Becoming (Musical) Woman—Virtual Femininity Beyond Gender in Interplay with Spotify

Cecilia Ferm Almqvist 1*

Published: March 5, 2021

ABSTRACT
Earlier research states that music listening at home is mainly steered by men. It seems that gender patterns steer possibilities in relation to music, which is in line with how power relations are constituting the Anthropocene. An earlier interview study suggested that musical, and to some extent digital embodied experience, constitute crucial preconditions for how a streaming service is used for meaning. The interviews showed that the streaming service offered possibilities for expanding becoming of selves beyond gender identifications. Eight interviews were performed with female-identified users aged between 14 to 62, with an interest in music, in the spirit of internet-related ethnography, based on a narrative inquiry way of thinking. Hence, they were interviewed at the same time as the users handled their Spotify interface setup. The interviewees were recorded, transcribed and analysed in a narrative manner. The results show how and to what extent the user-Spotify relation offers possibilities to expanding becoming, or virtual femininity. Braidotti’s (2017) concepts of feminist becoming woman, and virtual femininity are used as theoretical lenses in relation to the analysis. The article shows how entanglements with technology, music, human actors, and views of relationships contribute to virtual femininities.

Keywords: Anthropocene, virtual femininity, gender capture, Spotify, musical becoming

INTRODUCTION
Several scholars have criticised the academic concept of the Anthropocene epoch for being dominated by hetero-patriarchal configurations and conversations. Stoller (2014) argues that an active and engaged academic praxis is needed to respond to the impacts of this. In addition, Gruisin (2017) sheds light on the need to respond to the currently employed hyper-masculinist and techno-focused strategies for addressing the problems of the Anthropocene and to create a groundwork for more robust feminist ecologies. Todd (2015) questions the Anthropocene concept itself and asks what other stories might be told and what language is being silenced. She questions whose space the Anthropocene is, and who is not there, and stresses the importance of interrogating the conceptual apparatus behind the environmental change the Anthropocene is meant to identify. It has been stated that the condition of the Anthropocene has to be addressed by crossing boundaries between the humanities and sciences, as well as between cultures and natures (Haraway, 1988; Guattari, 2000; Brennan and Devine, 2020). Hence the concept of the Anthropocene calls upon scholars to see themselves as participants in a ‘becoming world’, where everything is interconnected and exploration takes place in tentative, ‘trial and error’ sort of ways (Gibson-Graham, 2011). In turn, Donald’s (2009) notion of ‘ethical relationality’ also ‘seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other’ (6) and provides a framework through which to read the discourses of the Anthropocene. Donald further emphasises the relationality between all things and all relationships, which reaffirms the way these connections are enmeshed in ‘web of relationality’ (2009: 12).

In music research, it is important to move from music studies about the Anthropocene towards studies in the Anthropocene, with an awareness of the ways in which music and music-distribution connect to several aspects of the humanities–science/nature–culture spectra (Brennan and Devine 2020). Hence, the task for research, according to Dumanoski (2009), is not to predict, but to experiment and act inventively via diverse adventures in living.
Anthropocene feminism can be viewed as such an experiment (Gruisin, 2017: xi), countering the 'technoscientific desire of specificity, definition and fact', and allowing for the assembly of small-scale systems and the responsibility for all human and non-human actants. Braidotti (2017: 34) further stresses that current feminist thinkers need to ‘actualize virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature–culture continuum and is technologically mediated but still framed by multiple power relations’. Accordingly, the challenge is to reach beyond the gender norms that can threaten these opportunities.

One such virtual opportunity to expand relational selves situated in a technology-mediated virtual web of nature–culture actants is the user–Spotify relation, where streaming music and active users are intertwined. Spotify seems to dominate the Swedish market when it comes to streamed distribution of music, which implies a unique possibility for music cultivation among people living in Sweden. As Spotify is established in a large number of other countries (more than 70) as well, and have over 150 billion users, this should be the case for a large amount of the population (Leijonhufvud and Ferm Almqvist, 2020). Earlier studies have illuminated the opportunities for explorative bildung, or expanded becoming, as well as the power relations that diminish these opportunities, within Spotify–user relations (Ferm Almqvist et al., 2020a; Fleischer and Snickars, 2018). On the one hand explorative bildung offers opportunities to become your full potential (Ekberg and Schwieder, 2020; Ferm Almqvist et al. 2020b). But on the other hand, technical, commercial, legal and normative structures threaten to shape users and reduced them mainstream listeners (Fleischer and Snickars, 2019; Burkart, 2020). A recent interview study by the author of a variety of users showed that musical, and to some extent digital, embodied experiences are needed for users to interact with the streaming service in meaningful ways that allow and promote expanding selves (Ferm Almqvist et al. 2020b). Such experiences appeared to be more important than the user’s sexual orientation or gender identification. The results showed that female-identifying participants were involved in webs of relations with the streaming service that led to diverse experiences and becoming, to the same extent as male-identified users were.
These results are startling and, given that steering documents at several levels call for music to be accessible to everyone, and that earlier research has not found equal accessibility in the way this study did, the opportunities offered by virtual streaming are worth further investigation. For instance, both Ganetz et al. (2009) and Green (2002) show that traditional gender structures are produced and reproduced in professional musical life. For example, Smith et al. (2018) and Bain (2019) show that males are highly overrepresented on the Billboard List (USA), as well as among British artists contracted by distributors, and Berker et al. (2019) state that female artists strongly experience the Dutch music industry to be steered by male-identifying actors, which has multiple implications for the female artists and their opportunities. In addition, certain musical instruments are still gendered (Hallam et al., 2008). It can also be stated that traditionally female-coded instrument choices among men, for example singing, offer extensive space for expression and development, whilst females who choose instruments associated with males, such as composing or electric guitar, are diminished and questioned (Armstrong, 2013). These patterns are to be found even in music educational settings (Borgström-Källén, 2014; Ferm Almqvist, 2019; Green, 2010). Lilliestam and Bossius’ (2012) study of music use in the home shows that participants identified as women often let go of their musical interests when entering a relationship, adapting their musical interests to those of their partners. In addition, none of the study’s interviewees spoke about their mothers’ discography, whilst the men’s collection of record albums seems to represent their biography. The study also made clear that male participants continue their musical interest even after family contracts. They let the males buy music for the home, download music for (common) listening, and even take space for their own music-making.

It becomes clear that the virtual opportunities for expanding of selves, as well as the potential pitfalls, offered by the user–Spotify relational situation are worthy of further investigation from an Anthropocene perspective. This article thus explores the potential for becoming woman found in the entanglement of female-identifying actants, technology and art. The aim is to investigate and discuss opportunities for female relational expanding selves, situated in Scandinavia, viewed as experimental diverse adventures in living. More specifically the becoming of sexual musical selves is explored through the entanglements of female-identifying users, the streaming service Spotify, other actants, music and sexuality. To produce material for analysis and thus fulfill the aim of the study, situations seen as webs of relations including the actants of female-identified users, me, Spotify interfaces, and a web communication tool, were created.

**CONNECTING STUDIES**

The network of actants surrounding human–Spotify relations was described by Leijonhufvud (2018: III) as ‘liquid affordances of musicking’ based on the starting point that music has an exceptional ability to help human beings to become expanding selves, saturated by previous embodied musical experiences. In her investigation, Leijonhufvud uses the concept of affordance to mark that the user is inscribed in the design of the service. Other actants that constitute the network are identified as employees, management, culture, Internet Service Providers, manufactures of digital devices, software algorithms and music formats, as well as Economic Maecenases and legislators. It is in this multifaceted network that users have the opportunity to become expanded musical sexual selves, not least in the interaction with the liquid—continually changing—service’s interface. The fluid situation constitutes the basis for musical experience through all kinds of media, which requires connection and engagement from all involved.

In my above-mentioned interview study (Ferm Almqvist et al., 2020b), which is a part of a larger cross-disciplinary research project (Ferm Almqvist et al., 2020a), we stated that musical and digital embodied experience constitute a prerequisite for musical meaning making, or *bildung*, in relation with Spotify. Transformed to a post-human way of thinking, musical and digital becoming have an influence on the becomings that can possibly take place in entanglements where the Spotify service, as a multiple archive steered by commercial, algorithmic, legal and structural powers, functions as one of the actants. Human actants must be active, aware, sensitive and critical in relation to these powers, and at the same time must remain open to new expanding becomings in relation to music (see Ferm Almqvist et. al., 2020a, Åker, 2018, Fleischer and Snickars. 2018). Music is a multifaceted phenomenon (Nielsen, 1998). From a post-human perspective, it becomes possible to say that music, as an embedded and embodied actant, can become acoustic, structural, tensional, bodily, existential and emotional, and can contribute in the entanglement with the all of these. It is important that music in its full potential is present in relational interactions, to avoid the risk that becomings are captured by traditional (patriarchal) patterns when it comes to, for example, genre, style, quality, instrumentation, sexuality, strong experiences or possible expressions.

Yet, earlier research focusing upon gender issues in relation to Spotify use, shows that traditional gender patterns tend to limit possibilities for such expanding becoming. Werner and Johansson’s (2016) study that investigated Spotify use among young females, argued that digital music use, at the time of the study, was shaped by discourses of difference, with gender a significant factor in terms of both constructions of the ideal user and
musical influence and guidance: in sum, they question the assumption of neutral use. They discovered that ideas about activities, values, expertise and technology, in relation to sexuality as well as family influences, are structured by gender norms. In addition, Eriksson and Johansson (2017) found that female artists appear in search results in lower numbers than male artists, independent of searching strategy. They used a range of ‘bot experiments’ and found out that listening recommendations favoured male artists to a very high extent, which the researchers connect to preservation of masculine norms within the music industry. They thus underline the non-neutral interaction between music, user and algorithms in Spotify use. Werner (2020a) observes that the functions related artists, discover and browse, through which algorithms steer what is offered to individual users, create closed circles for music consumption with reference to gender. She has also investigated the extent to which the commercial application Smirnoff can equalise individual listening, and thus break the closed circles regarding the artist’s gender (Werner, 2020b). Werner studied Smirnoff Equalizer advertisements that claim that the programme measures the balance between female and male artists in a Spotify account and suggests female identified artists to the listener via playlists. Her analysis of the messages of the advertisements showed that the responsibility for equalising what is offered by Spotify is still on the user, that numeric representation is used as a goal, and that the context of the Equalizer as well as its algorithmic architecture are hidden, even if it is claimed that the data the Equalizer uses for recommendations of female identified artists is neutral. Spotify recommendations also fail to help to remember marginalised artists (see Robinson 2020), placing the responsibility on an active user.

In other words, digital and musical embodied experience is not enough when it comes to ‘neutral’ becoming in relation to Spotify among female identified actants. Strategies and situations for new expanding becoming must address, overcome, break down, or go beyond structural barriers. Werner (2018) has shown that space is more important than place in creating creative musical worlds in relation to digital media. She underlines the development from mobility to movement, and notes that situations can be created in interplay with technique and music, where in and between movement in time and space becomes possible. Hence, in allowing musical becoming to happen, the virtual space per se seems to be more important than where it is placed. In other words, equal access to technology and time seems crucial for musical becoming amongst musically and digitally experienced females. Still, limiting societal expectations, as well as those of the women themselves, regarding who gets access to technology and time—and hence space—for musical becoming, itself puts limits on the opportunities (Baker, 2004), even in the feminist user–Spotify web of relations.

**EMBEDDED AND EMBODIES IN THE ZOE-WORLD—THEORETICAL STARTING POINTS**

Braidotti (2017) sheds light on the complexity of the Anthropocene. She underlines that the Anthropocene ‘entails not only the critique of species supremacy—the rule of Anthropos—but also the parameters that used to define it’ (26). Accordingly, man is seen as a powerful representative species whose centrality is threatened by scientific development and economic concerns. The ‘ex-man’ (Massumi, 1998) is embedded in the materiality of the human. One consequence of such a view is a human–non-human continuum, preserved and maintained by current technology. A central feminist scholar in this tradition is Haraway (1988), who among others contributed to setting the agenda for a new tradition of politicised science and technology studies, interrelated with feminist body politics. Not least, she underlined the need for critical thinking based on a technology-mediated view of the nature–culture continuum and challenged the dichotomies of human–non-human, nature–culture, male–female, European–non-European, and so on. As one movement originating from this post-anthropocentric turn, the development of information technologies, including global mediation possibilities, opens the door to new ways of thinking. The question explored in this article, of becoming woman in the entanglement of females, technology and art, can be understood as one outcome, or part, of this movement. A post-human feminist thinker, according to Braidotti (2017: 29), is:

> a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires major readjustments in our ways of thinking. But she remains committed to social justice, and while acknowledging the fatal attraction of global meditation, is not likely to forget that one-third of the population has no access to electricity.

According to Donald (2009), such an ethic holds that the past occurs simultaneously in the present and influences how we conceptualise the future. He further emphasises that the approach requires that we see ourselves as related to, and involved in, the lives of those yet to come. Hence, it becomes an ethical imperative to value the meaning of relationships with others, the way life histories and experiences are layered and position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people similarly are tied together. ‘It is also an ethical imperative to see that, despite our varied situated cultures and knowledge systems, we live in the world together with others and must constantly
think and act with reference to these relationships’ (Donald, 2009: 7). It becomes important to be aware of what experiences of and in relationships make us even more tightly connected, and in turn contribute to our life worlds.

We must keep in mind that the current study is situated in a North European, Scandinavian context, but it presents an important and current case of becoming, where possibilities for interrelations between female-identified actants, technology and art are put on the table. Braidotti (2017) suggests a "zoe-view (non-human)" of a world that is based on an egalitarian vision that allows for relations, alliances and mutual detailed statements. That all agents in the ‘zoe-world are embedded and embodied, as well as situated, is an important starting point for making possible such a view of life and a world that is dynamic and self-organised. Her view is that such an approach can offer an understanding of the fluid and complex workings of power in a capitalist driven world and can, in that way, contribute resistance to taken-for-granted norms. Todd (2015) emphasises that an effective art of the Anthropocene is one that directly engages with the structural violence of heteropatriarchy as it shapes discourse and praxis. The current study, which explores expanded becoming of musical selves among females in Scandinavia surrounded by capitalist, legal, technological, and structural powers, can function as some kind of resistance to the threat of rooted gendered behaviours and habits.

Members of the ‘zoe-species are always embedded and embodied, enfleshed and relational, and thus creatively ‘zoe-centred, aware of the location, and capable of becoming. Further, Braidotti (2017) underlines that the technologically mediated world does not per se categorise or divide people or cultures, and thus should be able to function as an alternative ground for formation of selves. But as we know, capitalistic powers have interrogated ‘zoe-related interrelations, as Werner’s studies (2020a; 2020b) show with becoming selves in interaction with Spotify, for example. Therefore, Braidotti (2017) suggests, sexuality must be rethought, beyond gender. She further argues that generative powers of female embodiment must be re-evaluated. Sexuality thus becomes a constitutive force, already present, prior to gender, and as a part of the open space of virtual relations. Otherwise, sexuality is governed by gender.

Instead, Braidotti (2011) argues for the feminist becoming woman, or the virtual feminine, that is to return socially constituted gendered identities of woman, the virtual multiplicity of ‘chaosmic’ forces of becoming. And—

CREATING RESEARCH WEB OF RELATIONS

To come close to the entanglement of becoming sexual expanding selves in the interrelations with Spotify, actants and music, access to the Spotify users’ qualitative descriptions of their everyday activities and lived experiences of streaming media interactions seemed to be crucial. Inspired internet-related ethnography (Postill and Pink, 2012), I chose to interview female-identifying Spotify users in the moment they handled their Spotify interface setup, such as the view of their mobile phone-, table-, or computer screen when logged in on their Spotify account. Internet-related ethnography is defined by Postill and Pink (2012) as an approach that engages with internet practices and content directly, but not exclusively. Spotify use, like social media, can be viewed as a research environment that ‘is dispersed across web platforms, is constantly in progress and changing, and that implicates physical as well as digital localities’ (Postill and Pink, 2012: 125). Accounting for face-to-face social and material contexts such as Spotify environments therefore became necessary. The interviewee and I sat together in front of a computer where the user was logged in at her own Spotify account. To some extent, the participant–Spotify use relation functioned as both the research subject and the tool for research. The interviews both were stimulated by and influenced the use of Spotify in the actual situation (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). The interviewee, as well as I, myself, could both depart from and continuously relate to various events and activities fixed in the Spotify graphic user interface. This facilitated the orientation of the data sampling session towards the users’ experiences and memories of specific situations and events as points of departures for the interview conversation.

The recruitment of interviewees was conducted through convenience sampling (Flick, 2014). This means that all the subjects were Scandinavian, and previously to some extent known to me. Eight female-identifying users of different ages (14 to 62), studying or teaching music, were recruited to get access to a broad collection of Spotify-use experiences. In the interviews, which were performed during winter 2019–20, the participants shared their
experiences of music activities related to the use of Spotify, as well as their activity history as it was presented at the Graphic User Interface. The conversations also focused on the interviewees’ relations to music and music activities in general.

Each user’s Spotify-related activities were documented by saved activities at the website, which were studied and reflected upon during the interview. The stimulated recall interviews, including explorations of the interface, were documented using the audio recording, as well as the screen sharing and recording feature in the chosen web conference software application (Zoom). The eight interviews each lasted 50–70 minutes per session. The recordings were transcribed and subjected to narrative analysis in accordance with Clandinin et al. (2007), aiming to make the participants’ voices and stories heard. Here, I will present the findings partly in an overarching way, considering all participants’ experiences, showing different examples of becoming, in the ‘femininity-user–music–Spotify’ web of relations. Primarily though the results are presented through one narrative, based on one of the interviews, showing a divergent becoming where diverse sexualities are at play. In sum, possibilities for female relational expanding selves, viewed as experimental diverse adventures in living, are visualised by text and pictures, and discussed.

**BECOMING WOMAN AS VIRTUAL FEMININITY IN THE USER-SPOTIFY WEB OF RELATIONS**

Roughly interpreted, the analysis of the material makes clear that the older participants in the study first and foremost relate to Spotify in situations aiming to offer musical experiences and opportunities to become musical selves to pupils, family and friends: the participants thus become teachers, music organisers, or choir leaders, rather
than expanding feminist musical selves. To handle such situations, the results show that interaction with the technology-, law- and business-steered service demands active users who do not just ‘take what they get’, but cross barriers and develop strategies for responsible choices. At the same time, although the older participants are using their musical and digital experience, as well as good musical equipment, the result is still that they become women that fulfil the traditional female-connoted expectations of caring, socialising and, to some extent, musical subordination.

But there are also examples of the web of relations contributing to the becoming of diverse virtual femininities, which include more than the traditionally feminine-related roles and behaviours. Situations are created where expanding selves in relation to music have the possibility to become. It seems obvious, though, that there is a risk of being trapped by age- and gender-connected traditional listening habits which suits Spotify’s commercial idea, or that the male-identifying inhabitants of a household will tend to decide what the females to listen to. Still, there are lots of examples of the more egalitarian musical becoming in the material, which also offer movement in time and space that is seen by the older participants as a revolution. One participant expresses that she loves living alone, where she is able to choose for herself among the multitude of offers, what music sounds in her home. The participants are involved in relational webs of becoming on the move, when exercising, in situations of non-interruption, in the unknown, in worlds of deepening, and in worlds of performance. The interviewees act in aware ways in the user–Spotify web of relations, at the same time as they are open for new aesthetic and existential experiences.

One of the interviewees, Inger, creates musical worlds for herself, for example aiming to create spaces for concentration, or training. When it comes to concentration, when she is to work at a café for example, it is important for her that she knows the music very, very well; it must be music that she has heard so many times that she does not hear it anymore. When it comes to training on the other hand, she has other criteria for what kind of music she chooses: energy and tempo, that the music works in a rather noisy environment, and finally that the music is interesting enough to distract her from training challenges. She organises different setups for the music as an actant to interact with, and she influences the web of relations in varied ways.

‘New releases’ is an important function at the interface according to Inger. She uses it in a conscious way to let herself be in the unknown. She checks the offered list every Friday and looks for new albums from interesting artists. Inger listens once to all the new releases, but to get a second listening, the music must be perceived as really good. Other lists that she follows to get access to new musical experiences are available via Spotify but created in collaboration with, for example, a magazine or a blog. Here even more actants are involved in the web of relations, and they all influence each other. Inger values the lists that are continually upgraded, and, for example, she finds nice songs through the NPHAP (Nothing But Hope And Passion) playlist. In the following section we will consider part of Inger’s story.

**INGER’S STORY – A COMPLEX ASSEMBLAGE OF FEMININE VIRTUALITIES**

As an example of how a female-identifying user, intertwined in the technology, music, sexuality entanglement that the service Spotify offers, interacts with her egalitarian self, I share a story told by the 37-year-old woman called Inger. She has been married for seven years, and lives with her husband and two children, who are 5 and 8 years old. She is a PhD student in music and works part time as a music teacher. She is also involved in a relationship with a man called Lasse, who is not her partner, but is more than a friend.

In our home we take turns when it comes to who decides what music that should sound in the apartment, both children and adults. But I also have an agreement with my husband, that I can put my noise-cancelling headphones on and listen undisturbed to music when I do household work of some sort. That is a piece of freedom, I mean I have small children, and I can say that now I am occupied, and if they want something, they have to come to me and knock on my shoulder, or preferably turn to their father. So, I am available if the issue is important, but then they can’t hassle all the time. I think that is a good thing. And I have a really kind husband, he is much more patient and kinder than me in a way. So, if I have been at work and is exhausted, we can agree that I get an hour for household work, and that he takes the kids during that time. By that I do something meaningful and can relax at the same time.

Humans, non-humans, relations, technology, home, space, place, family and music interact in the user–technology–music entanglement described above. Not least, we can see becoming of distanced from the family – which interrelates with virtual becoming femininity. Inger becomes something more than mother and worker through the interplay with technology – her sound cancelling headphones and the Spotify interface – with music, and with her husband. But at the same time, she remains in the role of the woman of the household.
As we can see, specific musical qualities and values are closely intertwined and act in the entanglement. What of Inger, to see how this is happening.

In the process of continually becoming. The weave of relations and actors is complex and intertwined, as well as another human actant, Lasse, and in that way, it becomes obvious how the concept of love relations is also situated and at play at the same time.

It becomes clear, here, is how different musical and relational dimensions of expanding becoming are intertwined in the network activities, in ways that create opportunities for all other actants, but also sets limits for the actual processes of becoming. They are not offered the same suggestions from the service, they can't always choose exactly which songs they want, and the fluent interface is changing all the time. One thing is that the limitations of communicating, both at distance and when we are together. Of course, we talk as well when we meet, music, so there are a lot of different music, Frank Sinatra and Nina Simone as well. So, this is our way of communicating, both at distance and when we are together. Of course, we talk as well when we meet, but the play list constitutes the core of the relationship.

All actants influence embellishment in the process of becoming – such as the music Inger chooses, as well as the music Lasse has chosen for her. To develop, intertwinement towards egalitarian mutual engagement and interconnectedness is required, which seems to happen in the case of Inger and Lasse. Sustainable relations and families from a feminist post-human perspective demand that anyone can be active in the human–technology networks they want to be in. Of course, the commercial algorithm-steered service of Spotify is active and interferes in the network activities, in ways that create opportunities for all other actants, but also sets limits for the actual processes of becoming. They are not offered the same suggestions from the service, they can't always choose exactly which songs they want, and the fluent interface is changing all the time. One thing is that the limitations and commercial interests of the service force humans to develop strategies to broaden opportunities for widening becoming, on equal grounds – something Inger is continually working on. We will continue following the narrative of Inger, to see how this is happening.

There is a lot of American music, country, that direction [in the list], because we have that in common. Then there is some disco and pop, and a bit of funk, Old funk and old disco, and some classical country. And if I search in this list, you can see that there is for example, Daniel Romano, he is a common favourite, and we have been to one of his concerts together. Then we have Matt Maltese, a lot of his music, so there are a lot of different music, Frank Sinatra and Nina Simone as well. So, this is our way of communicating, both at distance and when we are together. Of course, we talk as well when we meet, but the play list constitutes the core of the relationship.

As we can see, specific musical qualities and values are closely intertwined and act in the entanglement. What becomes clear, here, is how different musical and relational dimensions of expanding becoming are intertwined and at play at the same time.

The playlists that constitute the core of the relationship is co-created and continually developed together with another human actant, Lasse, and in that way, it becomes obvious how the concept of love relations is also situated in the process of continually becoming. The weave of relations and actors is complex and intertwined, as well as fluid, and constitutes the embeddedness for Inger’s feminist becoming woman. How the entanglement contributes to expanded sexualities and virtual femininity becomes clear. The following offers insight into how Inger and the Spotify interface, as well as other media sources, interact in the love relation entanglement.

I have a system for how I put new songs into the list. I have one list called ‘Well, maybe’ and there I put songs that might qualify for the shared list. I often read reviews and find out who have played together. Now and then that is available in newspapers, and I can see that someone is playing before an interesting artist, and then I want to check that out. I might go to that artists’ Spotify webpage and read about it. And it can be that there is a link to a text, which make it possible to grasp who has produced the music and the like. Or the function ‘fans like also’ is useful to learn about closeness between artists, both related to geography and genre. Based on that I might put a song on my ‘Well, maybe’ list without listening.

Then the songs, after listening, might proceed to the ‘Yes, maybe’ list, and by that the chance that I put the song at the common list is close. Now and then, I find a song that I know that I want to put on the common list, but the occasion is not perfect, for some reason, and then they are placed at the list ‘Sure,’ which is a very short playlist. Because, I have thought when I found the songs, ‘oh, perfect for a birthday’, or ‘perfect for some other occasion’. You know, then I know where I have them. Whether they proceed or not depends partly on if I like the music or not and partly that the text must be within the frames of what I think I can say to him, if you understand what I mean. Then we have some other play-lists, for example Christmas. I almost never listen to that list, because that is almost like a Spotify discussion.
To go beyond gender structures and be connected in the web of user–Spotify relations in ways that allow virtual femininity, musical and digital embodied experience is useful. The text above shows how today’s music technology can be used for communication beyond gendered expectations. Inger’s story tells us that she is aware of how to find and organise music in relation to the interface, but also that she is open to the unknown, to life adventures. She becomes a musical woman, she becomes a technical woman, she becomes a more-than-mother woman, she becomes a multi-relationship in-love woman in a closely connected entanglement. The music as well as Spotify become actants and contributors to relationships and musical embodiment, at the same time as the interface becomes a sorted archive in several layers, to mention some obvious becomings.

And we meet now and then, but not as often that he wants it to be, so if there are long time gaps in between that we put music in the list, it is not so good for him. He looks forward to me contributing something to the list, and I look forward to his contributions. So, it is important for me that not too much time flies in between the sharings. And if other things happen and hinder my contributions, it is important that he gets to know that. You can see that we both shared music yesterday afternoon, I try to put in something once a day. Hence, it is important for me to find something nice to put there. If it is my turn. I can go back and find periods when I didn’t share so frequently, and I know that was occupied with other things at that time. It is almost like a diary. The list actually started before we had agreed upon what our relationship should look like. So, in the start I was going for vacation at a place without internet covering and created a playlist with songs I wanted to bring. So, in the start it was just me, and I said ‘if you see any songs that are missing, you can put them there’. And then there was one song from him, and gradually, he started to contribute with several songs. It took a while before we found a shape for that, and for us and our relationship. So, in the beginning we put in several songs at a time. And by then the text was not so important. But the songs are cool, and at one moment, about half a year ago, we started more and more with contributing every second time. Still, it is him who contributes the most, because he has more musical experience than me. But, eventually, you can see that the text became more and more important. Like when I shared Falling in love with you, and I felt like ohohoh. Life would be different without him, really very different.

It becomes obvious that the entanglement leads the two human actants into a to some extent egalitarian love relation, an example of virtual femininity. What we see are that they take equal part in the communication, based on embodied music-digital literacy. But it also appears that some deeply rooted gender powers are at play, and to some extent snare the becoming woman. These gender powers become visible as threads of caring, anxiety of loss, and musical subordination which are visible ‘between the lines’ in Inger’s story.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

As was stated at the beginning of this article, female-identifying humans have been, and are, marginalised and placed in the periphery of musical life (Ganetz et al., 2009; Green, 2002; Armstrong, 2013; Robinson, 2020). Another starting point for the current study was that the Anthropocene calls us to recognise that we are all participants in the ‘becoming world’, where everything is interconnected, and becomings happen in trial and error sorts of ways (Gruisin, 2017; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Donald 2009): experiments and life adventures are encouraged. Hence, experiments where all actants have the opportunity to become musical sexual diverse selves must be conducted and performed, in order to find egalitarian ways of being and becoming with music, beyond gender. Even if companies like Spotify are products of the Anthropocene, steered and driven by patriarchal, capitalist forces that risk trapping behaviours and experiences in traditional unequal gender patterns, it seems that the techno-musical service offers entanglements where all can become female relational expanding selves. But to make that happen, all actants must be aware of the interconnectedness and open to uncertainty and diverse adventures of living, in which several pathways of becoming are encouraged and taken care of.

Otherwise, there is a risk that the user–Spotify web of relations will contribute to the preservation of traditional gender norms and patterns. This is a risk not only of Spotify’s own approach to gendered users, but also as some female actants seem to take what they get and hence get trapped by traditional woman-connoted gender forces (Werner and Johansson, 2016). The question is how female-defined users can become aware of opportunities for becoming expanding sexual selves, about the world of feminine virtualities, beyond gender to use Braidotti’s concepts. Another question is how a zoe-view of sexual relational selves can allow ‘older women’ (over 40) to let themselves be in musical becoming settings, without having to divorce or go to the training studio. The story of Inger shows one example of how entanglements with technology, music, human actors and views of relationships contribute to virtual femininities. But what would several stories look like? The post-human lens helps us to see
that such stories demand that all are aware of connectedness, and how that connectedness can be used for change, in the Anthropocene.

REFERENCES

Åker, P. (2018). Spotify as the soundtrack to your life: Encountering music in the costumized archive, in S. Johansson, A. Werner, P. Åker, P. and G. Goldenzwaig. (eds), Streaming Music Practices, media, cultures, (pp. 81–104). New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207889-6

Armstrong, V. (2013). Women’s Musical Lives: Self-Managing a Freelance Career. Women: A Cultural Review, 24(4), 298–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2013.850598

Bain, V. (2019). Counting the music history: The gender gap. A study of gender inequality in the UK music industry. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/40898607/. (Accessed: 25 January 2021).

Baker, S. L. (2004). Pop in(to) the Bedroom: Popular Music in Pre-Teen Girls' Bedroom Culture. European Journal of Cultural Studies, 7(1), 75–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/1367549404039861

Bennett, E., Biggs, R., Peterson, G., McPhearson, T., Norström, A., Olsson, P., Preiser, R., Raudsepp-Hearne, C. and Vervoort, J. (2018). Seeds of the Future in the Present: Exploring Pathways for Navigating Towards ‘Good’ Anthropocenes, in T. Elmqvist, X. Bai, N. Frantzeskaki, C. Griffith, D. Maddox, T. McPhearson, S. Parnell, P. Romero-Lankao, D. Simone, and M. Watkins (eds), Urban Planet: Knowledge towards sustainable cities, (pp. 327–350). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berkers, P., Smulders, E. and Berghman, M. (2019). Music Creators and Gender Inequality in the Dutch Music Sector. Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies, 22(1), 27–44. https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGN2019.1.003.BERK

Borgström-Källén, C. (2014). När musik gör skillnad. Genus och genrepraktiker i samspel. [When Music Makes a Difference; Gender and Gender Practices in Interplay]. Diss. Bohus: Ale Trycket.

Braidotti, R. (2011). Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory. New York: Columbia University Press.

Braidotti, R. (2017). Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism, in R. Gruisin (ed), Anthropocene Feminism, (pp. 21–48). Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Brennan, M. and Devine, K. (2020). The Cost of Music. Popular Music, 39(1), 43–65. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143019000552

Burkart, P. (2020). Spotify som företagsidé – från download till access: relationer till ett samhälle i förändring med fokus på juridik och politik. [Spotify as Company Idea—from download to access, relations to a society in change focusing law and politics], in C. Ferm Almqvist, S. Leijonhufvud, and N. Ekberg, (eds), Explorativ bildning i strömmande medier. [Explorative Bildung in Streaming Media], (pp. 39-56). Huddinge: Södertörn University Press.

Clandinin, D. J., Pushor, D. and Orr, A. M. (2007). Navigating Sites for Narrative Inquiry. Journal of Teacher Education, 58(1), 21–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487106296218

Donald, D. (2009). Forts, Curriculum and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts. First Nations Perspectives, 2(1), 1–24.

Dumanoski, D. (2009). The End of the Long Summer: Why we must remake our civilization to survive on a volatile earth. New York: Crown Publishers.

Ekberg, N. and Schwieler, N. (2020). Evolving Bildung, Technology and Streaming Art. Popular Communication. https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2020.1744608

Eriksson, M. and Johansson, A. (2017). Tracking Gendered Streams. Culture Un-bound, 9(2), 163–183. https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.1792163

Ferm Almqvist, C. (2019). How to Become a Guitar Playing Human Being in the Situation of Ensemble Courses – Independent of Sex: An Episode of the Radio Show. European Journal of Philosophy in Arts Education, 4(1), 149-168.

Ferm Almqvist, C., Leijonhufvud, S. and Ekberg, N. (eds). (2020a). Explorativ bildning i strömmande medier. [Explorative Bildung in Streaming Media]. Huddinge: Södertörn University Press.

Ferm Almqvist, C., Leijonhufvud, S., and Ekberg, N. (2020b). Spotify ett sätt att vara – om musikaliskt blivande och dess förutsättningar. [Spotify a Way of Being – About Musical Becoming and its Pre-Conditions], in C. Ferm Almqvist, S. Leijonhufvud, and N. Ekberg, (eds), Explorativ bildning i strömmande medier. [Explorative Bildung in Streaming Media], (pp. 115-136). Huddinge: Södertörn University Press.

Fleischer, R. and Snickars, P. (2018). Den svenska enhörningen: storyn om Spotify. [The Swedish Unicorn: The Story of Spotify], Stockholm: Mondial.

Flick, U. (2014). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. (5th ed.) London: SAGE.

Ganetz, H., Gavanas, A., Huss, H., and Werner A. red (eds). (2009). Rundgång: Genus och populärmusik. [Loop: Gender and Popular Music]. Göteborg: Makadam.
