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Stretching and cracking: becoming feminist posthumanist scholars in music education

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ABSTRACT

How and why did three PhD fellows become feminist posthumanist scholars within the field of music education research? Drawing on Karen Barad's theorising of phenomena, not pre-existing entities, as the primary ontological unit and on Rosi Braidotti's concept of the nomadic subject, we explore our research subjectivities as they are becoming in and through relations within the phenomenon of Western music education. Through the figuration of 'voice', we trace how and why our research voices stretch and crack as we go through a scholarly voice change transitioning from humanist to feminist posthumanist scholars. We tell performative stories that intra-actively take part in the ongoing re-configuring of the world, making matters such as children, care responsibilities, and 'feminist killjoys' become issues of music educational importance. Our aim is to offer companionship to others be (com)ing posthumanists, and to stretch the boundaries of music education research and practice.

Introduction

Becoming researchers in music education requires us to relate to the music educational research and practice that already takes place. Western music education scholars of today have mainly worked with quantitative and qualitative research methods (Matsunobu and Bresler 2019), and human-made sounds seem to dominate Western music education practices (Smith 2022). This is the status quo in music education research and practice that the call of the special issue 'Posthuman Perspectives for Music Education' asks us to trouble. We, the three authors of this paper, greet the appeal for troubling the status quo with enthusiasm. Starting out our PhD journeys in 2018 without knowing each other, we all expected to become scholars within the dominant paradigms of music education research and practice. During our PhD periods, we have in various ways found a home in postqualitative inquiries (St. Pierre 2019) and we have become feminist posthumanists using stories as a way of knowing. In 2022, the three of us found kinship in each other and started to explore how we have become (more or less) determinately bounded as feminist posthumanist scholars within the phenomenon of music education research and practice. This article is an unperfect and partial testimony of that exploration.

Being feminist and posthumanist PhD fellows and early career researchers doing postqualitative research, we sometimes feel as though our mere existence causes trouble. We have become feminist

killjoys (Ahmed 2017) who contest the boundaries and norms in our field. This feeling was particularly strong during the first years of our PhDs when, within our respective music education institutions, we were the only ones engaged with posthumanism. Although our mere existence has caused trouble, we have found that to trouble the status quo is for ourselves to become less troubled by the boundaries of the field. In this paper, we tell stories of becoming feminist posthuman research subjectivities, emphasising how this becoming is not an individual, human-centred becoming relying on our intentions, but rather, it is a becoming of nomadic subjects enabled by relations (Braidotti 2011; 2013; 2019b) and intra-actions (Barad 2007). We also explore why be (com)ing feminist posthumanists is worth the trouble it causes.

The 'we' writing this paper are research subjectivities that are intra-actively constituted through practices of sense-making (Barad and Gandorfer 2021) or as nomadic subjectivities becoming through relations (Braidotti 2019b; 2013). Braidotti (2011) invites a rethinking of the self by viewing the structures and boundaries of the self as fluid, open-ended, and in constant movement. These subjectivities are not to be understood as humanist subjects but rather as nomadic subjectivities that are constantly formed and informed in the world – a non-unitary vision of the subject. These posthuman understandings of subjectivity highlight how the boundaries of our subjects are enacted within phenomena, not separated from them. We have named the phenomenon in which our research subjectivities are becoming 'Western music education research and practice', but we are also entangled with the Norwegian welfare state and its healthcare and educational systems; our offices and bedrooms; our caregiving responsibilities and writing retreats; our voices and the rooms in which they are raised; and a number of other entangled agencies. Therefore, we ask: *How and why do research subjectivities, such as the 'we' in this article, become (more or less) determinately bounded as feminist posthumanist scholars within the phenomenon of music education research and practice?* In addressing this question, we work with the figuration of 'voice'. We are musicians, singers, and scholars, and we are accustomed to raising our voices in various rooms. But not all nuances and variations of our voices are welcomed in music education. Sometimes our voices are muted by conventions and traditions, and, more importantly, other voices might never be heard. As we began reading feminist posthuman theory, we learnt not only how to raise our new scholarly voices but also how to build the rooms where a multiplicity of voices could be voiced, such as the voice of a rebellious soprano (Jenssen 2021), muted bodies in classrooms (Kvile and Christophersen 2023), and missing violins in violin lessons (Fjeldstad 2023).

This paper has a dual objective. Firstly, we aim to offer kinship to other feminist killjoys and posthuman scholars raising their voice to pose troublesome questions. We offer kinship by telling stories of reading, thinking, and writing with theories, and by telling stories of how caregiving responsibilities and matter entangled themselves with such practices. We tell stories of stretching ourselves and being stretched by theories, breaking away from familiar methodologies and research approaches, and becoming some of the first feminist posthuman scholars in music education. Although feminist posthuman theories are present in other educational fields such as early childhood studies (e.g. Murris and Osgood 2022), there is a lack of posthuman approaches in music education research (Zimmerman Nilsson, Borgström Källén, and Almqvist 2022). Recent PhD studies (e.g. Cooke 2021; Fjeldstad 2023; Jenssen 2023; Jonasson 2020) and journal articles (e.g. Kinsella, Fautley, and Whittaker 2022; Kvile and Christophersen 2023; Showen and Mantie 2019) indicate that posthuman theories are emerging in the field of music education research. By offering our kinship, we aim to contribute to this emergence. Secondly, this paper aims to develop insights into the field of music education research and practice – its boundaries and potentials; its entangled pasts, presents, and futures – and to trouble the status quo by investigating the points in our journeys when the field stretched to accommodate our becoming researcher subjectivities and the points when the boundaries of the field gave in, and cracks appeared.

After the following section where we position our thinking in the Anthropocene and this paper as a postqualitative inquiry thinking with feminist and posthuman theories, we group our stories and our diffractive reading (Barad 2007; Haraway 1992) of them into three knots (Haraway

1994; Murris and Osgood 2022). The first knot tells stories of stretching. In this section, we explore how our research subjectivities, as well as the field in which we do research, were stretched and broadened when encountering posthuman philosophies. In the second section, 'Cracking', we offer a story illustrating an event that led to a crack or rupture. In the third section, named 'Becomings', we dialogue our differential becomings with and through the stories to explore how and why we have become (more or less) determinately bounded as feminist posthumanist scholars within the phenomenon of Western music education research and practice. We close the paper by considering how our voices and bodies are in ongoing processes of becoming otherwise.

Feminism, posthumanism, and postqualitative inquiry in the anthropocene

We start by acknowledging that we live in the Anthropocene, the era where no part of nature, not even the climate, is untouched by human activities (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). The current climate crisis forces us to relate to what might have been the case all along: that there is no nature exterior to culture and no culture exterior to nature (Barad 2007; Braidotti 2013). Although many other philosophies and scholarly traditions do not rely on such a separation – e.g. Sámi ontologies and Sámi research-storying (Guttorm, Kantonen, and Pyhälä 2021) – this profound insight is foundational to the posthuman and feminist theories we think with, offering an alternative to the anthropocentric and humanist philosophies that have dominated European thought since the Enlightenment (Barad 2007; Braidotti 2020). Feminist posthumanism theories do not take the humanist subject for granted but rather question who is considered to be fully human (Braidotti 2013). This is in stark contrast to transhumanism, which is hinged on human mastery and seeks to enhance the humanist subject (Åsberg and Braidotti 2018).

Referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was at its height at the time of her writing, as well as the ongoing climate change, Braidotti (2020) claims that we are in this together, but not one and the same. She argues that we need to understand and account for the pain the planet is going through by taking part in knowledge productions that do not rely on the idea of a sovereign thinker standing outside of the object of research (Braidotti 2020), much like Haraway's (1988) critique of the God trick. Instead, our knowing and being are entangled into knowing-in-being (Barad 2007). In the following, we will elaborate on some important grounds in which we situate our research.

Firstly, we position our posthumanism as feminist and our research as feminist research. Posthuman theories build on feminist theory and feminist science studies (e.g. Barad 2007; Braidotti 2022; Haraway 1994). Although encompassing a wide variety of theories, feminist theories, in general, refuse binary thinking, take an interest in fluid processes rather than static entities, and are concerned with both political and intellectual questions (Ferguson 2017). We share Ahmed's (2017) argument that feminism is at stake in 'how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who we cite' (14). Furthermore, Ahmed argues that feminist theory is world-making, not merely a tool for doing research. This view resonates with the posthuman understanding of theory as part of the ongoing reconfiguring of the world, not something outside the world (Barad 2012). In writing this paper, we take part in creating a world slightly more accommodating to feminist scholars in music education.

Secondly, this is a postqualitative inquiry which takes reading philosophy, not predefined methodologies, as the starting point for doing research (Lather 2016; St. Pierre 2021). Our feminist posthuman readings have most notably been Braidotti's critical posthumanism (Braidotti 2022; 2019b; 2013) and Barad's agential realism (Barad 2007; Barad and Gandorfer 2021). These readings have profoundly shaped our diffractive storytelling methodology. Stories as research and in research is a well-grounded and established research approach (e.g. Adsit-Morris 2017; Ahmed 2017; Guttorm, Kantonen, and Pyhälä 2021). Barad refuses the representationalist worldview where language represents reality, whether the reality is thought to be already there or constructed through social relations (Barad 2007). Thus, the stories we tell are not representational stories. Rather, they are performative stories that intra-actively take part in the ongoing re-configuring of the world.

They are also diffractive stories. Diffractive research practices, founded on the refusal of the binaries of culture-nature and discourse-matter, investigate the differences that matter, not representations or reflections of a pre-existing reality (Barad 2007; Haraway 1992). We diffract our stories through the theories we think with (Jackson and Mazzei 2012) and through our singing, mothering, scholarly embodied voices, and we explore the new patterns created.

Our attention towards phenomena – not individual humans – is part of our striving to do inquiry in a response-able (Barad 2007) way that allows us to respond to and be responsible for the world we take part in bringing into being. One way of doing so is to write in an affirmative manner that strengthens the counter-values (Braidotti 2017) we want to see gain a greater foothold. Such counter-values are enacted through our collective and shared writing praxis (Braidotti 2017), accommodating our shifting care responsibilities, and in our mindful and political citational praxis (Ahmed 2017; Truman 2023).

Another way of being response-able scholars is to recognise our entanglements with material-discursive structures. The three of us are cis females in our 30s and 40s with care responsibilities for children. We are, or have recently been, PhD fellows in music education, and we have varied experiences within the tradition of Western music education as students, teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and performers. We conducted parts of our PhD research during the COVID-19 pandemic and felt the same trouble as many other female academics in trying to uphold scholarly production in stressful and unpredictable situations while also caring for our children (Bender et al. 2022; Deryugina, Shurchkov, and Stearns 2021). Although the pandemic intensified our care responsibilities, our roles and responsibilities as mothers have continued to shape the becomings of our researcher subjectivities. We position our research subjectivities as embodied and material subjectivities, not purely rational, fleshless minds. When theorising and doing research, we do so with our singing voices, with our sweaty hands, and with our pumping hearts.

Thinking with Virginia Woolf and her statement that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' ([1929] 2014, 6), we want to acknowledge the rooms in which we write and the money we spend acquiring these rooms. The rooms we write and live in, are not geometrical and closed rooms. Rather, they are topological (Barad 2007) and nomadic (Braidotti 2011) rooms that are becoming through intra-actions and relations.

We are privileged to have houses to live in. However, being mothers and wives, all the rooms of our houses are shared with family members. Two of us have offices; the third writes from her bedroom. As we live at a distance from each other, we arranged to share an Airbnb apartment for a weekend, with some of us paying with private funds and some with the funds of our employer, to talk and write undisturbed and in person. Recognising that the resources spent on meeting in person generated possibilities for thinking, writing, and generating kinship that would have been different had we not met, we acknowledge our privilege in doing so. We needed, and appreciated, the room and the money that enabled us to write.

The weekend together was planned to start off our writing of this article, although as we all know; writing an article starts long before the first word is written. On the day of arrival, one of us had to cancel the planned stay due to care responsibilities. Not knowing if she could come the next day or not, the two other authors quickly landed on a structure of the paper that would accommodate her to join in later. Even though she was not there physically, she was still very much present as though we could hear her voice even if she did not speak. Our collaborative writing has been done through and from multiple sites – on a couch, on Teams, and in a Google document – and into multiple ways of being together – in person, online, and in our thoughts, compassion, and worries. Several agencies contributed in making this article become the way it is, and the stories themselves have also worked their way into the text in a collaborative and nomadic manner. All stories have first been written in our own private documents, then shared, read, discussed, edited, moved around, commented on, and sometimes led to new stories. Other stories have been left behind and are not included in the text anymore. Still, these stories are also ways of knowing (Hearne 2015). Through regular meetings online, we developed deep trust and companionship with one another, and the

joint writing allowed for the stories to no longer be 'mine' or 'hers', but rather ours. None of the stories are only written by one pair of human hands.

The rearrangement of our joint weekend plans forced us to examine the material-discursive arrangements enacting the boundaries of authorship and collective writing. Some of the insights generated through this examination will be told as a story in the section 'Cracking'. First, we turn to stories of stretching.

Stretching

We call this part of the paper 'Stretching' because finding (to us) new ways of theorising stretched our voices in unforeseen ways, allowing us to voice and be heard in different ways than before. As we fell in love with feminist and posthuman theory, the theories tickled our embrained bodies (Braidotti 2019a) in much the same way as music so often does.

The stories we are about to tell concern our first encounters with posthuman theories. Some of us felt exposed by Barad's critique of representationalism. Others had a sense of finally finding a philosophical home. Did we search for theories to stretch us, or did the posthuman theories find us? Does it matter, as long as we meet halfway, stretching and being stretched?

Be(com)ing stretched

I loved the way reading theory stretched my thoughts in new ways as I conducted my master's degree in music education. I did a discourse analysis that profoundly changed my perspective on life. When I started my PhD several years later, I found myself longing for that feeling again – the feeling of being moved, stretched, and challenged.

Suddenly, it happened. During a PhD course on science theory, I encountered the following quote: 'Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter' (Barad 2003, 801).

The quote hit me right in the gut. It felt like Barad was talking about me and my way of life, about the discourse analysis I had done. Barad obviously did not approve. As I felt my pulse rise and sweat filling my palms, my bad conscience grew, along with a deep sense of missing out on something important. What was this matter that mattered so much? Why did it matter, and why had I not cared for it before?

Posthumanism questions who is considered to be fully human and argues that humanism centres on the rational, adult, able-bodied, and male humanist subject (Braidotti 2013) and it questions the privileged position of discourse and culture over matter and nature (Barad 2007). This story, where one of the authors encountered Barad's writings for the first time, makes tangible how we all have read theory with our bodies, with our elevated heartbeats and sweaty hands. It also directs attention to how the theories have demanded that we stretch our thinking and how the rooms in which we do music education research and practice has been expanded. As our humanist and anthropocentric assumptions have been challenged, we have felt a sense of guilt (why didn't we question this before?) and we have felt that our previous research endeavours have been devalued.

The field of music education research, rooted in a humanist research tradition, centres on individual and adult humans and their discourses. This is illustrated by the multiple studies concerning the discourses of teachers (e.g. Jordhus-Lier 2021), leaders (e.g. Emstad and Angelo 2019), and policy documents (e.g. Ellefsen and Karlsen 2020). When language, discourse, and culture are granted that much power, there is little space left for other matters to matter and other voices to be heard. This was the status quo of music education research and practice that we, until encountering Barad, had been immersed in without much questioning.

'What was this matter that mattered so much? Why did it matter, and why had I not cared for it before?' Reading these questions at the end of the story, we – the nomadic research subjectivities writing this paper together

– started to wonder: what is the 'it' we had not cared about before? Was it our body, the body reacting with sweaty palms and a rising pulse, the body feeling that tingling sensation of thinking-feeling-being thoughts not previously considered? Was it the other voices of music education, those who do not belong to adults mastering the dominant language of English (Hohti and Truman 2021)? The instruments, the rooms, the sheet music?

Although posthuman thoughts troubled us, they also made us less troubled by the norms of our field. For one of us, feminist posthuman philosophies allowed her to embrace her singer's body and the stories her body carried as part of her scholarly subjectivity.

Stretching voices

'Is your study about you or the female voice change?' The very experienced reader looked towards me with sharp eyes. Fuck. What should I answer? What is the right answer? I actually thought my PhD was going quite well. I had done what all the books I was given in the qualitative research methods course told me to do. I had gathered my data through observations and interviews. I had transcribed the interviews, and I was in the middle of the process of categorising. I had desperately tried to write about my bias. Of course, I had to do that – to gain distance from my data. Being a classically trained soprano researching voice change in a female choir, I was embedded in the discourse I researched. In a way, I loved it. I deeply cared for female voices. But something felt wrong. A feeling. Something was disturbing me, but I couldn't put my finger on it. And now, facing this question from the very experienced reader of my PhD, the nagging feeling hit my gut again. What was I actually researching? I was sweating, and I knew that I had to come up with an answer. Right now.

'Can it be both?' I responded with an almost whispering voice. The reader laughed. 'No', came the reply. Blood rushed to my head. Silly me. The soprano who thinks she can do research should rather stick to what she does best: letting others feel the stories I tell through my voice, both in teaching and performing.

Fuck. My PhD is a complete failure.

Although it is now more than 25 years ago that Haraway critiqued the God trick of an objective and neutral observer and argued that feminist objectivity means situated knowledges (Haraway 1988), and despite the situated nature of the researcher being a shared topic in qualitative music education research (Matsunobu and Bresler 2019), the situated knowledge of the singer-researcher in this story was contested by the reader. This might be an expression of the complex relationship with the entanglements of the researcher and the research object in music education research. While reality is commonly believed to be socially constructed, and both the researcher and research participants are believed to take part in the construction of knowledge (Matsunobu and Bresler 2019), there is also an underlying assumption that the subject and object, researcher and the researched, knower and the known, are separated. Examples of how this manifest in research are the practice of bracketing preconceptions in phenomenological analysis (Tufford and Newman 2012) or the interpretation and reflection of reflexive research (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2017). Thus, the reader questioned what the study 'was about' and refused the possibility of an entanglement of the topic female voice change and the researcher's female, singing body.

Stretching voices, part two

After the experience of failure, when I couldn't answer the question about my study's focus, my brilliant main supervisor felt we needed another supervisor in the supervising team. She approached a potential candidate who replied with a list of suggested readings. Thus, I started to read theories of gender and embodiment, nomadic theory, and performative autoethnography. As I read, my writing started to flow. The question had thrown me off balance and made me fall, but the new theories I read changed the fall into a flight. I flew into something new and unknown that nevertheless felt right. This was the theoretical framework that allowed me to have a voice both as a singer and as a researcher.

Rosi Braidotti (2011) *and her nomadic theory urged me to think globally but act locally from embodied and grounded perspectives. I started to explore my voice as a classically trained soprano within a Western culture through telling stories of how music education is gendered and how it had silenced and disciplined me into a normative feminine soprano voice. I became a feminist post-human researcher, my singing voice totally entangled with what I was researching. I stretched my voice so far that I was afraid it would crack. But it didn't. Rather, it became stronger, more flexible, and full of joy.*

In the stories told so far, feminist posthuman theories have stretched our thinking and bridged the imposed gap between researcher and singer. In the third story, encountering the writings of Barad felt like finding a scholarly home.

A feminist, posthuman home

On my first day as a PhD fellow, starting with an introductory course in philosophy of science, I threw myself enthusiastically into the assigned texts. Yet, my enthusiasm soon turned to annoyance. The first thing that annoyed me was that the texts introduced me to a world of philosophy dominated by men. All the theories and concepts we were taught were formulated by dead, white men. Although annoying, this male dominance was no surprise, as I had been a feminist for a long time.

The second thing that annoyed me was more difficult to identify. Although the philosophies I encountered – phenomenology, hermeneutics, discourse studies, critical theories – held different worldviews, they all annoyed me in the same way. I did my best to think with them while developing my project, but the itchy feeling remained.

Seeking alternatives, I approached the lecturer about contemporary philosophy strands. He mentioned 'posthumanism', a term entirely unfamiliar to me. Using resources like Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and similar websites, I stumbled upon Karen Barad's 2003 *article, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter'. As I read the article – sometimes nodding off and often comprehending only half the words – I felt the oddest sensation of coming home. Despite grasping just snippets of the reading, I realised the discomfort had vanished. This was my theoretical home!*

Ahmed (2017) writes about how the theories we think with and the theorists we cite are akin to bricks constructing the academic houses within which we craft our dwellings – or, to use Woolf's ([1929] 2014) metaphor, the rooms in which we write. Our encounters with feminist posthumanism felt, for all of us, like coming home, to become at home, and to become with the houses in which we make our home. But although we are in this feminist, posthuman house of theory together, we are not one and the same (Braidotti 2020). In the first story, the home was not an altogether friendly place. It asked the research subjectivity to change, to become something else. In the second story, the home felt like a refuge. Finding a new home, the researcher and singer could coexist in a space where their collective voice could be heard. In the third story, the theories felt like home even before their full comprehension.

Despite the varied sensations of coming home, we all felt the necessity to reconstruct the house, establishing rooms where ideas contrary to the dominant thoughts in music education could thrive and our voices could resonate fully. As Ahmed (2017) highlights, feminist housework is not solely about maintaining the existing structure – here, continuing the work of music education research in a similar vein to our colleagues and supervisors – but it is also about fundamentally reconstructing the house itself. While this paper focuses on how feminist and posthuman theories took part in the rebuilding of our theoretical home, there were also many other agencies intra-acting such as the COVID-19 virus, our bodies, and our families. In the process of constructing and entering our home, we were stretched beyond our perceived limits. At times, the stretching went beyond our capacity, resulting in something giving way and cracks appearing.

Cracking

When a voice stretches, attempting to produce a sound outside its register or undergoing changes during puberty, it often reaches a point where it cracks. In our process of becoming feminist

posthumanist scholars, we have encountered several instances where what we believed could be held together, could not. All three of us have experienced the persistent and vulnerable feeling of our researchers' voices faltering, being exposed, or cracking while attempting to respond to critical comments or curious questions. These are voice cracks where our bodies stiffen, and we fear that our voices will not meet the expected standards. To voice our be(com)ing posthumanist voices have often felt risky, and we have been afraid of cracking.

Braidotti (2011) writes that we need affirmative empowerment of alternative difference. Thinking with Braidotti, we are inspired to see our scholarly, mothering, and singing voice cracks as a productive force. What if a voice crack could be embraced as something generative? Embracing an affirmative empowerment of cracks would be in line with Braidotti's idea of how the grounding of the subject starts with affirmative vulnerability and is the starting point for becoming (Braidotti 2011). What would happen to our and other researcher's voices if we embrace vulnerability and risk as a force of possibilities? What new voices could be amplified and listened to?

'Why am I so scared?'

I am shivering. My body wants to burst into tears, but I am holding back. In truth, I'm not only on the verge of tears. I want to scream out loud. But I can't. I am a mother. I must care for my four children, particularly the one requiring extra attention at the moment. 'It's just a writing retreat', I tell myself, trying to stay calm.

To be honest, it is not 'just' a writing retreat. It's a writing retreat with my academic colleagues and friends – fellow feminist posthuman scholars – who, like me, are obsessed with thinking and voicing differently. I desperately want to go to the Airbnb we have rented. I need to go. Being a mother of four, research has become a space where I feel free. A room of my own. I love to write and think with posthuman philosophies. I fight for a multitude of voices in music education. I love Rosi Braidotti's theory where she embraces difference as a positive space to hold, as a tremendous source of knowledge. In my research, I embrace Braidotti's approach to thinking with difference. I feel so brave. Even bold. I dive into innovative theories and methodologies. I take risks. But, as a mother, I am so scared. Why am I so scared?

I'm afraid of being different. I'm afraid of my child being different.

Now, I am crying. I cry because my academic colleagues and friends reassure me that it's alright, that I've made the right decision. They encourage me to stay at home and honour my caregiving responsibilities. They reassure me that I won't be excluded from our planned paper. Moreover, they suggest I write about this struggle and propose ways to stretch the article to encompass my role as a mother. They affirm that writing about this experience is valuable. Perhaps it's the initial step towards becoming a researcher where my whole body – also my body as a mother – is voiced.

Becoming

The stories we have told, grouped in the knots 'Stretching' and 'Cracking', could just as well have been grouped in one knot incorporating both the stretching and cracking as there are no absolute boundaries, only temporal agential cuts that are cutting together-apart in one move (Barad 2007; 2014). Thus, in this section, we bring the stories together. We also invite comments we have received to disrupt us as we return to the question we initially asked: How do research subjectivities, such as the 'we' in this article, become (more or less) determinately bounded as feminist posthumanist scholars within the phenomenon of music education research?

> 'Posthumanism? Really? You went that far?' He laughed.

We, the ones becoming feminist posthumanists in music education, are not individuals acting from the outside of the world. Rather, we are intra-actively constituted through practices of sense-making (Barad and Gandorfer 2021). We intra-act with supervisors and colleagues, rooms

and homes, tools and technologies, discourses and practices. Some of these intra-actions have enabled us in becoming feminist posthumanist storytellers while others have restricted them.

One way that our becomings have been enabled, is by the extensive and generous system of public health care and social security of the Norwegian welfare state. Even though economic inequality has increased in recent years (Aaberget et al. 2021), we live in a society that, on a global scale, offers a very high level of security. This, taken together with the fact that we are perceived as white, heterosexual, and able-bodied, puts us in a position where taking risks is not that risky. But that is not to say that we, at all times, have felt secure. In some situations, our becomings have been accompanied by sweaty palms and racing heartbeats.

> 'Why are you subjecting yourself to this 'academic self-harm'?' We both chuckled. 'No, but seriously, why would you do this? You could just stick to what you already know and get it over with. So why put yourself through this?'

Our supervisors have also enabled us in our becomings as feminist posthumanist scholars. Part of a supervisor's role is to guide the doctoral student into a field of research. Supervisors possess insights into both the implicit and explicit norms, conventions, and regulations of the field, guiding the student through diverse theoretical and methodological landscapes (Bastalich 2017). However, how does one fulfil this supervisory role when the field of research is emergent such as the field of feminist posthuman music education research? Our female supervisors made the choice to expand their understanding of the field of music education and adapt it to accommodate the emerging thoughts that were arising through our work. Through this approach, they facilitated and supported our efforts in broadening the field to encompass the posthuman theories we aimed to engage with.

Our supervisors might have cautioned us against posthumanism, as some of our colleagues and readers did. They could have said 'Well, go ahead, but then, you are on your own'. Rather, they were supportive while acknowledging the limitations of their knowledge about these theories. Therefore, we all received support from supervisors and commentators outside the field of music education. Additionally, we sought out and joined posthuman communities through social media, reading groups, courses, and conferences. We even established a national network for post-theories in music education ourselves.

Becoming feminist posthumanists has led us beyond the confines of the established field of Western music education and into transdisciplinary research domains. In our desire to connect with others employing feminist posthuman theories and engaging in postqualitative research, we have delved into literature from a wide array of so-called research fields, including early childhood education (e.g. Murris and Osgood 2022), Sámi studies (e.g. Finbog 2020) and philosophy (e.g. Barad 2007; Braidotti 2022) alongside feminist essays (e.g. Guin and Ursula 2019; Woolf 2014). We have researched with Sámi ontologies and storytelling traditions (Fjeldstad 2023), diffracting drawings and illustrations (Jenssen and Martin 2021) and by incorporating music, materials, and feminist storytelling in conference presentations (Jenssen, Kvile, and Fjeldstad 2023). These perspectives have allowed for a decentring of the human subject and have opened our research to include some of the missing people (Braidotti 2019a; Murris and Osgood 2022) and messy matter (Fjeldstad 2023) of music education research.

> 'Posthumanism?' he said, raising an eyebrow. 'What's next? Holocaust?'
>
> Not wanting to, or daring to, be the feminist killjoy, I laughed at his comment.

Although we have found the boundaries of music education research to be flexible and accommodating to our feminist and posthumanist subjectivities, we have also encountered situations where these boundaries are fixed and restrictive. 'When you expose a problem you pose a problem' (Ahmed 2017, 36). Ahmed (2017) calls the figuration of the feminist exposing problems 'the feminist killjoy'. We might describe ourselves as posthumanist killjoys. By exposing the problem of humanism in music education, we have, at times, become the problem. Our existence itself becomes a problem, a questioning of the status quo. Simultaneously, some of the negative comments we have

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encountered seem to contain a kind of admiration cloaked within criticism. Statements like 'academic self-harm' and 'you went that far' might embody this dual nature – boasting and roasting at the same time. Laughing underlines that duality as well. Laughing with us or at us? Perhaps both? Our own laughter can be viewed as a defence mechanism, a way of diffusing tension and maintaining a pleasant atmosphere. Moving forward, we aim to rather embrace being posthumanist killjoys and to use our voice answering back.

Posthuman voices and posthuman bodies

How do three PhD fellows – the 'we' in this article – become (more or less) determinately bounded as feminist posthumanist scholars within the field of music education research? Through our stories, we have offered insights into how we have stretched and been stretched, and of the cracks appearing when something or someone is stretched too far. As the world is not already there, nor made once and for all (Barad 2007), the process of becoming feminist posthumanist scholars is, and will continue to be, ongoing. We – our differential subjectivities 'intra-actively constituted through practices of sense-making' (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, 30) – will never be the same as they were when we started out on our PhD journeys. Nor will we stay the same. Nevertheless, completing a PhD is a rite of passage or transformation. Not unlike puberty.

In puberty, the voices of both males and females go through a period of change, often called a voice change (Abitbol and Abitbol 2014) characterised by a vocal range extension downward in pitch with a husky, breathy voice that cracks, followed by, for some, uncertainty, shame, even silence (Sweet 2018). Through our becomings as posthuman feminists, we have gone through a scholarly voice change. When we first started reading Barad, their statement that language has been granted too much power (Barad 2003) resonated deeply with us. For a long period of time, we felt like we lost our language. Not only were we required to leave behind our mother tongue of Norwegian to communicate with the international field of research, but we also had to leave behind the underlying representationalist and anthropocentric logic and our familiar turn of phrases. Like adolescents who often stop singing, maybe even stop talking, for a period when their voice changes, we experienced a period of not having the means to express the thoughts that were slowly starting to find their shape. We felt vulnerable trying to speak with unfamiliar and cracking voices. But as we have become and continue becoming feminist posthuman scholars, we have gained new voices that we are (still) learning to use. As we are speaking, crying, thinking, writing, and living with posthuman philosophies, we are entangled with the insight that subjects and objects are not already there, but becoming through intra-actions and relations. For us, this is not a purely theoretical insight. It is a way of being in the world in an affirmative and ethical way that encompasses all aspects of our iterative becomings.

Be(com)ing entangled bodies

I woke up to a feeling of something bursting. Within a second, I had thrown myself out of bed and squatted down beside it. Amniotic fluids flooded the bedroom floor. 'JB, my water broke'.

Being pregnant was a kind of physical shape-shifting that accompanied my theoretical and intellectual shift from Foucault to Barad. Just as my tummy grew and my body became occupied by another living being, my understanding of life became entangled with Barad's agential realism. '(…) the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather phenomena' (Barad 2007, 193). This was no longer a theoretical claim I could barely grasp, but something I could feel and watch happen in my uterus. My unborn child was not an independent person with inherent boundaries and properties, and neither was I. We were agencies intra-acting in a phenomenon also including my husband's genes, knowledge about what's good for foetuses, ultrasound, health personnel, the Norwegian welfare state, love, anticipation, stretch marks, and the fear of giving birth. After all, this was my second time birthing a baby. I knew.

Ten days overdue, he broke free from my body, making the separation of 'me' and 'him' come from within the phenomenon. The separation had to happen; he was ready. I was terrified, but it had to be done. Still, we were entangled, only in a new form. Just as the baby stretched and cracked my body in ways I could not control, reading posthuman theories and listening to posthuman scholars stretched and cracked my body, leaving it with marks as it became and is still becoming the body of a feminist, posthumanist music education scholar.

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Disclosure statement

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