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Other Ways of Knowing the Danish Music Industry: From Disorientation to Feminist Collective Capacity

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we explore how women and gender-minoritized music professionals experience the gendered infrastructure of the Danish music industry. Based on ethnographic material, we discuss how the Music Movement of 2019, a closed online community, serves as a space where bodily and affective experiences of work-related sexism are shared and transformed into a feminist capacity in terms of a collective body of ideas and initiatives that privilege other ways of knowing popular music and the music industry. We argue that the Music Movement is in itself an important infrastructure that facilitates social change within the Danish music industry.

KEYWORDS

Gender; infrastructure; affect; musical anthropology; networks; social change

Introduction: “A Wave Washing Over the Danish Music Industry”

On 2 March 2023, the Danish association for women-, trans-, and non-binary identified music professionals, “Musikbevægelsen af 2019” (The Music Movement of 2019), won a newly established music award, the BRIGHT Award, which is given to a person or actor who has made an exceptional contribution to promoting equity and diversity in the music industry. At the so-called GAFFA Music Award Show 2023, chairperson Gry Harrit, who has had a long career in the Danish music industry, thanked the jury and the audience with these words:

The legalization of porn over 50 years ago started a celebration in the advertising industry, and I have – in my life – witnessed a complete extreme sexualization and pornification of the music industry. And I have witnessed a music industry that – in the fight for big money – has narrowed the mainstream field more and more. And in the heat of the battle, gendered norms have actually prevented the market from working. We have a culture in the music industry with unpaid labor, with more and more “naked ass” [*bar røv*], and zero respect for either music or its creators. In a way, the music industry has actually undermined itself. . . . The movement is much bigger and goes much deeper into Danish society than just the music industry. The energy is so strong that it will find its own dynamics. Its own markets. Its own mainstream. Its own new business models. So, do we want to watch, or do we want to join in? We want to join in. . . . So let’s do something about it. Together. All of us.¹ (Harrit)

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The Music Movement of 2019 includes partly an online community, a closed Facebook group, with more than 2800 members, and an independent (but intersecting) association with fewer (but paying) members. All members of both the online forum and the association identify as women, trans-, or non-binary, and it is stated on their Facebook page that “[t]he group is for girls, women and gender minorities—so not for cis men, even if they are curious and agree with the purpose of the group” (*Musikbevægelsen*). The BRIGHT Award is not the first accolade the Music Movement has received. In 2021, the community won the prestigious Steppeulvene Music Award for “Best Initiative of the Year.” In this context, it was described by the magazine *GAFFA* as “a wave washing over the Danish music industry” (Frank). The impact that the Music Movement has had on the Danish music industry was echoed by the jury of the BRIGHT award 2023, who justified the Music Movement as the winner by highlighting how they have managed to “create a safe space in the Danish music industry, set a sharp agenda and organize events that focus on both problems and solutions,” and in doing so they had “brought the debate out of the shadows of social media and into the venues” (qtd. in Svidt). In light of the above celebrations, this article will look at the knowledge work that has taken place in and around the Music Movement as an important part of a feminist transformative movement to change the Danish music industry.

The Music Movement emerged from a Danish music scene that is currently struggling with issues of gender inequality and inequity for minoritized groups. Several surveys initiated by Danish music institutions and trade associations have within the past 10 years shown how people who identify as women (as well as gender minorities) are under-represented and face inequity in almost every area of the music industry in Denmark (e.g. “Gender;” Dansk Live; DMF et al.; NIRAS et al.). Within the past few years—since the Danish #MeToo movement took off in 2020 – various Danish musicians identifying as women have publicly told of an industry that is characterized by experiences of sexism, ageism, and lack of diversity. This has led to several efforts for greater equality and gender balance within the industry, such as ten so-called “2030-goals” put up by several Danish trade and genre associations aiming at creating gender balance (Dansk Komponistforening et al.); internal institutional diversity sounding boards; a specific public service focus on gender within the Danish Broadcasting Corporation; and two new qualitative based surveys on gender (un)balance in the Danish music industry, published in 2022 (Kvinfol et al.; Sarltvit et al.). Besides this, several separatist communities and informal networks for artists identifying as women, trans-, or non-binary, as well as various community-based educational music projects targeting girls and gender minorities have been established. Promoted as alternative (safer) spaces for professional networking, knowledge sharing, promotion, and learning processes, such communities are actively committed to facilitating (other) opportunities for their members and to reflecting, challenging, and potentially restructuring the gendered infrastructural norms of the music industry. The Music Movement is one of these communities.

With a particular focus on questions about affect and transformation, this article examines how the Music Movement emerged as a consequence of collective reflections on affective experiences of inequalities and organized (gendered) expectations, and how the Music Movement facilitates a new infrastructuring of the music industry by privileging other ways of knowing (popular) music. Based on ethnographic material, such as participant observation of, for example, network arrangements and panel discussions, interviews with some of the members,² and media coverage of public

events and issues of gender in the music industry, we discuss questions such as: What experiences of the gendered infrastructure of the Danish music industry prompted a need for intervention? How is a collective body of knowledge that privileges women, trans-, and non-binary music professionals' ways of understanding the industry generated in the context of the Music Movement? And in what ways does the Music Movement work as a counter-infrastructureal development that currently challenges the dominant (male-dominated) infrastructure system within the Danish music industry?

In what follows, we first examine how the music industry can be understood as an infrastructure. Second, we look at some of the experiences of disorientation and active forms of regulation experienced by members of the Music Movement. Finally, we explore how the Music Movement can be understood as a feminist hack of music industry infrastructures that has enabled its members not only to navigate the power structures enacted through gendered expectations in their work-related activities, but also to facilitate change at various levels of the broader Danish music industry.

Political and Counter-Political Infrastructuring

... when the men asked if they should also have their own separatist space or “closed club,” I always replied with a wink: “You already have one. It’s called the music industry!” (Cecilie)

As one of the founding members, Cecilie, recalls in the quotation above, the Danish music industry was perceived by the gender minoritized professionals who co-founded the Music Movement as a “closed club,” a professional space or system that privileged male professionals. The Music Movement emerged as an alternative network or space for women and gender minoritized music professionals. In line with this idea, the basic assumption underlying our approach in this article is that the popular music industry—understood as a network of people, companies, organizations, institutions, and NGOs working to create artistic and economic value (Williamson and Cloonan)—is not a neutral background, but an infrastructure that privileges certain bodies and embodied conventions while limiting others.

Hence, while discussions about “gender inequality” and “gender balance” in Danish public discourse often end up in debates about increasing the number of women in areas where they are underrepresented, we believe that it is crucial to focus on issues of infrastructure, both at the informational, organizational, and social levels. We suggest that it is insufficient to focus *only* on increasing the number of women in areas where they are under-represented, such as the music industry, because this leaves the patriarchal infrastructure unchallenged. By approaching the Danish music industry with an infrastructureal attention, we shift the analytical focus away from the numbers and the skills, talents, and productions of individuals toward their embeddedness and orientations in social, economic, historical, and gendered conventions. By doing so, we add a Danish infrastructureal perspective to the various international studies that have shown how people who identify as women face inequality in almost all areas of the music industry (e.g. Berkers and Schaap; Born and Devine; Farrugia; Hill, Lieb; Raine and Strong; Reddington; Ringsager et al., “FOCUS;” Ringsager et al., “PEER;” Strong and Raine; Warwick and Adrian; Wallevik; Whiteley; Werner et al.; Wolfe).

While the term “infrastructure” is often used to refer to physical and technical connectivity, communication, and exchange (Graham and Marvin), it is important to emphasize that in our approach it also includes the norms, cultural models and stereotypes, techniques, information practices, legal instruments, and social relations that underpin sociality and political belonging (Butler; Easterling). Furthermore, we agree with Star’s observation that rather than producing an endless list of things that can be categorized under the heading of “infrastructure,” ethnographic accounts speak more to the ability to discern when and how the infrastructural quality of things comes into play, and to map the different kinds of systems they underpin (Star; see also Knox and Gambino).

Typically, infrastructures are designed to divert attention from themselves and are usually only recognized when they cease to function. As the architect and urban scholar Keller Easterling points out, this, however, makes contemporary infrastructural spaces “the secret weapons of the most powerful” because they “orchestrate activities that can remain unstated but are nevertheless consequential” (15). Thus, when producer and musician Cecilie in the above quotation points (or “winks”) to the Danish music industry as a preexisting “closed club” or separatist community for male professionals, she is drawing attention back to (and “wording”/“worlding”) the unspoken and invisible character of the industry’s current (male-dominated) infrastructure and its orchestrated activities. Easterling suggests the concept of “disposition” to uncover the “accidental, covert, or stubborn forms of power . . . hiding in the folds of infrastructure space” (73). Disposition can be understood as the result of different “active forms” (which can be technological, organizational, or social, such as multipliers, switches, or stories) moving through an organization, and, in this sense, it describes something of what the organization or system *does*, including activities that may deviate from the stated intention (Easterling 72, 92). In other words, just as a roundball and an inclined plane suggest direction, disposition locates activity in the latent tendencies of a thing (or a being) and its interaction with other things (and beings). In that sense, as Easterling argues, the *active forms* are like powerful bits of code that can hack the infrastructural operating system (92).

Several other scholars have also shown how the standards, classifications, and knowledge systems that frame and shape infrastructures are both informed by, and in turn inform, relations of inclusion and exclusion (Bowker and Star; Lampland and Star; Star and Ruhleder; Edwards). Anthropologist Susan Leigh Star, among others, has noted how “[o]ne person’s infrastructure is another’s topic, or difficulty” (380). She, therefore, calls for analyses that identify not only the “master narrative” of an infrastructural space, but also its “others,” just as she encourages, like Cecilie in the above quotation, making visible the invisible work that infrastructures do that is not immediately apparent (385).

As anthropologist Hannah Knox and human geographer Evelina Gambino have argued, ethnographies of infrastructure can show how overlooked objects and networks offer exciting insights into the processes that make up social life. Following this thought, we approach the Music Movement of 2019 ethnographically, and look at it as part of a counter-political form of infrastructure development that has emerged in recent years as alternatives to the dominant (male-dominated) infrastructure system within the Danish music industry. We explore how women professionals in the industry perceive, experience, and know the active forms they are disposed to when navigating the

infrastructural nodes (such as stages, backstage rooms, rehearsal spaces, [social] media, etc.), objects (such as instruments, equipment, technologies, etc.), and processes (such as recording, composing, rehearsing, networking, touring, signing a contract, etc.) in their work and everyday life. Furthermore, we examine how these experiences come to orient, position, and affect people and bodies in different ways and, in this sense, how power is enacted and operates in the context of the Danish music industry. Additionally, we discuss how people who experience being othered within the industry find ways to tinker, rework, alter, or hack the infrastructure of the music industry in order to forge not only new material arrangements, but also alternative anti-sexist ways of imagining possible futures and other ways of knowing popular music.

Entering the Music Movement: Entering a Queered Space

The Music Movement of 2019 was initiated as a reaction to the feeling of repeatedly being wronged by the structures of the existing systems of music production. The group began as a private Messenger thread discussing the fact that the music organization Gramex's annual lists of the 10 most played Danish musicians, artists, and songs on Danish radio in the previous year (and for the third year in a row) consisted exclusively of men. Starting with a handful of women and non-binary identified professionals working within the music industry that shared their frustrations over the lists, more and more were invited into the Messenger thread—people who subsequently followed suit over to the Facebook group that was initiated in June 2019.

Therefore, as a starting point, we consider the movement as a network based on what Clare Hemmings has called “affective solidarity,” which emerged from a gathering around “affective dissonance” (Hemmings). In her introduction of the concept “affective solidarity,” Hemmings argues that the counterpart of “affective solidarity,” what she calls “affective dissonance,” is a necessary component. As she elaborates,

... in order to know differently we have to feel differently. Feeling that something is amiss in how one is recognised, feeling an ill fit with social descriptions, feeling undervalued, feeling that same sense in considering others; all these feelings can produce a politicised impetus to change that foregrounds the relationship between ontology and epistemology precisely because of the experience of their dissonance. (150)

Hemmings speaks of a dissonance between ontology and epistemology that produces feelings or affects³ that can generate “politicized impetus to change.” Thus, according to Hemmings, affective dissonance, such as feelings of not fitting into social conditions and of discrepancies between actual experienced worlds and common self-perceptions, carries a specific political potential to be transformed into affective solidarity, as feminist collective action. In other words, affective solidarity becomes “a way of focusing on modes of engagement that start from the affective dissonance that feminist politics necessarily begins from” (Hemmings 148).

According to the Danish sociologist Ea Høg Utoft, one of the biggest problems with gender equality in Denmark is what she calls the “post-feminist double bind” (93). On one hand, through common perceptions, self-understandings, and national narratives, we iterate our feminist victories of the past and conclude that we have achieved gender equality and are no longer in need of feminism.

Those narratives and self-perceptions make it hard, on the other hand, to acknowledge and recognize everyday experiences with sexism in practice. Stories of sexism, Utoft argues, are likely to be miscredited and rendered uninteresting or untrustworthy (93).

It was such experiences of discrepancies between society's self-perception and actual individual (mutual) experiences in practice that gave rise to frustration among the "handful of music professionals" and initiated collective action. Experiences of affective dissonance—of being (repeatedly) discriminated against and treated unequally (in contrast to repeated narratives of Denmark as a gender-equal society)—were the starting point of the Music Movement of 2019.

At first the group was named "Sisterhood Music Movement." However, due to resistance from some to the narrow category of "sisterhood," and in order to embrace wider identities, the name was quickly changed to "The Music Movement of 2019." As the woman-identified musician and producer, Charlie, said to the music magazine *GAFFA*:

I felt a bit of resistance in the beginning of the group's [the Music Movement's] existence, because I was afraid that it would turn into another women's network that excluded gender minorities. Because then we had not moved on at all. But somehow something happened that made this group just work. (qtd. in Frank)

Another of the founding members of the Music Movement, Anne, also recalls the in-depth discussions that took place in the early meetings about who should (and should not) be included in the community. And, as she puts it, "it was kind of decided that it had to be inclusive from the start, because otherwise we'd be doing what we didn't think was cool, right?" (Anne). Such inclusivity proved successful, as "The Music Movement of 2019" ("Musikbevægelsen af 2019") turned out to be a very popular social media group that grew quickly and gained members from all over Denmark.

Reflective of its inclusive approach to gender minoritized music professionals, when entering the community, potential members are offered guides and (gentle) instructions. When completing a membership application, potential members are asked about their position in the music industry, their knowledge about the movement, as well as their pronoun. When the request has been accepted and the new member is allowed into the group, they will see that the group practices a code of conduct that explicitly calls for gender-neutral language, as expressed in the Facebook group's guidelines. Those guidelines explicitly ask members to use gender neutral greetings such as "hey homies" or "hi people" instead of "hi girls," "hi guys," "hi sisters," or "hey queens" in order to create an "inclusive and welcoming environment." Besides encouraging gender-neutral language, the guidelines encourage members to "speak lovingly and supportively to each other," and to create a kind environment where all information is confidential. In addition to clear guidelines on gender identification and the avoidance of heteronormative language, it is also made clear that it is not permitted to use the group to promote one's own projects. This also helps to blur conventional "straight" dualisms such as amateur/professional or performer/producer, and to avoid hierarchies of, for example, genre, age, or commercial success.

The clear intentions to be "inclusive from the start" and the explicit guidelines working to break down "straight" dualisms and hierarchies can be understood by turning to

Sara Ahmed's thoughts on the importance of paying attention to a "queer phenomenology." Ahmed describes how it is by supporting "those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange and out of place" ("Orientations" 570) that one can change the existing structures or infrastructures (or, as she puts it, "queer the straight"). As she further notes, "[t]he table is assembled around the support it gives" ("Orientations" 551), hereby suggesting that if you wish to change the table (and thus the infrastructure) one way of doing it is to "support" the queer. By avoiding traditional dualisms, power hierarchies, and "straight" infrastructures, the Music Movement can be seen to be practicing strategies of "queering" space, with the result that it appears as a space and platform for interaction that is very different from other online and physical platforms and networks within the established music industry in Denmark.

Experiences of (Dis)orientations

Since its beginning, the Music Movement has been a platform and a community where individual experiences are shared and negotiated: a space where, according to Charlie, "there is room to have the difficult conversations, share knowledge and experiences and basically meet each other with respect in a professional manner" (qtd. in Frank). Many of the "difficult conversations" and experiences that are dealt with in and around the Music Movement are connected with feelings of being "out of place" or "disoriented" in specific situations and social music professional spaces. In her discussion of how "orientations" matter, Sara Ahmed has described how the world takes shape through the contact between people and objects. Orientations are organized rather than casual and, thus, they shape what becomes socially as well as bodily given. Not only do our bodies orient to things, but spaces also orient to particular bodies, making some bodies feel more "in place" than others. By indicating that some bodies are in place, this leaves others with a feeling of what Ahmed refers to as being "out of place" (*Queer* 158; "Orientation Matter" 254). For bodies that are out of place in the spaces in which they gather, the experience can be disorientating. Moments of disorientation are bodily experiences that "throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground," as Ahmed puts it (*Queer* 157). And the "affect" of disorientation can include experiences of feeling oblique, odd, or even disturbed (*Queer* 170). Where the bodily feeling of disorientation can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground in ways that might persist and become a crisis, the feeling itself might also pass as "the ground returns or as we return to the ground" (*Queer* 157).

Within the context of the Music Movement, individual experiences of being "out of place" or bodily feelings of disorientation are transformed into a collective body of knowledge, ideas, and initiatives that privileges other ways of knowing. In our conversations with women music professionals, it was a common theme that in their working lives and in their musical collaborations with male colleagues, certain expectations were placed on them because of their gender. Many described experiences of being regulated, disciplined, or censored in relation to their behavior as "woman in quite the right way" when participating in male-dominated collaborations or music scenes. We now dwell on some of the shared experiences of being subjected or disposed to the preexisting active forms and dispositions in the male-dominated

industry. These are examples of experiences of vulnerability that are reworked in the context of the Music Movement.

To “Know Your Place”

Several women and other gender minoritized musicians experience being labeled as “difficult” (in contrast to their male colleagues) when they have been highly engaged in their own professional work, for example by expressing opinions about the production processes of their music or how to brand themselves as artists. As the musician Birgitte, an active member of the Music Movement, who was signed to a major international music label, put it in one of the episodes of the 2023 podcast series *Tekla*⁴:

I have definitely experienced being labeled as difficult when I had expressed opinions about me and my own music, and I didn’t want to compromise on my stuff. Some people took offense to that. And, uhhhh, that’s why some people thought I wasn’t welcome (“Momentum” 16:35–16:56).

Birgitte was, as she describes, labeled “difficult” when expressing her opinions about herself as an artist and about her music and, as she further explains, the “difficulty” led to experiences of being “frozen out” by her professional connections, such as not being invited to her own P3 Award winning party.⁵ In her opinion, this is related to the fact that she is a woman:

I feel 100% that it has something to do with the fact that I’m a woman. And I’ve thought a lot about it in the years since: why is it the way it is? And what I’ve come to realize is that there’s no room for women to be . . . whole persons. (“Momentum” 17:10–17:25)

In terms of artistic expression, musicians also describe how perceived feminine characteristics expressed in music are corrected and altered, either through direct censorship or self-censorship. At a panel discussion, the rapper Elise recounted an episode in a recording studio where her producer, who thought her voice was too light, insisted that she recorded her vocals while lying on the floor in a fetal position so that she could sing with a “darker” voice. However, as she went on to say, this backfired at live concerts because the audience could not understand why she did not sound like she did on the record (Elise). Another woman-identified musician, Anne, also explained that in order to get high marks at the music conservatory, she had to “cut out everything that was characterized as ‘girlish.’” She continues: “So, everything that was bright and soft and smooth, and a bright voice and stuff like that. I had to just cut it out. Because that was just like ‘no-goes.’”

Finally, some of our interlocutors have experienced being excluded from music communities or collaborations if they become a professional “threat” to their male colleagues. Elise, for example, explained how she was called “fucking dope” by her male peers when she started going to MC battles, but experienced exclusion from the battle community (both from fellow rappers and the audience) when she began to win over her male counterparts in the battles. In her interpretation, this is clearly related to the fact that, as a woman in a male-dominated scene (such as the battle rap scene), she has to “know her place” and, as she put it, that place is somewhere in between being neither “too much” nor “too little.”

As described above, the women and gender minoritized musicians we have met in our fieldwork encounter “unwritten rules,” as the rapper Elise put it, about how to behave professionally: “rules” that have to be learned and followed in order to be accepted in male-dominated music communities, collaborations, and networks. Elise, Anne, and Birgitte feel that in order to be accepted in specific music communities, scenes, and collaborations, they have to shape themselves (and cut things out) according to the expectations of the (mainly male) gatekeepers: they cannot be too much or too good, nor can they be too little. With Ahmed, it could be said that the infrastructural nodes, objects, and processes that are part of the professional spaces in which they participate orient their bodies, and leave them with a bodily feeling of being “out of place.” Obeying the regulating and limiting “unwritten rules,” and thus demonstrating that they “know their place,” is experienced as the only possible pathway to avoid being excluded or labeled as “difficult” or “too much.” Drawing on anthropologist Cathrine Hasse, they have to “follow the direction of the [cultural] models” (*Queer* 240) and shape themselves into the expected images: images that they feel are attached to their feminized subject positions, shaped by the patriarchal infrastructural system.

Doing Care Work and Smelling Good

While some ways of being “a woman” (or anything other than male) can present challenges to collaboration and networking for women-identified musicians, there are other ways and behaviors that are more valued. However, these are often associated with the identity of “woman” in a stereotypical sense, rather than with a “music professional” identity. According to musician and singer Alice, women-identified professionals in the industry are often either given special treatment according to “classic gender roles,” where, for example, “the door is opened for you,” or they are expected to take on additional functions beyond their professional contribution:

... when you're out playing, you bring a packed lunch. That's another function you can have. Or “it smells better in the bus” or something like that, right? [laughs] And then there's also ... you have all sorts of other functions besides being a musician. It's all wrapped up in something weird like that.

Alice's notions of how she (and other women in the industry) are often assigned roles such as “fragrance dispensers” or “lunchbox providers” resonate with popular music scholar Emilia Barna's findings on how women are required to perform specific gendered roles and functions when pursuing a career in the Hungarian music industry. Barna argues that while all musicians and music industry workers constantly negotiate the boundaries between professional and personal labor in creative collaborations, women in particular are required to perform additional “emotional labor” (Hochschild) to build networks and maintain friendships with male musicians (Barna).

This can be seen in the act of taking on “care work” or a “motherly role” – such as bringing the lunch—but, as Barna notes, it can also be performed as a kind of “emotional neutrality” (121) that women perform when they tolerate objectification and stereotypification from male professionals. Pressure to perform “emotional neutrality” was described by many of the women we encountered in our fieldwork. Some described, for instance, how photographers encourage them

to make certain facial expressions, lip-positions, and body postures. As Barna argues, in doing so, women unwittingly contribute to the consolidation of their subordinate status in the industry and the “masculine atmosphere” that pervades the music industry in general (121).

Becoming Someone “You Don’t Want to Be”

Another recurrent theme in our empirical material is the experience of lack of recognition and the expectation that women and other gender minoritized musicians will not be able to perform at the same level as their male colleagues. Echoing the view of several of her women colleagues, Birgitte explains how, when she released her first album, she was met with suspicion when she told people that she had not only written all the songs, but had also co-produced them. She recalls some of the reactions: “But that can’t be . . . there must have been someone else . . . some men involved” (“Momentum” 25:00–25:20). As she goes on to explain, this led not only to feelings of not being recognized, but also to a change in her own behavior that made her uncomfortable:

I really felt that I was being written out of history in front of my eyes, and it was really violent. What’s so uncomfortable is that in order not to be written out of history, you have to constantly draw attention to yourself. And that’s not cool. You don’t want to be that person. (“Momentum” 25:20–25:30)

Thus, for Birgitte, the fear and anxiety of not being recognized led her to behave in ways she did not actually want to. Similarly, a woman-identified producer, Sanne, recounted numerous experiences in the studio where her male co-producer, without any communication or mutual agreement, felt entitled to simply “take over” the producer’s chair and thus take control of the sound desk. As she said in a panel discussion: “So what do you do? Do you kick the chair over and take it, or . . .?”

Such feelings of having to fight for space among male-identified professionals who “naturally” feel entitled and the fear or anxiety of not being professionally recognized by (male) colleagues, also mean that many of those we have met in our fieldwork feel that there is no room for failure when working in male-dominated music communities. As the musician Anne points out, she has often felt that she “couldn’t really ask anyone about anything.” As she puts it:

You can’t really ask, because you can’t say: “psst, what’s a plug-in?” Because then it would be something like: “You don’t know what a plug-in is!” right? And that’s what the boys have had. They have dared to ask each other. But there weren’t any girls . . . really no other girls. And maybe they didn’t know either. And maybe they didn’t talk to each other.

Such experiences of being pushed into unwanted positions and into degrading and humiliating situations have led for many to a sense of shame at being perceived as “disruptive,” “unqualified,” and “different,” what we might describe as affects of disorientation (Ahmed, *Queer*). Furthermore, such experiences seem to lead to a strong sense of loneliness and exclusion from the professional environment.

Being the Only

The experience of having to struggle for a very narrow space is not limited to intimate working relationships with *men* in rehearsal rooms, studios, and on stage. Most of our interlocutors also talk about feelings of loneliness, isolation, and, in retrospect, shame about how they have behaved toward other *women* when navigating the infrastructures of the music industry. The experienced musician, Susan, explains in an interview with the music magazine *GAFFA*: “. . . there’s only room for one woman at the top at a time, so you have to compete fiercely against each other. During my time at the top of the charts, I didn’t have much contact with other women in the industry” (qtd. in Frank).

In several of the conversations we have had during our fieldwork, the so-called “queen bee phenomenon” was brought up by our interlocutors as a lonely, vulnerable, and shameful social structure to be embedded in. The concept of the “queen bee” is a derogatory term originally applied to women who achieved success in traditionally male-dominated fields, and women who have distanced themselves from other women in the workplace in order to succeed. However, as we find in our fieldwork, the queen bee effect is not the course or pathway to gender inequality (like “women holding other women down”), but a consequence of highly “sexist organizational cultures,” where “the pervasiveness of organizational gender stereotypes . . . obstruct women in reaching career success” (Derks et al. 533).

An example of the infrastructuring that sustains the “queen bee phenomenon” is festival programming with only room for one or two women headliners. As the musician Helene puts it: “When we can see on the festival posters that there is only one seat [for women] . . . it’s really about holding on to the place you’ve been given.” As she further notes, this discourages collaborative behaviors of helping, featuring or promoting other women colleagues. Furthermore, the aforementioned musician Birgitte explains how, in her opinion, there is a tendency for music corporate systems to “coach” women artists by constantly emphasizing “who your competitors are and who you should be better than” (“Lyden” 10:45–10:52). Finally, the creation of a very narrow space for non-male artists in the concrete landscape of the music industry is reinforced, according to Helene, by the tendency of music journalists to compare women artists with other women artists, thus relegating the women arena to a kind of “side business” neatly separated from the “real” music industry: “One place you see this playing women against each other a lot is, for example, music reviews. So often when you get a good review, then it can be at the ‘expense’ of someone else: ‘She’s certainly better than that one, or her.’”

In this sense, festival planning, corporate coaching, and music criticism all function as active gendered forms of infrastructure that contribute to both a side-tracking of women musicians away from the “real” music industry and a harsh culture of competition among both men and women music professionals. For many of our interlocutors, this has led to a strong sense of loneliness, inadequacy, and even shame. As Alice states: “If you’re a woman in the music industry . . . you’re the only one. Because . . . we, women, are also taught . . . or brought up to believe that we are each other’s worst competitors.”

Shame and (In)visibility

To summarize the active forms of (visible and invisible) gendering in the infrastructure of the Danish music industry: the place carved out for women and other minoritized people in the music industry is perceived as a very narrow platform, and it is an act of balance to navigate it. Don't be "too much," or "too little." Don't be "too good," but don't make mistakes or fail. Don't be "too feminine" in artistic expression or appearance, but definitely be "feminine" when it comes to taking on stereotypically women's tasks. And get used to being alone or one of very few, as the infrastructure creates a competitive, insecure, and unstable platform for women, non-binary, and trans-identified music professionals, encouraging an internal competition between the few "queen bees" allowed on stage at any one time.

The consequences of navigating such structures in a primarily male-identified environment include feelings of affective dissonance for the women-identified artists, such as feelings of inadequacy; isolation and loneliness; not fitting in; lack of community, sharing and solidarity; self-censorship and shame for making "girlish" music; and a general feeling of shame for being wrong(ed) and out of place. There is a clear parallel between the "shame" expressed by our interlocutors, and the kind of "women's shame" that moral philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky writes about. As Bartky explains, there are two main types of "women's shame:" The shame of the (female) body—of being "fat, old or ugly" (85)—and a less specific kind of shame that is not so much a particular feeling or emotion (though it involves specific feelings and emotions), but rather a blurred and diffuse "pervasive affective attunement" to a specific social environment that shows itself as subtle feelings of inferiority and inadequacy (85). Such a pervasive affective attunement was reflected in almost all of our interlocutors' attitudes toward being part of specific music production environments. As such, the combination of music shame, body shame, and diffuse power mechanisms in the social realm of the music production environments can thus be seen as a mirror of what Devika Sharma, linking to Bartky, points out as the "generalized and faceless nature of controlling women" (525; see also Wallevik).

In addition to internalized feelings of inadequacy and shame, we have also seen how the gendered infrastructure and its active forms seem to draw attention toward the *gendering* of women identified musicians, while drawing attention away from their *professional* creative contributions and work in the industry. Ahmed's argument that bodies become both invisible and hyper-visible when they inhabit places that are not thought to belong to them ("Phenomenology" 159) has been taken up in recent years by several music and gender studies scholars when analyzing women and gender minoritized artists and musicians in various scenes. In *The Privilege of Invisibility*, Cathrine Landberg and Mikkel Okine conclude that in the Danish DJ industry, women-identified DJs are made visible through gendering, while "men can once again sit back in their invisibility" (74). Similarly, the Danish sound studies scholars Marie Højlund and Anne-Sofie Udsen have noted how,

... the pop-stage is generally male-dominated, whereby the female becomes invisible as she is not considered part of the orientation of the stage. Then, when she does inhabit the space,

she becomes hypervisible; she does not pass the male codes, so she stands out, and this creates a feeling of being out of place. (Højlund and Udsen)

The Swedish musicologist Rebekka Dobre Billström furthermore sums up this tendency that gender minoritized musicians within the industry are both “hypervisible” and “hyper-invisible:” “women and trans people in different music environments have faced, and still do, a similar mix of gendered social rules and limits, expectations, and perceptions, which further indicates a condition where hypervisibility exists in parallel with invisibility in sometimes incongruous ways” (17). Our empirical material resonates with Billström’s conclusion, highlighting how places become frameworks for bodily encounters and actions, setting the agenda for what bodies can—mean, act, and be seen—and cannot (see Ahmed, *Phenomenology*; see also Ringsager and Jørgensen).

The experience of being welcomed into the field of popular music, but of feeling highly regulated when entering it, led many of our interlocutors to confront feelings of shame and affective attunement, of being made both hyper-visible (as women) and hyper-invisible (as professionals). This led to a sense of disorientation. The bodies we have met—primarily women-identified bodies, but also non-binary and trans-identified bodies—were disoriented in the system they encountered as a result of their disposition to these structures: “I was tired of having to be approved all the time and always being told that what I was doing didn’t fit in. Everyone had all sorts of opinions about what I was doing and ought to be doing. I soon got the feeling that I didn’t want to spend my time on that” (Charlie, qtd. in Frank).

As with Charlie above, one strategy for overcoming such disorientation seemed for many to be to leave the established environments of the music industry. Similarly, in a panel discussion, the Danish independent pop artist, Kate, expressed that she would always recommend minoritized artists to “go independent,” even if it means always being a bit behind because, as she points out: “You have control. And it’s a huge currency that has nothing to do with money.”

It is against this background of gendered infrastructure that the Music Movement was established, first as a small, informal online group and later as the award-winning organization recognized for its achievements. As music anthropologists, we have been involved in the collective reflections generated in and through the Music Movement. In doing so, we have explored how some of the gendered expectations are experienced by women-identified professionals in the music industry. And we have seen how these gendered expectations have led to affective dissonances that for many have meant saying goodbye to certain environments and opportunities. These are all feelings related to diffuse power mechanisms in the social realm of work that lead to disorientation, and that can be traced back to the stubborn forms of power hidden in the folds of the music industry’s infrastructural space. Let us now, finally, turn to how the Music Movement has intervened in the Danish music industry as part of a counter-political form of infrastructure development.

Other Ways of Knowing: Release and Re-Orientation Through Community

The Music Movement Facebook group was pivotal in allowing women-identified and gender minoritized music professionals to connect over shared experiences. Alice’s

description of her early encounters with the group reflects an experience relayed by many others and captures the strengths and dynamics of the group:

I think it [the Facebook group] is so beautiful in its culture. Because people can always post. Sometimes it can be very personal things, “I’m having a bad day” or something, and . . . there was always someone like “Hey, it’s going to be OK.” Or there was someone who was angry and wrote, “Now I’ve got a fucking . . .” and then there were comments like “Yeah, okay, I know that too,” “Yeah, okay, but just try to . . .,” “I can understand that too” and “We have to try to see if . . . maybe you should try to approach it a bit differently.” Whatever emotions people came with, there was always someone there to catch them. I was so touched by that. And very quickly there were so many people in the group that someone always responded very quickly. And that means that this feeling of loneliness that I think we’ve all carried around with us, it . . . it went away because you suddenly felt that you were together with somebody. And that’s what it can do. It’s extremely touching. And people talk about all sorts of things. I was . . . well, it doesn’t happen so much now, but there was a really long time where every single day I experienced, “God, I know the feeling this person is talking about. Imagine, has she experienced it too?” And so on. And I was like, “So I don’t have to blame myself for being treated badly. I mean, it’s not my fault!” And that was a very big release for me personally.

Several of our interlocutors describe how, like Alice, the sharing of individual experiences within the Music Movement, as well as seeing themselves mirrored in the experiences of others, has led to a sense of “release,” where the feeling of shame they had imposed on themselves is removed and transformed from an individual experience into a collective and structural problem. The sharing and negotiation of individual experiences of barriers and gendered expectations of injustice reveals the invisible and relational forms of power that regulate access and orientation within the music industry—and it becomes a structural, and less of a personal, issue.

Bodies that experience being out of place and disoriented in certain social realms “might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action” (Ahmed, *Queer* 158). The Music Movement has become the “something” that has steadied the actions of many women and gender-minoritized musicians when navigating the gendered infrastructures of the Danish music industry. The community and collective knowledge that is generated, shared, and discussed within the Music Movement has been the “something” that people have turned to and reached out for—either by writing in the Facebook group, or by coming to the physical meetings and panel discussions that the Music Movement hosts—when they feel out of place, disoriented, or shameful. And within that community, feelings are collectively resonated, mirrored, and negotiated in ways that feel releasing and reorienting. The Music Movement has changed how its members perceive and orient themselves within the infrastructure of the music industry, in particular, because it has turned feelings of loneliness and individual experiences of being wronged into “a collective capacity.” As the woman-identified musician Anne puts it: “I think for many people the biggest thing is not feeling alone anymore. At least that’s my experience. It’s kind of crazy.”

Furthermore, the support the women and gender minoritized professionals receive from the Music Movement and the way in which experiences and arguments are shared, negotiated, and developed collectively within the Music Movement, means that individual members “dare more:” they dare to confront people or colleagues, and they dare to intervene in discussions (both online and offline) that they would not have done before.

They also dare to be “killjoys” (Ahmed, *Living*) when they encounter sexism in their social constellations because, as several put it, they feel that their colleagues in the movement “have their back.” As the woman-identified musician Helene expresses in a panel debate:

... it does something important for us mentally, fundamentally, to know that there are 2,300, or however many there are in the Music Movement, right behind you and have your back, right? It means a hell of a lot. Six years ago you were standing there all alone. And I didn't feel like I was in the industry then, I was on a desert island and it was a really long way to go, right? So it means so much that we're supporting each other and we're lifting each other up and we know that if you lean back or if you fall, someone's going to catch you.

The safer space that has been established within the Music Movement gives individuals strength and courage to not only navigate, but also confront the gendered expectations and the obstacles they are met with in their daily lives. As the musician Alice puts it: “Fuck off, there are some people who will fight for me too. Totally romantic. I love it.”

The collective engagement and network of the Music Movement has had a concrete impact on the Danish music industry. For example, the Music Movement was the breeding ground for a series of articles on sexism in the music industry published in one of Denmark's biggest newspapers, *Politiken*, in 2020. Here, a large number of named and pictured (famous and not so famous) musicians came forward with their individual (#metoo) experiences from their careers, testimonies of discrimination experienced in all corners of the music industry (e.g. Wind-Friis et al.). The process behind *Politiken*'s large and influential feature on music and sexism was initiated by the Music Movement, where musicians agreed to come forward collectively. Supporting the idea of the Music Movement as a basis for transformative action, the trans-woman identified artist Viola expresses: “I feel it gives me the confidence to go out and fight the conventional structures of the industry. ... They [the other members of the Music Movement] have my back if something happens, and that gives me more strength to fight the inequalities in the conventional industry” (qtd. in Frank).

The testimonies of discrimination from all corners of the music industry published in *Politiken* laid the foundation for further conversations and the development of a language around the issue, and provided a foundation for initiating research that has resulted in several reports and perhaps even our own research project, Gendering Music Matter (GEMMA). An important part of *Politiken*'s series of articles on sexism in the Danish music industry was the fact that the journalists behind the articles had access to sources through the Music Movement platform. The Music Movement has established itself as a broad network in which almost all professions (and across genres and generations) within the music industry are represented and actively communicate with each other: musicians, composers, producers, sound engineers, managers, music teachers at various music institutions, music journalists, and researchers (like us). In the Danish context where music organizations and associations are divided either by profession (e.g. whether you are a creator or a performer) or by genre, this entanglement is rather rare, or queer, and has created spaces for conversation between women and gender minorities working across disciplines within the music industry. This new and unique flow of communication among others means that musical collaborations can emerge from the network, jobs

are distributed, and journalists and researchers have access to sources. In that sense, the Music Movement creates a collective experience of having “access” to different levels, units, and actors within the whole infrastructure of the music industry, as well as a flow of communication that enables new kinds of counter-political mobilization of a feminist collective capacity that can challenge or “hack” the dominant infrastructure of the industry.

Conclusion

The purpose for most of the members of the Music Movement is not primarily a political transformation, but rather to create a good and caring working environment and a network of people who support each other across sections in the industry. Despite the group’s primary function, however, the Music Movement *has* contributed (and continues to contribute) to a political transformation of Danish music life by creating a safer space and a production community based on support and solidarity. In this article, we have argued that the Music Movement functions as a counter-infrastructure that reconfigures the larger dominant infrastructure from below in ways that also feed back into the movement itself, empowering its members and giving them a voice. As Elise puts it,

I think it’s a huge change, even though a lot of things in the industry haven’t necessarily changed. But the women in it have changed. And I think that is a . . . maybe the most important start. Because I think it will change a lot, I think it will change a lot.

By creating a queer space for networking and sharing, the Music Movement has established itself as a counter-infrastructure that not only enables its members to navigate the power structures enacted through gendered expectations and intersectional hierarchies in their work-related activities, but also facilitates change at various levels of the broader Danish music industry. By doing so, it has exposed invisible power structures, transformed affective dissonances to an affective solidarity, as well as individual feelings of “shame” and disorientation to a “collective feminist capacity.” By making the personal into a political matter, to rephrase Betty Friedan’s seminal argument from 1963, under the banner of the Music Movement, its members have found ways of tinkering, reworking, alternating, or hacking the dominant infrastructure of the music industry. As such, the Music Movement has forged not only new material, social, and cultural arrangements, but also alternative anti-sexist and inclusive ways of imagining possible futures and other ways of knowing and being in popular music and its industry.

We do not want to put the Music Movement on a pedestal. “An actor acts, but nobody acts alone” (Mol 256), and the Music Movement is just one of many initiatives that have contributed to the focus on equity and solidarity in the music industry in the Danish context in recent years. In our fieldwork we have also talked to women and gender minoritized professionals who are not interested in being part of the Music Movement—or who are members of the online Facebook group, but do not feel like participating in its activities and discussions, either because they cannot relate to the shared experiences, or because they do not experience it as an inclusive space. Such conversations indicate that there are structures and forces of exclusion⁶ within and around the Music Movement (in terms of precarity, merit, income, sexuality, body ableness, race, ethnicity, and

age) that deserve further exploration. In an article for the music magazine *GAFFA*, the trans-woman identified musician Viola, for example, reflects on the pitfall of the Music Movement's lack of an intersectional focus on representation and discrimination within Danish music life: "I don't feel we see very much from BIPOCs . . . or queer people. I would like to see a little more focus on how we can get everyone on board at the same time, because the struggles are very alike. It's about being 'like-minded' and not necessarily about gender on that front" (qtd. in Frank).

Despite the ongoing complicated work of reflection within the Music Movement, for example, on issues of intersectionality, equity, and representation, the Music Movement has made its mark on and been accoladed by the Danish music industry landscape. And, we argue, the meaning beyond the accolade lies in how the Music Movement suggests new ways of infrastructure for the whole industry: suggestions for tinkering with *new ways of knowing* by collectively gathering knowledge and insights across genres, disciplines, intersections and work areas in the music industry; suggestions for tinkering with *new ways of speaking* by, for example, avoiding stereotypical assumptions about people's gender, race, body, or love orientation; and finally, suggestions for making *work/life sustainability* (for all, regardless of gender, age, race, body abilities, etc.) in the music industry a common issue and a shared responsibility. The infrastructural proposals of the Music Movement are not solutions, but guidelines for further work that can hopefully open up a much greater degree of care and responsibility and a much greater degree of diverse representation of bodies in popular (music) culture. In such a perspective, the Music Movement, as Gry Harrit puts it in the opening quotation of this article, may have paved the way for new dynamics, new markets, new mainstream, new business models *for all*.

Notes

1. Translated from Danish into English by the authors.
2. All interviewees are anonymized by pseudonyms. All interviews, chat messages, etc. were conducted in Danish, and quotations were translated into English by the authors.
3. While the distinction between "affect" as pre-conceptual and pre-discursive and "emotion" as conceptual and discursive is essential for some scholars (e.g. Massumi), we draw on scholars from the intersectional fields of feminist, queer, and post/de-colonial theory who are more likely to use affect and emotion interchangeably. In doing so, we agree with scholars, such as Sara Ahmed, who have argued that "the distinction between affect/emotion can under-describe the work of emotions, which involve forms of intensity, bodily orientation, and direction that are not simply about 'subjective content' or qualification of intensity. Emotions are not 'after-thoughts' but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit" (*Promise* 230). We use the term "affect" to denote a generic category of emotions and feelings, including embodied and sensory feelings, through which we experience the world and through which worlds, subjects, and objects are enacted and produced.
4. *Tekla* is a podcast that thematizes issues of women composers/musicians through the story of the great Danish composer Tekla Griebell Wandall (1866–1940).
5. Birgitte received the P3 Award 2011. The P3 Prize is the main prize (worth 100,000 kr/10,000 GBP) awarded at the annual P3 Award Show, P3 Gold. P3 is the national radio station for mainstream music in Denmark.
6. We are aware that our own biases as white, cis, women researchers in our 40s have influenced this article and our focus on the benefits of the Music Movement, and we look forward to engaging in dialogue with other positions on this issue in our future research.

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