



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Musika: The becoming of an artistic musical metaphysics

Withers, S.

Citation

Withers, S. (2020, October 27). *Musika: The becoming of an artistic musical metaphysics*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/137929>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/137929>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/137929> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Withers, S.

Title: Musika: The becoming of an artistic musical metaphysics

Issue date: 2020-10-27

Afterword

Throughout this dissertation I have strived to understand musical (and people) matters of ‘ineffable’ nature. The ineffable has appeared in different shapes and colors, and through different concepts and notions, like the Implicate Order, the smooth space, the reality of sound, the Absolute Unbounded Manifold, Musika, practice, the Musical assemblage, the Musical entity, consciousness As far as music is concerned, the ineffable is sublimated in the concept of the Musical as the meaning, the consciousness of music. The BwO, on the other hand, stands out as a broader and more comprehensive, general idea: it articulates the virtual dimension of an(y) actual body – its reservoir of potentialities, possibilities, affects, movements. I approached the ‘InterZone’ with the assumption that the BwO is the right ‘place’ to look for the Musical, believing that “the way to the Musical passes through the middle of a BwO.” My reasoning stemmed from the idea that in order to find something individual and particular, one must dive into something whole and general. My experience with Tanya Tagaq has revealed that what I have been referring to as ‘the Musical’ is much more organized and palpable than I had presumed; Tanya has helped me to fine-tune some of Musical’s characteristics. Explanation follows.

Tanya Tagaq’s performance plays the BwO as the dynamic aspect of Musika’s in its ‘unstructured but structurable’ energy state characterized by high entropy, high potential, low coherence and low integration. The artists-musickers visit the musical BwO to tune into other reality plane(s), to study movement, to harness potential, to borrow ‘nonorganizational’ insights and know-how, to channel feral intensities and desires. But the BwO is not strictly musical. When closing eyes in meditation and trying to really ‘see’ and ‘listen’ from a distance what is going on ‘out there,’ one directly plugs in the holomovement of an Implicate Order. Upon maintaining a detached perspective, one notices how active and alive this Order is, how everything is enfolding in everything else, how glimpses of thoughts, flakes of language and fragments of images – while preserving their identity – are appearing and disappearing, molded and kneaded by a twisty current. There is an inherent integrity to this zone, but the entropy is too high (for physical entities like us) to comprehend. This is what Tanya Tagaq presents us with her performances. However overflowing with information, however engaging and engrossing this BwO is, dwelling here strains and unnerves – in both its mindspace and musical variants. The BwO does not invite residents and is not a destination, but rather a liquid interzone, a portal. To proceed, one must relax

the curious, grasping mind and let go of the instinct to liaise observation to making sense and to understanding. As in the Zen kōan, let go (of any last blades of grass) or be dragged, here too softening and surrender are necessary actions to override the dangerous currents of the flow that is the BwO.

The turbulent BwO described here, is not the only possible one of its kind. Going further into the meditative state, for example, one arrives at a smooth plateau. It is another articulation of the Body without organs, one of markedly different nature. This slower zone fascinates and energizes; here one perceives no thoughts and glimpses, no happenings or desires. All one does, is staying still and observing the topological plasmic dance, in which an ‘I’ is nowhere to be found, any ‘I’ and any ‘it’. The BwO could also be understood as a transmission station – an electrical grid, an organizational dispatch, a network gateway, a traffic firewall. Instead of organs, this body is supplied with various switches for making and breaking connections: for modifying, distorting, amplifying, spreading, limiting, breaking into pieces, storing, stopping, and generally, navigating current and waves . . .

Art historian Délia Vékony expounds a similar to the BwO space she names ‘Ground Zero’. In her eponymous dissertation from 2017 she introduces and explores this space alongside concepts like artwork, image, agency, representation, presence, rapture. In her formulation, the ‘ground zero’ overcomes the logic of representation. It is a depth beyond the surface that invites us beyond its own narrative (Vékony 2017: 78):

(Contemporary art) creates a space in which one is not told what to do and it is the intention of the artwork *not to tell*. Presence is not forced onto the viewer. (...) The attitude with which one might approach [the work] is not empathy (...) It is rather an inner work in which the image does not demand the viewer to engage with it, but demands the viewer to engage with him or herself. While looking at it, the image starts working on me *personally*, it asks me to work on myself. In this sense, the image becomes a mere starting point, an initiator and it builds into me, opens up gates to myself (Ibid.: 80, emphasis in original).

The uncanny ability to cancel narratives and to open an ‘absence’ for personal engagement and exploration of one’s inner world is, of course, not a special power of contemporary art alone, one needs only remember Rilke’s contemplations before the archaic torso of Apollo with its terrifying message (“*You must change your life*”). The ground space works without expectations or tradeoffs: the beholder is not urged to come up with a ‘particular’ – any – solution. The ‘ground zero,’ then, is the space of art engagement, in which “the force of art”

manifests itself as “energy that does not strive for a particular goal” (Ibid.: 50), “in which the beholder does not have a choice but to confront his or her own issues” (Ibid.: 79).

Vékony’s descriptions and definitions of the ‘ground space’ are congruent to a large extent with my understanding of the Body without organs. By defining it as an absence, as “a mere starting point,” she contributes to further fine-tuning the concept and the phenomenon. The BwO is such a potent concept that it is, perhaps, easier to say what it is rather than what it is not. One thing the BwO is not, however, is a production factory: the outcome of all its fantastic activity is not and cannot be manifested within itself and by itself – it needs an outlet, it needs a receiver with an energy source. Thus, to define it yet again, the BwO is also the process navigating and managing energy charge between an input and an output. The in-form-a-tion of meaning, unleashed on the edges of the BwO in high multiples, must be integrated by the consciousness of the receiver of the BwO and its actual (i.e. physical) coagulation.

I have suspected that it is here, in the acrobatic articulations of the BwO where the Musical resides – in the smooth, alien mindscape beyond the narrative, where there are no great revelations, passions or ‘lessons,’ only subtle changes in density, tone, background, silences, wordlessness, pressure, continuity. Tanya Tagaq’s performance makes me question this assumption by posing the question explicitly: Can the Musical be found in a BwO? What is its nature? The short answer is that the way to grasping the Musical may pass through the middle of the Body without organs, but it does not stay there. In other words, the BwO is not where the Musical is to be found. The two phenomena have different nature, mechanics, and function: if the BwO is more about a how, the Musical is more about a what. Let’s consider.

Where the BwO inebriates with excess and extremism, fullness and density, the Musical is more transparent and lucid, it lures with sophisticated attributes, like eloquence and ambiguity. The Musical is the secret clause of the Music work, that, which we can never catch, but whose lingering scent we follow long after the sounds cease to be. Like the BwO, the Musical, too, dwells on the edge of an abyss, but unlike the former’s *modus operandi* motivated to maintaining the breathless strain between break down and breakthrough, the latter softly levitates, playing just above the cusp between knowable and ineffable, the physical and the musical projects.

Further, where the BwO is more like a process or transmission, the Musical is more like a tailor-fit musical intelligence. Occupying the gray zone between the Implicate and the Explicate Orders, the Musical manifests as a higher entropy state of the explicate Musikon

evolutions, e.g. the Musinculus, the Music work, but not as high as the BwO's. In the BwO one observes nonlocality in action, i.e. the body abounds with noncausal connections between any n number of moments, movements, affects. The Musical, by contrast, is a local embodiment of Musika's potential, always. Although it is not physical itself, it emerges, as in transpires, from the physical. If, as Deleuze and Guattari state, the assemblage sits on the top of a BwO ("a striation on the face of the BwO"), the Musical, in turn, perspires – as a condensation – from the Musical assemblage itself. It is one of the most refined phenomena we have the ability to perceive, its essence being filtered, first, through the BwO, then, through the physical reality rule-set, and finally, through us, the crown of creation! Each musical instrument engenders a different Musical. Each Music work secretes a different Musical. Each sentient encounters a different Musical. Each Music work, through each different instrument, presents a different Musical to each sentient. The Musical is bound to its medium as a secret message. As far as earthlings are concerned, without the articulation of the constrained, stratified, carnal bodies with organs, the great musical flow of the electrical BwO cannot manifest a single musical thought. The situation is perhaps similar in all different reality frames – in order to interact with the said reality denizens, the Musical must exit the BwO and emerge through said reality matter and media.

Then, there is the difference of agendas. Entities, regardless of their reality frame and level and quality of consciousness, have unlimited access to myriad BwOs as portals to the 'other side'. The BwO design is to de-organ-ize flows, to disturb and to mess up structures, narratives and texts, to expand and plug the thin self-conscious thread into a freer, larger source of consciousness, triggering transformation. The agenda of the Musical is more ambiguous. Strangely complete in itself, it invites us to listen deeply, again, more; to hear the work in five, ten, twenty different interpretations, to keep coming back to it, to keep searching for the 'right form' of music and life. Using different media, the Musical is conducive to a variety of other meanings as organizations of consciousness. If there is an agenda to it, it is this – to instill in us, sentients, according to our individual level and quality of consciousness, a capacity to be susceptible to paralinguistic meanings, a desire to play, chase, and create meanings, to involve us into absorbing, and, eventually, integrating these hidden meanings. As such, the Musical is an agent of the fundamental process of consciousness evolution, spearheading the becoming of the Absolute Unbounded Manifold –

higher organization : more integrated meanings = more consciousness

And finally: the greatest difference between the BwO and the Musical might be that where the former multiplies our questions and inspires new ones, the latter provides us with variety of answers. With variety of musical answers. Reading Andersen's "Little Mermaid" as a child, I suffered that this gentle girl who played *va banque* and sacrificed all believing love overcomes the impossible, is not seen and heard for who she is. The Prince is oblivious to her pain, to her grace and beauty, to her monstrosity, because he is blinded by language to see only that, which is linguistically mediated, established through research, objectively manifested and scientifically verified: to him, the Little Mermaid is an auditory cheesecake. The intimation of the story is that, was the Little Mermaid able to tell who she is and why she is here, the Prince would have fallen in love with her and they would have had their happily ever after. . . . Like the Little Mermaid, the Musical showers us with answers, which, being a secret, it is committed not to tell. And instead of considering this situation as an inconvenience to be disposed with or as a mystery to be solved, we should blindly embrace it – not telling is Musical's way to stay, its strategy for long-term survival and propagation. In order to remain our ever-so-obscure object of desire, it must stay close by, but to remain ungrounded, untamed, uneffable. Only by dwelling past matter, outside of language and the "vulgar illusion of words,"¹⁵⁸ beyond the rational, can the Musical, like the Little Mermaid, become ethereal, transcendental.

And we need the transcendental Musical, as it, too, needs us. Forever cast – out and away – in the gray light of self-consciousness, we don't hear anymore the beautiful voices of the gods, forever lost in the bicameral mind. The Musical has, in a way, taken the place of that lost connection; with codes and protocols, and sometimes with straight hyperlinks, it provides us with ways, both painful and exuberant, to enfold into a larger reality. By enunciating and resounding this deeper reality, the Musical present us with other modes to grow and refine our consciousness; by becoming more conscious, we create new ways to hear the Musical and to expand its rhizome of meanings and organizations, thus assisting the evolution of Musika, contributing to the growth of the Absolute Unbounded Oneness.

As far as our 'I' will ever know, the Musical, as a physically conducted consciousness of music, is profoundly bound to man. In the last analysis, it may be true that the meaning of music is the meaning of man (Steiner 1991: 6). While the Musical may be presenting entities,

¹⁵⁸ Stéphane Mallarmé, quoted in George Steiner's *Real Presences*. The full quote reads: "Mallarmé's poetry and its revolutionary typography developed a philosophy of "real absence"; words become empty signs that cannot instruct us as to the real meanings of things; "to ascribe to words a correspondence to things out there is.... vulgar illusion" in the view of Mallarmé" (1991: 95).

meanings and realities beyond ours, its becomings and self-discovery – like God's – pass through our various bodies: rubbing, teasing, manipulating. And so to the Musical we may come not through understanding, but through becoming-it.

music heard so deeply

that is not heard at all, but you are the music

while the music lasts.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ T.S.Eliot *Four Quartets* 1941, Quartet No.3: The Dry Salvages.