Feminist inquiry is mobile and diffractive. The questions we ask, our means of asking and answering them, the subject(s) we research and ourselves as we engage in inquiry—all are in motion in relation to one another. Our research is diffractive. It explores how "data intra-act with other entangled agencies through waves of interruption, interference, and intervention . . . we don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know it because we are of the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 185). "This move from a relation of exteriority to one of interiority offers a diffractive shift in methodological thinking, including the nature of research design and data analysis" (Pomerantz & Raby, 2020, p. 987).

Elaborating the concept of diffraction, Barad (2007) writes that a diffractive analysis "involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter" (p. 30).

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES (I.E., WHAT IS UNDER DEBATE, PENDING, AND/OR UNRESOLVED IN THIS AREA?)

The incorporation of the ecology of the planet into feminist inquiry. De Freitas and Truman (2021, p. 523) write, "We stretch this term ecology into new territory, attending to the metamorphic nature of matter and trans-species intimacies," challenging the reader to explore the possibility of making "visible the inorganic potentialities and inhuman forces by which a body becomes transindividual and learns to 'branch out into territories beyond its own self-maintenance'" (de Freitas & Truman, 2021, citing Colebrook, 2014, p. 138).

The expansion of our sense of commonality in encompassing differences and our ongoing differenciation. New materialist feminism offers "a different political future, one that ultimately relates to care and commonality as well as to (new) modes and modalities of political agency" (Bargetz, 2018, p. 3). When we begin to imagine the world we live in as "a world of difference(s), a world in/as ongoing differenciation, in such ways that the outcome is not ever more separation and antagonism, exclusion and the fear of others, [then] new senses of commonality are envisioned" (Thiele, 2014, p. 202).

Continuing the challenges to "escape anthropocentrism and the transcendental relations of categorical reason, with its dualities of mind and matter, general and particular, global and local" (MacLure, 2021, p. 502). These are ongoing and experimental forays into the new, through which we learn to *overfly.* Enguix Grau generated the term *overflown bodies,* where *overflown* is the past participle of *overfly,* a term in common usage in the 1800s. It is a term that suggests overflowing, being filled to capacity and flowing over, spreading beyond one's limits: "Overflown bodies are open materialities, active social agents" (Enguix Grau, 2020, p. 2); they are "bodies without limits embedded in matter, social discourses, other bodies, gender and power. Like a body without organs, the overflown body is a body 'populated by multiplicities' that is activated by the confrontation with other bodies" (Enguix Grau, 2020, p. 3, citing Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 30). "Overflown bodies are characterised by openness, relationality and porosity towards other forces and stimulations. . . . The political agency and potentialities of overflown bodies rely on their visibility and their recognition" (Enguix Grau, 2020, p. 3). The flow in between, Enguix Grau (2020) points out, involves much more than human bodies. It involves "complex relationships of matter, discourse, emotions, affects, ideologies, protest, norms, values, relations, practices, expectations and other possibilities of (for) social and political action" (p. 1).

Reconfiguring ethics beyond institutional legal matters of risk aversion and the automatic positioning of research subjects as weak and vulnerable (Wyatt & Davies, 2011), moving toward matter and mattering and the examination of what comes to matter and how it comes to matter. This is an ethics that is not so interested in what experience is, but in making experience matter (Renold, 2018). "In place of the institutional ethics that tie down the research event to controlled and predictable practices and outcomes, new materialist ethics, in its unpredictability, never lets the researcher off the hook of considering how their emergent thoughts and actions matter" (Davies, 2021c, p. 9).

Greater recognition of the arts. To this end, Dionne (2020) offers the concept of involution: "Creative involution foregrounds a necessary entanglement between the projects that animate the arts and the sciences to produce knowledge and worlds" (p. 11). Taking the example of the wasps and the orchids that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write about, Dionne argues that their relation is not evolutionary; such a reading sees the orchids as tricking the wasps into pollinating them. An involutionary reading sees them as

> mutually engaging in playful endeavours *together,* desiring the un/doing, sensation and unknown that emerge through their vivid contact, their playful desire for superfluousness, vulnerability and the unknown, thus revealing at the heart of matter/nature/life *desiring* practices, to do and undo and redo together. (Dionne, 2020, p. 11)

It is this concept that opens up thought about the relevance of both science and art in their capacity to produce sensations in the researcher and in the matter and mattering being researched. This rethinking of the creative relationality of the orchids and wasps reveals "a matter that desires matter, a life that desires yearnings, excess, that is curious for the other, for radical alterity, embracing the incommensurability of alterity" (Dionne, 2020, p. 11).

Monadology: Rethinking the relation between the one and the many.

> Monadology offers an alternative way of thinking about individuation and distinctness, recasting the relationship between the one and the many. Distinctness is no longer that which separates and cuts off one individual or object from another, but refers rather to a particular fold or twist in the undulating fabric of the universe. . . . [Individuals] are continuous topological folds of the whole . . . [emerging] through continuous stretching and distortion. . . . This is a haptic theory of continuous relationality, a way of studying life as it contracts and expands across a continuum of mind-matter. (de Freitas, 2016, p. 225)

In monadology, in contrast to earlier methods that attempted to represent the world, "to *know* is to track the contiguity *between*, to flow through the connecting lines, and feel the collective affect as it contracts into a knot, or expands and undulates across the surface of a swarm. *To know is to become* this material configuration of proliferating folds and crenellations" (de Freitas, 2016, p. 227).

The superfold of digital lifeforms. Digital life forms a kind of superfold, or overfold. "If the fold conveys a smoothness, the superfold introduces an algorithmic iteration, a transversal crease in the fabric. The superfold is thus the crease or line that produces a repetition within the monadology" (de Freitas, 2016, p. 227). "Researchers must learn how to critique the particular software practices adopted in the field, while also becoming more inventive in altering this software to suit unscripted futures" (de Freitas, 2016, p. 233).

Taking account of Thing-Power: "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle . . . thing-power arises from bodies inorganic as well as organic" (Bennett, 2010, p. 6). The "I" Bennett explains is

> a compound of human and nonhuman parts, [and] is continually entering and leaving larger assemblages (ideologies, diets, cultures, technological regimes) made up of other sets of composite or compound bodies. A full acknowledgement of the porosity and contagion between bodies would entail a dramatic revision of the role of "will" and "intentionality" in human agency. (Bennett, 2012, pp. 256–257)

Rethinking causality. Jackson and Mazzei (2016, p. 103), working with Bennett, talk about distributed causality as "an agentic swarm of fractal causality," wherein no one body in the assemblage can be said as directly un/intentionally causal of events, but rather, "everything in the assemblage works as an aggregate: the interminglings produce affects, potentialities and desires," as an agentic assemblage. Chandler (2013) elaborates on Bennett, explaining that the

> ontological focus is being changing being—objects transforming objects—rather than subjects transforming objects. In relations of emergent causality there are therefore no subject–object relations as this positional divide is overcome through the understanding of process relations. . . . It is the assemblage that has agency rather than the specific actors per se. (p. 530)

CONCLUSION—WHERE MIGHT FEMINIST INQUIRY GO IN THE NEXT DECADE?

Feminist inquiry will most likely draw deeply on feminist new materialist scholars such as Barad and Bennett. The major issues that will need to be addressed include the question of what it is to be human, or posthuman, even posthumous, and what human interconnectivity is with other

beings, animate and inanimate. Deeply embedded in the question of what it is to be human is the ongoing question of how feminist inquiry might move us beyond the male–female binary and beyond the identity politics that define us in terms of the category we belong to—belong, that is, according to one normative position or another. While some have seen the multiplication of genders as the answer (such as the 58 gender options that Facebook provides), the debates for and against this multiplication tend to "congeal into new rigid norms and allow for a decontextualized culture of policing that actually creates limiting environments . . . [and creates] a proliferation also of boundaries" (Nicholas, 2021, p. 7). The challenge is to move beyond categories that represent us and limit us, toward life in its diffractive, emergent, relational immanence, in its intra-active becoming. Moving beyond binary categorizations, beyond the multiplication of categories, and beyond the shifting between categories is to think of the "self" as "always already multiply dispersed and diffracted through spacetime(mattering) . . . in its ongoing being-becoming" (Barad, 2014, pp. 181–182).

The urgency of rethinking what we are, and what mo(ve)ments we generate, is embedded in global climate change and the immanent end of the human species in the event that our immediate interventions are unsuccessful. Lying behind and against the urgency of those interventions are the environmental catastrophes already upon us. The fires in New South Wales in 2020, for example, were, globally, the most extreme ever recorded. They were followed by devastating floods and by the global pandemic that has impacted, and goes on impacting on all of us, in ways we do not yet understand. Entangled with the immanent destruction of the planet are neoliberal forms of government and control that individualize and control us, setting us against each other, directing money and power to planet-destroying corporations, and further impoverishing the powerless. The flow of displaced humans—the global refugee crisis—is being further intensified by the warming of the planet and by cruel forms of detention and blocking of borders. Feminist inquiry in the next decade will no longer see humanity as being above, and independent of, other forms of life on the planet, but as intra-active, affecting and being affected by the vitality of the material world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. There are many institutional practices in those places where we conduct our research that lean toward normative, well-established, methodical pathways. In what ways do they "kill the immersive, experimental character of ontological or 'postqualitative' inquiry" (MacLure, 2021, p. 506; see also A. Y. Jackson, 2017; St. Pierre, 2019)? What are those normative practices in your institution? What is their history? What are the forces that hold them in place that lie outside the institution and with/in it and with/in yourself as a researcher?
2. What part does desire, your own and others', play in the maintenance of those normativities?
3. What concepts and what strategies can feminist inquiry draw on to reach beyond the already known, bringing new things into view? What concepts have you encountered in reading this chapter that open the possibility of such openness in your own knowing-in-being?
4. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) famously said, "To think is always to follow the witch's flight" (p. 41). What do they mean when they use such a provocative metaphor? What part do uncertainty, caution, and risk play in any research project?

5. If thinking outside the already known is a form of madness, inducing lines of flight into the not-yet-known, how are we to avoid getting trapped into seeing ourselves caught in between the Scylla and Charybdis of "mediocre lives and mad thinkers" (Deleuze, 2005, p. 67)? How are our lives enlivened by new possibilities that thought opens up?