Music as Gestural Narrative:
An Analysis of Video Recordings of
Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, Op. 109

by

Chairat Chongvattanakij

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts
Graduate Department of Music
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Chairat Chongvattanakij 2016
Music as Gestural Narrative: An Analysis of Video Recordings of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, Op. 109

Chairat Chongvattanakij

Doctor of Musical Arts
Graduate Department of Music
University of Toronto

2016

Abstract

Western music scholarship tends to privilege the notion of music as text, rather than music as performance. Furthermore, even in performance research, the focus is typically on the listener’s perception of music, while the performer’s experience during performance often does not receive adequate attention. Informed by the perspective of embodied cognition, this dissertation introduces the concept of “gestural narrative” and investigates its viability for performance research from the performer’s point of view. Chapter 1 reviews the literature on the concepts of “gesture” and “narrative”, exploring their relevance to the examination of the performer’s embodied experience of music. As a preliminary case study, I consider how Chopin’s Second Ballade could be interpreted as a gestural narrative. Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, Op. 109 is the focus of Chapters 2 to 6. While Chapter 2 offers a detailed score-based analysis of the sonata as a gestural narrative by identifying salient gestures and outlining how the evolution of these gestures articulates a narrative archetype across the entire piece, Chapters 3 to 6 provide thorough video-based observational analyses of performances of Op. 109 by Chairat Chongvattanakij, Claudio Arrau, Daniel Barenboim, and Glenn Gould, discussing the extent to which each of the four performances can be interpreted as following the gestural narrative.
proposed in Chapter 2. While Chapter 2 is informed by traditional music theory and recent scholarship in music and narrative, Chapters 3 to 6 draw on Laban Movement Analysis and Paul Ekman’s research on facial expression to provide a working framework for understanding the dynamics and possible meanings of each performer’s gestures. Moreover, for the performances by Arrau, Barenboim, and Gould, observational analysis is supplemented by the consultation of various documents about and by these performers, as I aimed to establish an empathic connection with each performer in order to experience his performance from his perspective. Chapter 7 summarizes the research results and draws conclusions about music as gestural narrative.
Dedication

To my father, for inspiring me to seek knowledge,
To my mother, for teaching me to be true to myself;
Thank you both for equipping me for the pursuit of a flourishing life.

To the memory of my grandmother, Ku Hok Moi (1922-2015),
who always had the greatest faith in me.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii  
Dedication ...................................................................................................................................... iv  
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................ v  
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................... viii  
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ ix  
List of Examples ........................................................................................................................... xii  

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................... 1  
1.1 The Experience of Performance ....................................................................................... 1  
1.1.1 Taking Subjective Experience into Account ............................................................. 2  
1.1.2 Considering the Performer’s Subjective Experience ............................................... 3  
1.1.3 From Phenomenology to Embodied Cognition ........................................................ 4  
1.2 Embodiment ................................................................................................................ ..... 5  
1.2.1 The “Discovery” of the Body ................................................................................... 5  
1.2.2 The Primacy of Movement: Dynamic Embodiment ................................................. 7  
1.2.3 Conveying Meaning: Corporeal Intentionality and Intercorporeality ...................... 8  
1.2.4 From Movement to Gesture ...................................................................................... 9  
1.2.5 Musical Gestures ..................................................................................................... 10  
1.2.6 Hatten’s Musical Gestures ...................................................................................... 12  
1.2.7 Le Guin’s “Carnal Musicology” ............................................................................. 14  
1.2.8 Gesture as the Basic Unit of Embodied Expression ............................................... 14  
1.3 Narrative ......................................................................................................................... 16  
1.3.1 Music and Narrative ............................................................................................... 16  
1.3.2 The Nature of Musical Narrative ............................................................................ 17  
1.3.3 Characteristics of Musical Narrative ...................................................................... 18  
1.3.4 Narrative Archetypes .............................................................................................. 21  
1.3.5 Gesturing Narrative, Narrating Gesture .................................................................. 24  
1.4 Chopin’s Second Ballade as a Gestural Narrative ......................................................... 24  
1.5 Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 30
1.6 Research Methodology ................................................................................................... 31
  1.6.1 Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 32
  1.6.2 Data Analysis .......................................................................................................... 33
  1.6.3 Limitations ............................................................................................................. 37
1.7 Overview of the Dissertation .......................................................................................... 38

CHAPTER 2: BEETHOVEN’S OP. 109 AS A GESTURAL NARRATIVE ....................................... 39
  2.1 Overview .................................................................................................................. 39
  2.2 First Movement ............................................................................................................ 40
  2.3 Second Movement ......................................................................................................... 51
  2.4 Third Movement ........................................................................................................... 60
  2.5 Salient Gestures .......................................................................................................... 74
  2.6 Op. 109 as a Romance .................................................................................................... 76

CHAPTER 3: A PERFORMANCE OF OP. 109 BY CHAIRAT CHONGVATTANAKIJ ................. 79
  3.1 Overview .................................................................................................................. 79
  3.2 First Movement ............................................................................................................ 80
  3.3 Second Movement ......................................................................................................... 91
  3.4 Third Movement .......................................................................................................... 100
  3.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 110

CHAPTER 4: A PERFORMANCE OF OP. 109 BY CLAUDIO ARRAU .................................. 112
  4.1 Overview .................................................................................................................. 112
  4.2 First Movement ............................................................................................................ 113
  4.3 Second Movement ........................................................................................................ 125
  4.4 Third Movement .......................................................................................................... 133
  4.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 145

CHAPTER 5: A PERFORMANCE OF OP. 109 BY DANIEL BARENBOIM ............................ 146
  5.1 Overview .................................................................................................................. 146
  5.2 First Movement ............................................................................................................ 146
  5.3 Second Movement ........................................................................................................ 155
  5.4 Third Movement .......................................................................................................... 161
  5.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 169
List of Tables

Table 1.1. Liszka’s four basic strategies (1989: 133, modified by Almén 2003: 18) .................. 23
Table 1.2. Laban’s motion factors (McCaw 2011: 199) .......................................................... 34
Table 1.3. Laban’s effort actions (McCaw 2011: 200-201) ...................................................... 35
Table 1.4. Drives consist of three motion factors (McCaw 2011: 204) ..................................... 35
Table 1.5. Inner attitudes consist of two motion factors (McCaw 2011: 204) ......................... 35
Table 2.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, form diagram ............................................. 40
Table 2.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, comparison of primary and secondary themes 42
Table 2.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, form diagram ............................................ 51
Table 2.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, form diagram ......................................... 60
Table 7.1. Gestural meanings of Laban’s effort actions in performances of Op. 109 .......... 192
List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Frye’s mythoi (Denham 1978: 68) ................................................................. 22
Figure 3.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 5: Chongvattanakij ......................... 80
Figure 3.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 8: Chongvattanakij ......................... 81
Figure 3.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 11: Chongvattanakij ......................... 82
Figure 3.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 23: Chongvattanakij ......................... 84
Figure 3.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 26: Chongvattanakij ......................... 84
Figure 3.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 40: Chongvattanakij ......................... 85
Figure 3.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 47: Chongvattanakij ......................... 85
Figure 3.8. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 49: Chongvattanakij ......................... 86
Figure 3.9. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 62: Chongvattanakij ......................... 87
Figure 3.10. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 65: Chongvattanakij ......................... 88
Figure 3.11. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 84: Chongvattanakij ......................... 90
Figure 3.12. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 99: Chongvattanakij ......................... 92
Figure 3.13. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 8: Chongvattanakij ......................... 92
Figure 3.14. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 28: Chongvattanakij ......................... 93
Figure 3.15. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 43: Chongvattanakij ......................... 94
Figure 3.16. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 49: Chongvattanakij ......................... 95
Figure 3.17. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 66: Chongvattanakij ......................... 96
Figure 3.18. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 81: Chongvattanakij ......................... 97
Figure 3.19. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 120: Chongvattanakij ......................... 98
Figure 3.20. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 130: Chongvattanakij ......................... 98
Figure 3.21. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Chongvattanakij ......................... 99
Figure 3.22. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 1: Chongvattanakij ......................... 101
Figure 3.23. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 12: Chongvattanakij ......................... 102
Figure 3.24. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 14: Chongvattanakij ......................... 103
Figure 3.25. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 17: Chongvattanakij ......................... 103
Figure 3.26. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 29: Chongvattanakij ......................... 104
Figure 3.27. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 68: Chongvattanakij ......................... 105
Figure 3.28. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 109: Chongvattanakij ......................... 106
Figure 3.29. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 124: Chongvattanakij ......................... 106
Figure 3.30. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 142: Chongvattanakij ......................... 107
Figure 3.31. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 164: Chongvattanakij ......................... 108
Figure 3.32. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 177: Chongvattanakij ......................... 108
Figure 3.33. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 203: Chongvattanakij ......................... 109
Figure 4.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 0: Arrau ........................................... 113
Figure 4.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 9: Arrau ........................................... 115
Figure 4.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 11: Arrau .......................................... 115
Figure 4.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 15: Arrau .......................................... 117
Figure 4.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 15: Arrau .......................................... 118
Figure 4.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 43: Arrau .......................................... 119
Figure 4.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 48: Arrau .......................................... 120
| Figure 4.8. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 60: Arrau | 122 |
| Figure 4.9. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 81: Arrau | 123 |
| Figure 4.10. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 84-85: Arrau | 124 |
| Figure 4.11. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 99: Arrau | 126 |
| Figure 4.12. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 25-32: Arrau, audio waveform | 127 |
| Figure 4.13. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 37-48: Arrau, audio waveform from (a) 1966 recording, (b) 1970 recording | 128 |
| Figure 4.14. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 47: Arrau | 128 |
| Figure 4.15. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 50: Arrau | 129 |
| Figure 4.16. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 58: Arrau | 130 |
| Figure 4.17. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 169: Arrau | 131 |
| Figure 4.18. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Arrau | 132 |
| Figure 4.19. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 5: Arrau | 134 |
| Figure 4.20. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 19: Arrau | 135 |
| Figure 4.21. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 20: Arrau | 135 |
| Figure 4.22. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 29: Arrau | 136 |
| Figure 4.23. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 112: Arrau | 138 |
| Figure 4.24. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 152: Arrau | 139 |
| Figure 4.25. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 156: Arrau | 140 |
| Figure 4.26. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 160: Arrau | 141 |
| Figure 4.27. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 169: Arrau | 141 |
| Figure 4.28. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 192: Arrau | 143 |
| Figure 4.29. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 199: Arrau | 143 |
| Figure 4.30. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 201: Arrau | 144 |
| Figure 5.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 9: Barenboim | 147 |
| Figure 5.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 11: Barenboim | 148 |
| Figure 5.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 144: Barenboim | 150 |
| Figure 5.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 58: Barenboim | 151 |
| Figure 5.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 58: Barenboim | 151 |
| Figure 5.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 61: Barenboim | 152 |
| Figure 5.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 66: Barenboim | 153 |
| Figure 5.8. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 76: Barenboim | 153 |
| Figure 5.9. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 1: Barenboim | 156 |
| Figure 5.10. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, (a) m. 34, (b) m. 42: Barenboim | 157 |
| Figure 5.11. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 116: Barenboim | 159 |
| Figure 5.12. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 145: Barenboim | 159 |
| Figure 5.13. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Barenboim | 160 |
| Figure 5.14. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 5: Barenboim | 161 |
| Figure 5.15. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 14: Barenboim | 162 |
| Figure 5.16. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, (a) m. 97, (b) m. 101: Barenboim | 164 |
| Figure 5.17. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 112: Barenboim | 165 |
| Figure 5.18. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 203: Barenboim | 168 |
| Figure 6.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 13: Gould | 172 |
| Figure 6.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 62: Gould (1964) | 174 |
Figure 6.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 62: Gould (1966) ........................................ 174
Figure 6.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 97: Gould .................................................. 176
Figure 6.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 48: Gould .................................................. 178
Figure 6.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 70: Gould .................................................. 179
Figure 6.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Gould ................................................ 180
Figure 6.8. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 65: Gould .................................................. 183
Figure 6.9. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 121: Gould ................................................ 184
Figure 6.10. Gould as Sir Nigel Twitt-Thornwaite, the “dean of British conductors”, 1980 .... 185
Figure 6.11. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 203: Gould ............................................. 187
Figure 7.1. Gestural-narrative dialectic as a continuum ............................................................. 196
List of Examples

Example 1.1. Chopin, Ballade No. 1, Op. 23, mm. 1-10 .............................................................. 18
Example 1.2. Chopin, Ballade No. 1, Op. 23, mm. 258-264 ........................................................ 19
Example 1.3. Ligeti, Étude No. 10 (“Der Zauberlehrling”), mm. 94-97 ...................................... 20
Example 1.4. Grieg, Lyric Pieces, Op. 71, No. 1 (“Once upon a Time”), mm. 1-3 ..................... 20
Example 1.5. Grieg, Lyric Pieces, Op. 71, No. 1 (“Once upon a Time”), mm. 17-22 .................. 21
Example 1.6. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 1-6 .............................................................. 25
Example 1.7. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 47-49 ........................................................... 25
Example 1.9. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 133-140 ....................................................... 27
Example 1.10. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 159-164 ...................................................... 28
Example 1.11. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 169-172 ...................................................... 28
Example 1.12. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 188-190 ...................................................... 29
Example 1.13. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 197-204 ...................................................... 29
Example 2.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 1-10 .................................................... 41
Example 2.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 11-15 .................................................... 44
Example 2.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 16-25 ................................................... 45
Example 2.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 110, III, mm. 8-10 ................................................... 45
Example 2.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 26-46 ................................................... 46
Example 2.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 47-57 ................................................... 47
Example 2.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 58-65 ................................................... 48
Example 2.8. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 71-99 ................................................... 49
Example 2.9. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 1-8 .................................................... 51
Example 2.10. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 1-8, reduction .................................... 52
Example 2.11. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 8-23 ................................................... 53
Example 2.12. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 24-44 ................................................... 54
Example 2.13. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 46-57 ................................................... 55
Example 2.15. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 75-104 .............................................. 57
Example 2.16. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 99-119 .............................................. 58
Example 2.17. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 168-177 ............................................. 59
Example 2.18. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 1-16 ............................................... 61
Example 2.19. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109: (a) II, mm. 25-26, (b) III, mm. 1-2 .............. 62
Example 2.20. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 17-32 .............................................. 63
Example 2.21. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 33-37 ............................................. 64
Example 2.22. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 41-46 ............................................. 65
Example 2.23. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 60-64 ............................................. 65
Example 2.24. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 65-74 ............................................. 66
Example 2.25. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, Var. 4, the two subjects ......................... 67
Example 2.27. Bach, Goldberg Variations, BWV 988, Var. 3, mm. 1-4 ........................................ 68
Example 2.28. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 106-109 .......................................... 69
Example 2.29. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 113-123 .......................................... 69
Example 2.30. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 128-137 .......................................... 70
Example 2.31. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 138-147 .......................................... 70
Example 2.32. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, Var. 6, diminution of the V pedal ........ 71
Example 2.33. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, Var. 6, diminution of the melody ........ 71
Example 2.34. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 153-157 .......................................... 72
Example 2.35. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 167-171 .......................................... 72
Example 2.36. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 176-179 .......................................... 74
Example 2.37. Voice-leading connections between the movements of Op. 109  
(Marston 1995: 253) ..................................................................................................................... 77
Example 3.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 9-12: Chongvattanakij ............. 102
Example 4.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 6-10: Arrau ................................... 114
Example 4.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 209-213 ........................................ 116
Example 4.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 9-12, harmonic rhythm .......... 126
Example 4.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 69-80: Arrau ............................. 130
Example 5.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 1-10: Barenboim .......................... 147
Example 5.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 81a, I, mm. 250-255 ......................................... 154
Example 5.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 57-62: Barenboim ................. 163
Example 6.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 66-69: Gould ........................... 175
Chapter 1
Introduction

This dissertation takes part in the relatively recent shift in the humanities from the textual to the performative (McCutcheon and Sellers-Young 2013: 1), a shift that places human experience at the forefront of academic discourse. In *The Anthropology of Experience*, Bruner goes so far as to write that the “performance does not release a preexisting meaning that lies dormant in the text”, but rather that “meaning is always in the present, in the here-and-now” (1986: 11). Even in the natural sciences, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the need to “develop paradigms for understanding human experience” and “integrate knowledge obtained from them with the rest of the sciences” (Price and Barrell 2012: 1). In this dissertation, I focus on the experience of performance in the Western art music tradition, and, specifically, I explore the extent to which it could be understood as a gestural narrative from the performer’s perspective. This line of inquiry combines the concepts of “gesture” and “narrative”, which have both received much attention in recent scholarship. The aim of this introductory chapter is to provide a review of the literature on these two key concepts and to examine their relevance to the study of the performer’s embodied experience of music. Then, as a preliminary case study, I consider how Chopin’s Second Ballade could be interpreted as a gestural narrative. Finally, I discuss the key research questions and the research methodology for the present study.

1.1 The Experience of Performance

In his highly influential book *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, the Australian philosopher David J. Chalmers distinguishes between what he calls the easy and hard problems of consciousness. The easy problem of consciousness refers to the relatively straightforward matters of functioning (such as discriminating, categorizing, and reacting to the environment), while the hard problem of consciousness refers to the fact that there is something that it is like for one to experience a conscious mental state (Chalmers 1996: 4).

With regard to music, Montague gives the example that the concluding twenty-nine measures of the finale of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony could be explained as “a prolongation of the tonic
But such a formalist interpretation does not seem to offer an accurate and complete description of how listeners actually experience this music. To say that listeners experience “a prolongation” is arguably as irrelevant as saying that viewers experience “the firing of neurons in the cortex” when they see the colour red (ibid.). Succinctly put, the hard problem in music is that “meanings are not the equivalent of sounding forms” (Hatten 1994: 275).

In light of the seeming ineffability of the musical experience, the hard problem of the relationship between subjective experience and objective functional analysis would appear to be especially pertinent to music scholarship. As Montague expresses it, “How can an apparently ineffable experience be rendered in words without losing that which makes it particular?” (30). While it is unlikely that the solution to this problem (if there is one) will emerge anytime soon, attempts have already been made to approach it in a rigorous manner.

1.1.1 Taking Subjective Experience into Account

In the Western art music tradition, music theory is typically a disembodied enterprise; it is based on analyzing the score, rather than examining the meaningful experience of music in the moment of performance. Zbikowski identifies two strands that make up contemporary music theory, where one strand is occupied with pedagogy and “a careful and often relentless explication of what… we can call musical grammar” (2002: viii), while the other strand is engaged with “speculative and highly systematic approaches to musical organization” (ibid.). Interestingly, the literary scholar Marie-Laure Ryan even remarks that “a conversation between music scholars will lose the layman in a way that a conversation between literature specialists will not” (2004: 267).

At the heart of this seemingly arcane enterprise is the faith in the objectivity of music analysis. As Samson points out, “music theory, after all, appears to have ‘rules’, and they are rules which have no validity outside the medium itself” (1999: 45). Such an abstract, rule-based approach seems to reflect the broader theory of functionalism, which could be regarded as “the latest stop for the philosophy of mind train” (Bailey 2014: 7). According to this theory, pain, for instance, would be regarded as the function of “taking a certain kind of stimulus as an input and producing a certain set of characteristic outputs” (ibid.). But surely, the understanding of what pain is entails more than this. And indeed, a major critique of functionalism is that it does not take into
account the *qualia*: the qualitative sensations that arise when one is experiencing something (such as pain).

In the same way, the typically rule-based approach of music theory does not give a complete picture of the musical experience. Moreover, these “rules” are actually culturally conditioned and contingent, rather than being like universally applicable scientific laws (Samson 45). Even in the realm of the natural sciences, there has been a loss of faith in objectivity in the past several decades, as scientists came to recognize the “blind spot” in traditional scientific paradigms: namely, that all scientific investigation must be “carried out by humans having human experiences” (Price and Barrell 3).

So it is reasonable to propose that any academic inquiry that does not take subjective experience into consideration runs the risk of being incomplete at best and perhaps even downright misleading at worst. With regard to music scholarship in particular, Samson suggests that music theory should “draw context into its discourse, as well as engaging directly with issues of performance and perception” (53). In other words, music theorists should devote more attention to music as a phenomenon that unfolds in time and becomes meaningful in lived experience. If the elegance and logic of conventional harmonic and formal analysis could be combined with insights gained during actual performance (especially from the performer’s point of view, as will be presently argued), a richer and more complete understanding of music would be within reach.

### 1.1.2 Considering the Performer’s Subjective Experience

The qualitative investigation of the experience of performance from the performer’s perspective is still “under-represented in the literature” (Holmes and Holmes 2012: 73). For instance, even in the pioneering research on performer’s gestures undertaken by Davidson in the early 1990s, the aim was to investigate “what sort of movement characteristics might guide observer perception” (2007: 384). But studies that investigate gestures from the performer’s perspective have yet to be carried out (Doğantan-Dack 2011: 247).

This neglect of the performer’s perspective is surprising, as music making “places unique demands on the nervous system” (Wan and Schlaug 2010: 566), and performers devote many years of their lives to perfecting their craft. In fact, Bangert et al. (2006), in a functional magnetic resonance imaging study of seven professional pianists and seven non-musicians, found that, in
contrast to the non-musicians, there was an activation of a musicianship-specific neural network involved in auditory-sensorimotor integration in the pianists during both the task of passively listening to short piano melodies and the task of pressing keys on a mute piano keyboard. In the same vein, Snyder observes that non-practicing listeners’ “memories of heard [expressive] nuances are rarely established to anything like the same degree as those of performers” (2000: 92).

Therefore, Holmes and Holmes write that “aspects of performance under consideration may not necessarily be clear to an observer, nor quantitatively measurable” (77). At the most fundamental level, it would seem to be obvious that the performer’s engagement with music is not the same as the listener’s engagement with music. Listeners might “know” a piece of music, but, unless they have spent countless hours rehearsing the piece deliberately, it could be argued that they cannot truly “know” it as intimately as the performers who have made such a commitment. (The two different meanings of the verb “to know” are more clearly articulated in the French connaître versus savoir or the German kennen versus wissen.) It is clear that there will always remain a dichotomy between the performance itself and the internal world of the performer, unless the performer’s perspective is also incorporated into performance research (Holmes and Holmes 73). Ultimately, it cannot be emphasized enough that the objective of such research should be the pursuit of “the precision of meaning, and not the accuracy of measurement” (Varela 2009: viii).

1.1.3 From Phenomenology to Embodied Cognition

Having discussed the need to examine the experience of performance, I will now address the question of how this could be carried out. As a counterpoint to the tradition of analytical Anglo-American philosophy, there is a tradition of continental philosophy that, particularly in the past decade, has become much more influential: phenomenology (Bailey 13). The aim of phenomenology is to “understand the meaningfulness of human experience as it is lived” (Price and Barrell 13). As Edmund Husserl, who is considered to be the founder of phenomenology, writes in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*:

> The first thing we must do, and first of all in immediate reflective self-experience, is to take the conscious life, completely without prejudice, just as what it quite immediately gives itself, as itself, to be. (qtd. in Moran 2014: 38)
This is no easy task. For example, if one attempts to actively attend to one’s thoughts, this will tend to make those very thoughts disappear (Price and Barrell 11). For Husserl, the key to unlocking consciousness lies in the understanding of intentionality (Moran 41). By this, he means that “every perception, memory, thought, feeling or emotion is about something” (ibid.). In other words, consciousness is the result of our intentions toward the world. Thus, “intentionality” in the sense that Husserl uses it is rather non-practical; it does not merely refer to goal-directed action (which would be called “practical intentionality” by Merleau-Ponty). However, I would like to emphasize that there is already an “aboutness” to practical, goal-directed action as well. This is an essential idea that I will return to later.

Building upon the work of Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is especially relevant for the present discussion, as he is now generally recognized as the “philosopher par excellence of embodiment” (Noland 2009: 55). His notion of intercorporeality is noteworthy and strikingly prescient of more recent neuroscientific research, as will be seen. As he explains in Signs:

The reason why I have evidence of the other man’s being-there when I shake his hand is that his hand is substituted for my left hand, and my body annexes the body of another person in that “sort of reflection” it is paradoxically the seat of. My two hands “coexist” or are “compresent” because they are one single body’s hands. The other person appears through an extension of that compresence; he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality. (qtd. in Heinämaa 2014: 71)

In other words, the shared human anatomy is fundamental to one’s understanding of others as beings essentially similar to oneself. Therefore, two key ideas that can be taken from these two prominent thinkers in the phenomenological tradition are intentionality and intercorporeality. Indeed, these two ideas also inform modern cognitive neuroscience, as phenomenology and the natural sciences engage in a fruitful dialogue to produce the growing literature on embodied cognition (Montague 32).

1.2 Embodiment

1.2.1 The “Discovery” of the Body

First of all, it must be noted that the body has long been absent in Western academic discourse. Farnell ascribes this curious absence to the “longstanding bias against the body” (2012: 11) in both philosophical and religious thought. Of course, the “flesh” has traditionally been associated with sinful desire (Turner 1984), as the word “carnal” should still make clear. And in philosophy, René Descartes’s famous dictum (“I think, therefore I am”) was instrumental in creating a
fundamental separation of body and mind that has permeated Western thought since the seventeenth century (Farnell 11). In standard cognitive science, cognition is still equated with computation, which is solely concerned with inputs to and outputs from the brain (Shapiro 2011: 26). As such, standard cognitive science is “brainbound” (Clark 2008: xxvii); the mind is equated with the brain, and there is no need to consider the body or the world outside the organism. This kind of cerebral, disembodied approach certainly had an impact on musical thought. As Schoenberg famously puts it:

> Music need not be performed any more than books need to be read aloud, for its logic is perfectly represented on the printed page; and the performer, for all his intolerable arrogance, is totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print. (qtd. in Newlin 1980: 164)

In other words, the “music” is already notated on the score and could simply be read and enjoyed in one’s head as an intellectual (and arguably elitist) activity that does not require the participation of active performing bodies. I should note that Cusick actually regards this as a gendered problem: “Metaphorically, when music theorists and musicologists ignore the bodies whose performative acts constitute the thing called music, we ignore the feminine” (1994: 16).

In the late 1970s, however, the body began to receive increasing scholarly attention. Indeed, Berthelot comments that “the body would appear to be everywhere” (1986: 155). Inspired by the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, anthropologists such as Csordas (1989) and Jackson (1989) turned their attention to the subjective living body (which can inform what is experienced, felt, and sensed), as distinct from the objective mechanical body (which, if dropped from a height, would accelerate toward earth at approximately 9.81 m/s²). In cognitive science, the emerging perspective of embodied cognition challenges the solipsistic and disembodied viewpoint of standard cognitive science by asserting that “the specific ways in which an organism is embodied in the environment will directly impact its cognitive processing, its movements, and its understanding of the world” (Cowart 2014: 259).

Reflecting this general trend, the renowned British ethnomusicologist John Blacking states that “what is ultimately of most importance in music cannot be learned like other cultural skills; it is there in the body, waiting to be brought out and developed” (1973: 100). Certainly, the field of ethnomusicology in particular has devoted greater attention to bodily practices, ranging from the study of the social structures articulated through dancing the polonaise (Lange 1977), to
examination of the “Irish dancing body” (Wulff 2005), to investigation of bodily transmission of
Japanese dance in the pedagogical context (Hahn 2007). Also noteworthy is the more recent
detailed discussion of vocal and bodily action in Hindustani music by Rahaim (2012).

It is crucial to note that the growing interest in the body in the past few decades across various
disciplines does not represent the swinging of the pendulum to the other extreme, so to speak.
That is, the aim of embodiment is not to fetishize the body and exclude the mind, which would
still affirm the traditional Cartesian mind/body dualism. Rather, embodiment seeks to mediate
between body and mind. Thus, dance researcher Karen Barbour emphasizes that “embodiment is
a holistic experience” (2011: 88). As Rahaim explains in a most memorable passage from his
book, “though we may study the dead muscles of a motionless hand on a dissecting table, the
trajectories traced by living hands are not themselves made of flesh: like the melodies traced by
the voice, they are weightless” (88). In short, meaning emerges from moving bodies.

1.2.2 The Primacy of Movement: Dynamic Embodiment

The French philosopher Pierre Gassendi, who was a contemporary of Descartes and was equally
well known during his time, could not comprehend why Descartes would be so preoccupied with
proving his own existence and countered Descartes’s pronouncement with what could be
interpreted as “I move, therefore I am” (Farnell 133). The Latin phrase that he used is “ambulo
ergo sum”, which would be literally translated as “I walk, therefore I am”. In any case, it is clear
that Gassendi was highlighting the primacy of movement for living beings. Indeed, Sheets-
Johnstone (1999: 135) believes that “I move” must precede all else (including “I can” as well as
“I think”), since infants do not necessarily move to accomplish anything; their movement is
simply a foundational aspect of their being alive. Barbaras expands on this:

> Movement is ontologically irreducible. With movement, we enter into another order of reality: in
classical terms, movement cannot be a mode or an attribute; it is always substantial and
necessarily engages the essence of the subject. (2010: 109)

Farnell even proposes that dynamic embodiment should lie at the heart of social theory; that is,
she emphasizes the “primacy of the signifying moving person” (8), thus turning away from
Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of *habitus*, which Farnell sees as a misplacement of human agency
(29). Undoubtedly then, dynamic embodiment, or the agency of the moving body, is a significant
concept with potentially far-reaching implications.
Although the primacy of movement has been established, “movement” itself has yet to be defined. What exactly is “movement”? Gill writes that “moving is associated with a transversal of time and space, yet it cannot be said to be in some point in space and time because that would take away its motion” (2012: 31). This means that there is something about movement that is inherently transitional and impossible to “grasp”. In this way, a moving body can be considered as being both actual and virtual. According to Massumi:

To think of the body in movement thus means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension of the body. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal. Inseparable, coincident, but disjunct. (2002: 5, original emphasis)

As will be presently shown, it is precisely this incorporeal aspect of the moving body that allows the emergence of meaning through the communication of corporeal intentionality within the framework of intercorporeality.

1.2.3 Conveying Meaning: Corporeal Intentionality and Intercorporeality

Neuroscientific research has shed new light on two key ideas from the intellectual heritage of phenomenology: intentionality and intercorporeality. Di Pellegrino et al. (1992) found that neurons of the rostral part of the inferior premotor cortex of a monkey responded both when the monkey made hand movements such as grasping, holding, and tearing, as well as when the monkey observed these hand movements in the experimenter, while it remained immobile. So even when it was the experimenter who was really performing the action, it was as if the monkey were performing the action too. Thus, these neurons came to be known as “mirror neurons”. Even more astonishingly, however, mirror neurons actually encode the intended action of an agent. For example, some neurons would fire if the experimenter grasped a piece of food and brought it into his mouth, but not when the experimenter grasped the piece of food and put it into a container (Ferrari and Gallese 2007: 83). More recently, Mukamel et al. (2010) provided direct evidence for the presence of mirror neurons in humans.

In light of such findings, Leman proposes the concept of “corporeal intentionality”, which refers to “an action-based understanding of the world” (2008: 84). Of course, this is not intentionality in the Husserlian sense, which Leman finds “slightly mysterious” (ibid.), but rather more like Merleau-Ponty’s “practical intentionality” (see page 5). As Laban perceptively writes, “Each phase of movement, every small transference of weight, every single gesture of any part of the
body reveals some feature of our inner life” (1980[1950]: 19). The discovery of mirror neurons suggests that we can perceive corporeal intentionality in others because of humanity’s common biology. That is, we can have a glimpse into the “inner life” of others by observing how they move because we internally simulate what it would be like to move in a similar fashion. That imitation, whether overt or covert, seems to be crucial to our understanding of others is corroborated by the research of Meltzoff and Moore (1983), which found that infants as young as forty-two minutes old would imitate gestures shown to them, such as mouth opening and tongue protrusion. Furthermore, after reviewing research findings from different disciplines, including cognitive neuroscience and dance/movement therapy, Behrends et al. (2012) conclude that interactional, coordinated movement is important for the development of empathy and prosocial behaviour. In short, the human capacity for imitation appears to be innate and integral to social understanding and bonding.

The discovery of mirror neurons has been regarded as being so momentous that it revolutionized psychology in the way that the discovery of DNA had revolutionized biology (Gerdes et al. 2011: 114). As Bråten asserts, “no longer can be upheld as valid the Cartesian and Leibnizian assumptions about monadic subjects and disembodied and self-centred minds without windows to each other except as mediated by constructed or symbolic representations” (2007: 2). This statement would lead us to the conclusion that the nature of human experience is inherently intersubjective. Furthermore, Gallese believes that, in fact, “intersubjectivity is best conceived of as intercorporeality” (2009: 486), thus linking the findings of cognitive neuroscience to the rich phenomenological tradition.

1.2.4 From Movement to Gesture

I have shown how bodily movement could give rise to meaning at the most fundamental level through corporeal intentionality and intercorporeality. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, it is useful to distinguish between movement and gesture. According to Gill, “gesture is not a onetime movement, but rather an iteration of a movement pattern established as convention through high repetition” (64). Basically then, a gesture is a movement that has been repeated and conventionalized. But there is much more to it than that, of course. Consider the following description of a graffiti writer:
In the magnified scope of the graffiti gesture, writing affords the writer an opportunity to impress the individual shape and vitality of the body’s motor power onto the contours of the cultural sign. Yet if the writer performs the motion repeatedly, his own body will eventually be inscribed, the muscles and ligaments physiologically altered, by the gestural routine that expresses and confines his body at the very same time. (Noland 1)

This insightful observation reveals that gesture mediates between individual agency and cultural values. That is, gesture gives rise to culturally-relevant meaning. It should be noted that, paradoxically, the “gestural routine” both “expresses” and “confines” the body. In this sense, the gestural routine could be considered as the conditioning of the moving body in order to make it more efficient at self-expression within a certain sociocultural context. Thus, Rahaim notes that the “musicking body may seem to disappear while chatting on a train or riding a bike, but it springs to life again in concerts, in practice, and in lessons” (2). Moreover, in the context of Hindustani music, Rahaim has found that the musical knowledge embodied in gestures can even be passed down from teachers to students (largely through subconscious imitation), and that untrained observers would be able to notice the teaching lineage of a certain singer from the way he moves (87-134). This suggests that the body that has been disciplined to move in particular ways through many years of training encapsulates cultural knowledge that can be expressed through a rich reservoir of gestures.

1.2.5 Musical Gestures

The late Steve Larson proposes that “experienced listeners of tonal music hear that music metaphorically as purposeful physical action – subject to musical forces that are analogous to the physical forces that shape physical motion” (2012: 82, original emphasis). However, this experience does not only apply to Western tonal music, as Rahaim demonstrates that the hand gestures that singers of Hindustani music make while singing reflect their understanding of raga as space. Researchers have even found that “performers’ spontaneous timing patterns follow the temporal curve of objects moving in a gravitational field, suggesting that a natural-sounding performance mimics the behaviour of physical objects moving in the real world” (Clarke 2002: 67). Apparently, we have the tendency to perceive and feel music as something that moves. The musicologist David Burrows goes so far as to generalize that we see the world as a noun and hear it as a verb (qtd. in Bresler 2006: 30). How can this be explained?

I have pointed out that corporeal intentionality is fundamental to our understanding of other people. And fascinatingly, psychological research suggests that we engage with music in much
the same way; namely, we tend to attribute human characteristics to music (Watt and Ash 1998) because the “experience of music involves the perception of purposeful, intentional, and organized sequences of motor acts as the cause of temporally synchronous auditory information” (Molnar-Szakacs and Overy 2006: 236). This is due to an important property of the human sensorimotor system: changes in physical energy (and sonic energy in particular) can be mirrored as motor resonances (Leman 134), which means that music can be experienced as what Hanslick (1891) calls “tönend bewegte Formen” (moving sonic forms). In fact, Janata and Grafton (2003) found that even passive listening to music tended to elicit activation in premotor regions of the brain concerned with planning for action.

Therefore, the investigation of gesture, which could conveniently refer to both physical movement and “moving sonic form”, is especially relevant in approaching music as an embodied practice. Indeed, gestural studies have become increasingly prominent in recent music scholarship. Most notably, three collected volumes have been devoted to it (Godøy and Leman 2010; Gritten and King 2006, 2011), covering topics ranging from the conductor’s gestures, to Mahler’s military gesture, to the psychobiology of musical gestures. The remarkable diversity that is present in these volumes reflects the interdisciplinary nature of gestural studies.

Historically, musical gestures tended to be approached from a philosophical perspective, rather than studied in a rigorous and systematic fashion (Godøy and Leman 5). This might have been mainly due to technological limitations (ibid.). For example, the “Generalkurven” (basic curves) of Becking (1928) represent an attempt to find a distinct pulse for different pieces by the same composer. Becking’s idea that there exists a “Bach pulse” or a “Beethoven pulse” has been pursued further by Clynes (1995). In contrast to this approach, Truslit (1938) drew curves that largely follow the melodic trajectory of specific pieces.

According to Theodor W. Adorno, the score contains the “seismographic curves, which the body has left to the music in its gestural vibrations” (qtd. in Mazzola and Cherlin 2009: 66). This view of the score as being made up of “frozen gestures” (ibid.) or gestural traces that require embodiment by the performer in order to find living expression is an interesting one. It has more recently been taken up in much greater detail by Robert S. Hatten in his book *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (2004).
1.2.6 Hatten’s Musical Gestures

Hatten defines gesture as “expressive, energetic shaping through time” (2004: 109). This definition emphasizes the dynamic nature of gestures, as the keyword here is “shaping”. Nevertheless, I would like to add that the shaping happens both in time and space. Hatten sees musical gestures as being “prelinguistic” (109) and “grounded in human affect and its communication” (93). In fact, infant research indicates that gestures are an innate part of human beings’ embodied nature (Trevarthen, Delafield-Butt, and Schögler 2011: 13). Rizzolatti and Arbib (1998) even postulate that speech evolved from gestural communication. Drawing on extensive evidence from developmental psychology and cognitive science, Hatten considers the foundational principles of human gesture to be functional coherence, intermodality, perceptual integration, and intersubjectivity (97).

Hatten thinks of gesture as a “relatively short temporal gestalt” (101) that is both immediate and temporally mediated (102). This means that a gesture is understood as being holistic (Mithen 2005: 25); it has a “clear and self-contained identity” (Ben-Tal 2012: 252), and it expresses an intention (Trevarthen, Delafield-Butt, and Schögler 13). At the same time, however, it is also understood as being part of a “continuous action” or “coherence of sequential events” (Hatten 102). It should also be added that Hatten sees gesture as “movement that is interpretable as a sign” (121), and he links it to Peircean semiotics (110).

In developing a theory of musical gesture, Hatten seems to recognize the crucial importance of embodying the sound. For instance, he finds great value in the “simple heuristic of sitting down and trying [gestures] out” (120), and he mentions that he knows and plays the works that he discusses (121). In spite of this, however, Hatten’s overall approach to musical gestures may still strike performers as being abstract and largely unsympathetic to their point of view. In the concluding section of Chapter 6, he writes:

The following chapters will inevitably make reference to specific ways of performing gestures, but my principal focus will be on interpreting gestures as implied by the notation of scores, interpreted both stylistically and in terms of their strategic deployment in a work… Embodiment, then, is understood as broader than that which is literally manifested through a body. We do not have to perform to understand and experience the embodiment of a gesture – we embody gesture imaginatively as participating listeners, or even more imaginatively in silent audiation of a score. (131, emphasis added)
Furthermore:

The human capacity to encode and interpret gestural meaning in any modality allows music to exist even without sound. A sufficiently imaginative world of inner audiation, such as enabled Beethoven to transcend deafness, is available to us all. (132)

In reading these passages, performers may perhaps be immediately reminded of the famous remark by Schoenberg that has already been mentioned (see page 6). Indeed, Hatten’s thorough discussion of stylistic types and strategic functions of gestures in Chapter 7 is heavily focused on a score-based analysis of expressive gestures that are ascribed to the music, rather than the physical gestures that performers make in playing the music. Based on Hatten’s notion of intermodality, both types of gestures should really be regarded as being intimately connected. Nonetheless, I find that Hatten himself is still leaning very much toward the “frozen gestures” in the score, rather than the dynamic experience of gestures made by a moving body in the moment of performance.

The underlying problem may be that Hatten conceives of gesturing as a “submission of the shared human anatomy to a set of bodily practices specific to one culture” (Noland 2). To be sure, there is some evidence for this, as Hatten writes, for example, that “interpreters can translate from their cultural gestural competency to achieve a basic level of musical understanding” (124, original emphasis). However, such a view does not capture the richness and bidirectionality of the dialectic between individual agency and cultural conditioning, as mediated by gesturing. As Gill remarks:

Gesture imprints the values and distinctions of a society on the habitual bodily techniques of the individuals, thus marking them as members of the society… Yet the manipulation of techniques of moving bodies is the mechanism by which societies transform. (69)

Quite simply, I think what Gill is saying is this: Culture makes us who we are, but we also make our culture what it is. Therefore, I would contend that Hatten overemphasizes cultural conditioning and undervalues the transformative power of the “signifying moving person” (Farnell 8) – namely, the performer. Without giving adequate attention to the performer’s point of view, Hatten’s investigation of musical gestures does not address what is arguably crucial to a holistic understanding of music as a fundamentally embodied experience.
1.2.7 Le Guin’s “Carnal Musicology”

A different approach is offered by Elisabeth Le Guin in her thought-provoking book *Boccherini’s Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (2006), which synthesizes historical and phenomenological perspectives in her examination of Boccherini’s cello music. Not only does Le Guin study documents from Boccherini’s time in an effort to situate his work in its historical context, she also provides meticulous descriptions of the sensations and experiences that arose when she played this music herself. Titled “Cello-and-Bow Thinking”, Chapter 1 is particularly pertinent to the present discussion. Much of the chapter describes what might be going through a cellist’s mind in playing the first movement of Boccherini’s Cello Sonata in E-flat Major (*fuori catalogo*). For instance, at the very beginning:

The first specific thing the performer is likely to notice in assessing this page of music may well come with a little lurch of alarm: the piece begins “out there”, technically speaking, not in the cello’s more ordinary bass or tenor register, but in the soprano range, unfamiliar enough that most cellists will have to find and secure the position for the left hand before beginning to play. (18)

And later on:

…as the pitches descend, the bow can be moved “in”, again toward the body’s center, a half-inch or so, and the strings’ resistance diminishes considerably. For both hands this is an experience of increasing ease and relaxation, and probably relief. Thus the retreat from the screwed-up courage of the opening is, physically speaking, pleasant, welcoming, grateful. (ibid.)

Such detailed descriptions highlight the performer’s direct engagement with the music in the act of playing an instrument. It demonstrates how musical features (such as the descending melodic line) naturally involve changing dynamics in the performer’s *instrumental gestures* – the physical gestures intended to generate sound (Cadoz and Wanderley 2000). Furthermore, we can come to understand that different physical gestures “feel” differently to the performer. This kinesthetic sense, which is what I would regard as the performer’s awareness of corporeal intentionality, is already quite capable of generating meaning in its own right, and I feel that it deserves as much attention as the expressive gestures that Hatten (2004) finds in the score.

1.2.8 Gesture as the Basic Unit of Embodied Expression

As Hatten’s (2004) work has shown, a gesture could be understood as a temporally brief, expressive gestalt; it is grasped as a meaningful whole in the experiential present. As such, gesture could serve as the basic unit of embodied expression. In playing or analyzing a new piece
of music, then, individual gestures should be identified first. This preliminary stage of segmentation, which could also be referred to as “chunking”, is necessary, as it helps to improve our ability to handle large amounts of information (Miller 1956).

But how exactly is chunking accomplished? As Godøy explains, gestures are perceived as “coherent chunks” that “exhibit superordinate trajectory shapes of motion and sound” (2011: 67). Furthermore, the elementary “atoms” of sound and movement that make up a gesture are subsumed under the superordinate trajectory shape of that gesture. This process is known as coarticulation, which Godøy deems “a naturally emergent phenomenon on the basis of our biomechanical and neurocognitive constraints” (75). Thus, coarticulated chunks, or gestures, should be considered as being “primordial to their atom events” (71).

For performers, then, it seems reasonable to suggest that the most natural way of identifying individual gestures is simply to play the music and be aware of how they perceive it to “move” as well as how they themselves move to express that perceived musical motion. Based on this awareness, they should be able to grasp the corporeal intentionality of a musical passage intuitively, and this would lead them to a holistic comprehension of that passage as a gestural unit. Hatten, though minimizing the performer’s perspective in much of his work on musical gestures, still emphasizes the usefulness of this heuristic approach; he writes that “a theory of gesture… requires a kind of subjective involvement that may be variously conceived as experiential, embodied, or personally manifested” (2004: 121).

Although it is essential to be able to identify the individual gestures in a piece of music, rich musical meaning does not emerge from a single gesture, but rather from the evolution of one or more gestures, or the complex interaction between contrasting gestures, or both. Thus, what is also required is an awareness of the overarching trajectory of a piece of music, and how it informs the shaping and relationship between all gestural events. Rink calls this the “creation of a unifying thread, a grande ligne linking the constituent parts of performance into a rhythmically activated synthesis” (1999: 218). In short, what is needed is a narrative.
1.3 Narrative

1.3.1 Music and Narrative

Though originating in literary criticism and folklore, narrative has become an important scholarly concept that now affects all the humanities and social sciences (Bresler 2006). As the French literary theorist Roland Barthes expresses, “narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there like life itself” (1977: 79). Interest in narrative is definitely not new to the field of music. Consider the following description of sonata form by Czerny:

Just as in a romance, a novel, or a dramatic poem, if the entire work shall be successful and preserve its unity, the necessary component parts are: first, an exposition of the principal idea and of the different characters, then the protracted complication of events, and last the surprising catastrophe and the satisfactory conclusion. (qtd. in Meyer 1989: 203)

Klein (2013: 13) is struck by the ease with which Czerny switches from formal to narrative categories. More recently, quite a number of articles have appeared on the topic of music and narrative – such as Klein (2004) on Chopin’s Fourth Ballade as a musical narrative, Micznik (2001) on narrativity in Beethoven and Mahler, and Newcomb (1987) on late eighteenth-century narrative strategies in Schumann’s music – and a collected volume (Klein and Reyland 2013) has been devoted to music and narrative since 1900. Furthermore, Almén (2008) has proposed a theory of musical narrative (which will be discussed in some detail later). Evidently, there has been much interest in the possibility of linking music with narrative in some way.

Nevertheless, there have also been critiques of such an endeavour, most notably by Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Carolyn Abbate. For example, Nattiez (1990) calls attention to the non-referential quality of music, while Abbate (1989) questions whether music could have a past tense. It is curious that these critiques tend to “focus on the absence of certain basic elements of literary narrative in music” (Walsh 2011: 51). Yet, it is essential to note that, even in the field of literary studies, there are actually multiple narrative theories, but no real consensus on what the concept of “narrative” itself is (Klein 2013: 11). When applied to music, then, the concept of narrative from literary studies can serve to complicate, rather than clarify, musical matters.

The underlying problem seems to be the assumption that “narrative” is necessarily “literary narrative”. As Turner writes, “narrative imagining – story – is the fundamental instrument of thought… It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally” (1996: 4-5,
emphasis added). Yet, according to Barthes, narratives are “able to be carried by language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures and the ordered mixtures of all these substances” (79). (Oddly enough, he does not mention music, but he does mention gestures.) The notion that narrative does not have to be solely verbal is supported by the essays collected in *Narrative across Media* (2004), in which scholars from various disciplines discuss narratives in face-to-face interactions, still pictures, moving pictures, music, and digital media. Indeed, Bresler believes that “all forms of artistic expression… are ultimately forms of storytelling” (22).

Given the above perspective, it does not seem reasonable to treat literary narrative as a kind of standard against which musical narrative must be judged. Walsh writes that a viable narrative approach to music would require the rejection of “the normative status of literary narrative, and with it much of the narratological terminology that is… native to literary narrative study” (51). In other words, musical narrative should be examined on its own terms.

1.3.2 The Nature of Musical Narrative

Infant research has shown that “communicative musicality” (Malloch and Trevarthen 2009) precedes language; that is, infants are sensitive to the prosody of speech long before they can understand the meanings of words (Mithen 69). Bråten and Trevarthen (2007: 27) point out that, in contrast to a joyful mother’s speech, which rises above middle C, a depressed mother’s speech falls below middle C and fails to engage an infant’s interest. Thus, there is reason to believe that musicality is innate and intimately linked with the communication of emotion. More intriguingly, Dissanayake (2012: 4) contends that such musical and emotionally meaningful interaction between mother and infant should be regarded as a kind of spontaneous narrative. As Imberty observes, “The voice, with its intentional contour which is not yet language, provides the foundation for the thread of our personal individual life story, which we will know how to put into words, but without which we would not be able to begin telling” (2011: 14). Moreover, following the theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, Dissanayake suggests that music and narrative were once one and the same thing, and that such ancient music-narrative would have been a “performative, improvisatory, social, communal, and multi-modal” activity (7). She further claims that in our modern world, “down-to-earth narrative has been snapped up by academic theorists and flipped up into an intellectual stratosphere” (ibid.).
If these scholars are right, then music-narrative would appear to be the earliest (ontogenetic and phylogenetic) foundation for meaningful exchanges between human beings. Therefore, there may be great value in considering this broad concept of narrative as being integral to musical experience and understanding. As Adorno puts it, “It is not that music wants to narrate, but that the composer wants to make music in the way that others narrate” (1992: 62). Perhaps there is something deeply human and humanizing in our desire to tell and listen to stories.

1.3.3 Characteristics of Musical Narrative

Klein (2013: 11) brings up four major issues that should be addressed in a narrative approach to music: agency, temporality, plot, and narrating voice. Agency refers to our perception of the music as “unfolding with an inner urgency or an act of will” (ibid., 12). This should not be surprising, as it has already been mentioned that, at the most fundamental level, we attribute corporeal intentionality to the movement that we perceive in the music (see page 11). Thus, we can experience musical motion as the meaningful action of an agent. From the performer’s perspective, however, I would suggest that musical agency could be experienced in two ways. First, the performer could feel that he or she is an active agent in the unfolding musical narrative. Second, the performer could feel that he or she is the narrator, and that the perceived musical actions are being carried out by an imaginary agent. Certainly, both ways of approaching agency can coexist within a single piece of music. For example, in the opening seven measures of Chopin’s Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23, the performer could easily imagine being a narrator who grandly announces, “Once upon a time…”:

Example 1.1. Chopin, Ballade No. 1, Op. 23, mm. 1-10
However, the violence of the concluding seven measures of the piece does not seem to portray the hysterical screaming of the formerly composed narrator (as the idea strikes me as being far too modernistic), but rather the outburst of utter despair that is experienced by the performer as emanating from the very depth of his or her psyche. (The visual equivalent of this experience would perhaps be *The Scream* by Edvard Munch.) I believe that the sense of urgency here is immediate and visceral:

![Example 1.2. Chopin, Ballade No. 1, Op. 23, mm. 258-264](image)

Therefore, I feel that agency and narrating voice are actually closely related, and the dynamics of their relationship must be carefully considered within the context of each piece.

It is obvious that both music and narrative unfold in time. But they also structure our experience of time. That is, the order in which events occur in time is significant to human understanding. A simple observation by Ray Kurzweil should make this clear: we can recite the alphabet from memory quite easily, but we find it much more difficult to do so backward (2012: 27). In the same way, the retrograde of a melody could sound totally different from the original melody (Bartholomew 1989: 37). Moreover, when many events occur within a given interval of time, the brain needs to work harder, and consequently, that interval of time is experienced as being longer than it actually is (Moore and Yamamoto 2012: 23). Ligeti exploits the relationship between event and time in mm. 94-96 of his Étude No. 10 (“Der Zauberlehrling”), where the overlapping lines create the impression that the very fabric of time is somehow repeatedly folding and layering over itself:
As Klein explains, “music’s signifiers – its rhythms, motives, textures, timbres – may advance through time without pause, but music’s temporal signifieds include more than an unceasing course through the present tense” (2013: 12). Another excellent example of this difference between the inexorable march of objective time and the fluid experience of time is Grieg’s “Once upon a Time” (No. 1 from Lyric Pieces, Op. 71). In ternary form, Section A is solemn, somewhat chorale-like, and harmonically complex. The melodic arches are lengthy and tortuous:

In contrast, Section B is more active and harmonically straightforward. The melodic line is also presented in simple repeated motives:
The return of Section A features essentially the same material as before. And yet, it feels different. If one evaluates Section B as a positive event, then the return of Section A may be experienced as being sadder and more nostalgic than before. However, if one evaluates Section B as a negative event (which I find harder to do), then the return of Section A may be experienced as a pleasant “homecoming”. But in any case, the experience of the same material would be different, as it would be coloured by what has transpired in Section B. Was Section B depicting a fond memory of happier times? Or perhaps the remembrance of reckless youthfulness? Whatever one’s interpretation may be, it is clear that the experience of events unfolding in time is remarkably complex and can give rise to rich meanings.

So far, I have looked at the interconnection between agency and narrating voice, and I have offered a brief overview of temporality. But perhaps the most crucial element in musical narrative (and indeed any kind of narrative whatsoever) is the plot. As Walsh suggests, “much of the power of narratives… to move and persuade is not specific to whatever those narratives are about; it is the affective potential intrinsic in the permutations of narrative form itself” (63). Childs (1977) believes that listeners try to hear a “narrative curve” in a composition (even when it is not clearly present), such that an initial statement proceeds to a development, climax, resolution, and conclusion. Yet, this is such a vague and general trajectory that I question its usefulness. What is needed, I think, is a more structured approach to plot that would still retain widespread applicability. I believe that narrative archetypes can serve this purpose.

1.3.4 Narrative Archetypes

Inspired by Jungian psychology, Northrop Frye published his seminal Anatomy of Criticism in 1957. It contains four essays, of which the third (“Archetypal Criticism”) is of greatest interest to the present discussion. Frye states that his aim in this essay is to “give a rational account of some
of the structural principles of Western literature” (1971[1957]: 133). Accordingly, he sets out to propose “four narrative pregeneric elements of literature”, which he calls “mythoi or generic plots” (162): romance, tragedy, comedy, and irony or satire. Frye envisions these four mythoi in a cycle:

![Figure 1.1. Frye’s mythoi (Denham 1978: 68)](image)

He describes it as follows:

The top half of the natural cycle is the world of romance and the analogy of innocence; the lower half is the world of “realism” and the analogy of experience. There are thus four main types of mythical movement: within romance, within experience, down, and up. The downward movement is the tragic movement, the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe. The upward movement is the comic movement, from threatening complications to a happy ending and a general assumption of post-dated innocence in which everyone lives happily ever after. (162)

Building on Frye’s work, Liszka suggests that these four mythoi could be treated as “four basic strategies used by fantasy, by the narrative imagination, in playing out the tensions between the violence of a hierarchy that imposes order and the violence that results from its transgression” (1989: 133). Thus, he linearizes Frye’s original model as follows:
As shown in Table 1.1, the dynamics of a narrative are now conceptualized in terms of the conflict between an order-imposing hierarchy and its transgression. There are two factors that determine which narrative archetype is being played out: the outcome of the conflict itself and whether the audience’s sympathy lies with the victor or with the vanquished. For instance, if transgression triumphs over the order-imposing hierarchy and the audience’s sympathy lies with the victorious transgression, then we have a comedy. If, however, the transgression triumphs over the order-imposing hierarchy, but the audience’s sympathy lies with the defeated hierarchy, then the result is irony.

Synthesizing the abovementioned ideas by Frye and Liszka and applying them to music, Almén (2008) developed his theory of musical narrative. According to this theory, opposing musical elements (which signify the order-imposing hierarchy and its transgression) must be identified, and their dynamic relationship traced throughout a piece of music. To this purpose, Almén proposes three levels of narrative analysis: the agential level refers to the “delineation of semantically meaningful units and pattern of relationships between them”, the actantial level involves “tracking their interactions over time”, and the narrative level gives the “expression of the overall narrative pattern” that is articulated (38). At the narrative level, of course, are Frye’s four narrative archetypes.

I should note that Almén’s theory of musical narrative has been criticized for not being able to account for “the whole story” (Klein 2013: 11). First of all, it remains questionable whether all Western art music could indeed be interpreted as involving some sort of crisis between order and transgression. Furthermore, matters become especially complex in music after 1900. For example, what is the narrative of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring? Should this piece be considered a romance? A comedy? A tragedy? Or an irony? Klein (2013: 20) demonstrates that a strong argument could be made for each narrative interpretation of the piece.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comedy</th>
<th>victory of transgression over order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romance</td>
<td>victory of order over transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irony</td>
<td>defeat of order by transgression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>defeat of transgression by order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1. Liszka’s four basic strategies (1989: 133, modified by Almén 2003: 18)
Nevertheless, I believe that Almén’s theory does provide a useful framework for a narrative approach to music from the performer’s point of view. His method of narrative analysis does not need to be applied slavishly. Indeed, Almén himself advocates a “methodological eclecticism for narrative analysis” (2008: 93), which, I believe, could easily accommodate gestures at the “agential” level (as will be discussed below). I think that this would allow for a semi-structured approach that can serve as a powerful tool for achieving a global view of a piece of music, without neglecting local features. And as for the possibility that more than one narrative interpretation may be applicable to a piece of music, I would propose that, from the performer’s perspective, only one interpretation can be presented in a single performance anyway.

1.3.5 Gesturing Narrative, Narrating Gesture

As suggested above, the large-scale narrative view must complement the moment-to-moment gestural experience. In fact, McGuiness and Overy argue that “what remains essential to music is the shared experience of an embodied present, at the co-subjective, pre-reflective level of consciousness” (2011: 260). For them, this embodied, pre-reflective level of consciousness “might exist as a substrate to a narrative level of communication at the reflective level of consciousness” (259). Basically then, narrative must still be grounded in embodied experience.

Therefore, I propose that gestural-narrative analysis should be approached as an interaction between a bottom-up process and a top-down process. Both the knowledge of harmony and formal outline and the awareness of the corporeal intentionality of gestures from the performer’s perspective can inform one’s understanding of a piece of music. I will attempt to demonstrate this in a gestural-narrative interpretation of Chopin’s Second Ballade.

1.4 Chopin’s Second Ballade as a Gestural Narrative

Chopin’s Ballade No. 2 in A minor, Op. 38 provides a particularly good example of how an entire piece could be essentially based on the dramatic opposition of two basic themes. Obviously, it will not be possible to give a detailed and complete account of the piece here. But by focusing on the key moments in the transformation and interaction of these two themes, it should be possible to get a sense of the large-scale narrative trajectory of the Ballade. The first theme is as follows:
In playing this opening, the pianist can immediately feel the regular rhythmic motion that carries the music forward in a calmly flowing manner. The predictability of this rhythmic gesture is physically pleasant (as it is perhaps reminiscent of the gentle swinging of the cradle). Furthermore, the two hands generally play at the same time, and they are never too far apart registral, so they are “in agreement”. At a more abstract level, one may observe that this theme is an example of the *siciliano*, which has pastoral connotations. The second theme of the Ballade presents a total contrast to the first theme:

The immense registral contrast at the beginning of m. 47 is reflected in the physical distance between the pianist’s arms. As the left hand blasts out ascending octaves, and the right hand’s more active arpeggio descends in contrary motion to it, the pianist’s arms move toward each other, as if gathering energy to the core of the body. In m. 48, the right hand works its way back up to the high register in a more laborious manner, as the thumb is required to articulate every other sixteenth note, which means that the right hand is frequently shifting its position and cannot feel as grounded in the keyboard here as it was in the descending arpeggio of m. 47. The sense of tension is further intensified by the widening stretch of the left hand required here. Moreover, the feeling of increasing physical tension is supported by the harmonic tension and
rhythmic complexity of m. 48. Harmonically, the vii\(^7\) chord over the tonic pedal introduces gruelling dissonances. Rhythmically, the right hand articulates \(\frac{3}{8}\) meter, while the left hand actually articulates \(\frac{6}{8}\) meter, and the resulting hemiola is far more unsettling than the articulation of \(\frac{3}{4}\) against \(\frac{6}{8}\) in m. 47. Hence, the overall gesture of mm. 47-48 is a cycle consisting of an effortless outburst followed by a more effortful regaining of energy. It is much more dynamic and forceful than the smoothly flowing rhythmic gesture of the first theme.

After such a powerful encounter with the second theme, the first theme returns, but it seems to be too overwhelmed to continue on as before:

For the pianist, the pause in m. 88 feels quite abrupt because the rhythmic pattern that was established at the very beginning of the piece flows from an eighth note to a quarter note. Thus, stopping the music after an eighth-note chord is particularly disturbing. Further contributing to this effect of an abrupt halt is the fact that the music breaks off on the subdominant harmony. It is almost like being left speechless after a terrifying experience. Later, though, the first theme is significantly transformed in mm. 108-114 and mm. 133-140 (shown in Example 1.9), as its gentle melodic character gives way to assertiveness, with thickened chordal texture in the right hand and octaves in the left hand requiring more physical involvement from the pianist:
Example 1.9. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 133-140

It is as if the first theme has found the courage to confront the potent second theme, which reappears in m. 141.

This second confrontation comes to a head in mm. 157-166, where the right hand’s sixteenth-note figuration from the second theme, formerly spanning a wide registral space, becomes registraly confined into relentless tremolo-like activity, which gives the impression of a manic assault on something that will never yield. The right-hand pattern here is seemingly simple, yet it is more complex than it appears. In a way, it is like the manual equivalent of a tongue-twister, and the pianist must devote some attention to how the pattern is organized both within the measure and at the hypermetric level in order to avoid stumbling. Against this manic pattern, the left-hand octaves attempt to recall the melodic line originally presented in the right hand in the first theme. It fails to deliver this line in its entirety in mm. 157-160, as the low E octaves keep interrupting. (The low E octaves feel like interruptions because of Chopin’s accent indications, and because they are physically and registraly farther removed from the melodic octaves.) The complete melodic line is finally stated in mm. 161-164, in an especially poignant moment that conveys an intense nostalgia for what once was, as one realizes at the same time that nothing could ever be the same again:
What follows is a fiery coda that initially presents new material; it is neither based on the first theme nor the second theme. Rather, it is the inevitable turmoil that is the consequence of their conflict. The quickly repeated double notes in the right hand here are notoriously difficult. Of course, playing quickly repeated single notes on the piano is already inherently challenging, as pianists have to fight the tendency to get “stuck”; namely, they must work out their movements in such a way that allows the depressed keys to bounce back up in time to be played again. This physical challenge reflects the \textit{agitato} character demanded here:

![Example 1.10. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 159-164](image1)

The powerful gesture from the second theme returns in m. 189, where it is even more intense than before, as the right hand punctuates triads every other sixteenth note, and the left hand

![Example 1.11. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 169-172](image2)
offers no rest here. Furthermore, it is no longer a cycle of outburst and recharge. Instead, mm. 189-190 are like two outbursts in rapid succession. (One almost feels that there is not enough time to breathe.) Rhythmically, the clear articulation of $\frac{6}{8}$ meter here means that each eighth note is strongly projected, which is in contrast to the highlighting of longer beats in earlier passages (like mm. 47-50, for example). Overall then, the atmosphere is remarkably tense:

![Example 1.12. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 188-190](image)

The first theme returns in m. 197 to conclude the work. Similar to m. 88, there is a pause in mm. 201-202. But the meaning of this pause is quite different, as the music stops after a quarter-note chord here, not after an eighth-note chord like previously. Also, the harmony is a cadential $\frac{4}{4}$ (not the subdominant as in m. 88), which implies that closure is near. Therefore, this pause does not seem unexpected or disturbing; it is not like the silence of someone who cannot find the right words, but rather the silence of someone who no longer wishes to speak. As such, it conveys a profound sense of resignation. Interestingly, the rhythmic gesture of the first theme becomes augmented in the final chords. Instead of an eighth-note chord leading into a quarter-note chord, a dotted-quarter-note chord now leads into a dotted-half-note chord. Therefore, the slower motion of this gesture seems to express fading vitality:

![Example 1.13. Chopin, Ballade No. 2, Op. 38, mm. 197-204](image)
Overall then, the Ballade could be understood as a tragic narrative. The first theme could be considered as the depiction of the protagonist (that is, the transgression), who comes across as being gentle and calm, but perhaps too passive to take effective action. The violence of the second theme could be equated with the enormous power of the order-imposing hierarchy, presenting a threat for which the protagonist does not seem to be adequately prepared. Then, the protagonist attempts to muster the courage to confront this threat. But the second confrontation only leads to chaos and the protagonist’s eventual acceptance of defeat.

I hope that the above discussion of Chopin’s Second Ballade has provided a better idea of what the consideration of music as gestural narrative from the performer’s perspective would entail.

1.5 Research Questions

To briefly summarize what has been covered so far: Western music scholarship tends to privilege the notion of music as text, rather than music as performance. Furthermore, even in performance research, the focus is usually on music perception; that is, how the listener perceives the music. Meanwhile, performers themselves tend to be regarded as the “inarticulate doers” (Doğantan-Dack 260). This is the gap in music scholarship that the present study aims to address.

If it is acknowledged that the performer’s subjective, embodied experience should be taken into account for a more comprehensive understanding of music, then a way must be found to discuss it in a precise and thorough manner. My hypothesis is that the concept of gestural narrative can allow us to explore the performer’s musical experience in a structured, yet intuitive, way. The purpose of this dissertation is to determine the usefulness of this concept in performance research. Accordingly, there are two key questions that it seeks to address:

Question 1: How can the performer’s musical experience during performance be understood as a gestural narrative?

Question 2: To what extent are different performers likely to interpret the gestural-narrative potentialities afforded by a certain piece of music in a similar way?

To address the first question, I could analyze one of my own performances as a gestural narrative. As a performer myself, I believe that I am in a privileged position to offer some insights into music as an embodied experience. At the same time, however, I am aware that such
a personal endeavour could easily come across as merely being “an exercise in narcissistic free association” (Le Guin 25). This is why it is crucial to consider other performers’ perspectives in order to establish some intersubjective validity. However, this would still not be enough. This is because in the Western art music tradition, the performer’s embodied engagement with music arises from an intimate relationship with the score. Therefore, I should also examine the extent to which a certain piece of pre-composed music, in virtue of the way it has been constructed, would be more likely to be interpreted as affording certain gestural-narrative possibilities. For example, is it more likely that Chopin’s Second Ballade would ultimately be interpreted as a tragic narrative, rather than a comic one? Addressing such a question would involve the critical analysis of the score to come up with a convincing gestural narrative and then determining the extent to which different performers share this narrative. I should emphasize that this would not be an attempt to find the one “correct” interpretation. Rather, it would serve as a means of comparing different performances against one possible gestural narrative that is based on an informed reading of the score. In taking a line of inquiry that incorporates both score analysis and performance analysis, I follow Cook’s (2001) proposal that Western art music should be conceived as existing between process and product, and scores should be treated as “scripts” rather than “texts”. This is the philosophical underpinning of the research methodology described below.

1.6 Research Methodology

Researching the experience of music performance does pose some significant challenges. Nevertheless, in a study of entrainment in Hindustani music, Clayton (2007) demonstrated that one viable approach is video-based observational analysis. Of course, the core assumption here is that video recordings “do indeed represent to some degree what is going on in situations that could be observed without a technological device” (Knoblauch 2006: 73). Moreover, in comparison with audio recordings, video recordings can potentially offer greater fidelity to the actual performances as events where the performers’ moving bodies are integral to the musical experience.

In the context of Western art music, the visual aspects of performance have been studied in the laboratory setting by Davidson (1993, 1994, 1995). But to my knowledge, the comparative analysis of different video recordings of complete performances made outside the laboratory has
yet to be carried out. With this consideration in mind, I have undertaken qualitative research that involved the score-based analysis of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109, as well as the observation and “embodied analysis” of four video recordings of this piece.

1.6.1 Data Collection

The video recordings of Beethoven’s Op. 109 that were chosen for this study were made by Claudio Arrau, Daniel Barenboim, Glenn Gould, and me. Arrau played Op. 109 at the Beethovenfest Bonn in 1970, and this performance was recorded live; Barenboim played the complete Beethoven piano sonatas in a series of recitals in Berlin in 2005, which was also recorded live; Gould made a video recording of Op. 109 for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 1964, as part of his “Anthology of Variation” programme, which also included works by Sweelinck, Bach, and Webern; I played Op. 109 during my first Master’s recital in 2012, which was recorded using a high-definition camcorder.

Of the four performers chosen, Arrau and Barenboim are especially noted for their interpretation of Beethoven. Arrau recorded the complete Beethoven sonatas, and he was awarded the Grobes Bundesverdienstkreuz, one of West Germany’s highest decorations, in 1970 for his lifelong dedication to Beethoven’s music (Horowitz 1999: 68). Barenboim played the complete cycle of Beethoven sonatas for the first time in 1960, when he was only eighteen years old (Barenboim 2002: 50). In a review of Barenboim’s all-Beethoven recital at Carnegie Hall in May 1975, Harold Schonberg pronounces, “This was Beethoven played by an artist of penetrating intelligence, with the technical command to back up all his ideas” (1975: 47). In contrast to Arrau and Barenboim, Gould is better known for his interpretation of Bach. However, over his career, Gould recorded a total of twenty-one of Beethoven’s piano sonatas. In an interview with Humphrey Burton in 1966, Gould even states that Op. 109 is his “favourite sonata”. Even though his recording sounds radically different from the other recordings, I believe that it can be understood as a gestural narrative. In fact, owing to its highly contrasting interpretation, I will argue that Gould’s recording demonstrates the flexibility of my framework. As for me, I have learned twenty-one Beethoven piano sonatas so far, and I am particularly familiar with the late works, as I have performed the Sonatas, Opp. 101, 106, 109, 110, 111, and the Diabelli Variations, Op. 120. The analysis of one’s own recording, especially in comparison with others’ recordings, could lead to deeper insights. For example, Hellaby (2009) creates an elaborate
framework for performance analysis, then applies this framework to his own as well as to other pianists’ recordings. He explains the advantages of doing this as follows:

In the case of my own recordings I am uniquely aware of the formative processes that occurred prior to arriving at my final interpretation, whereas with the other artists’ recordings no such insight is available. An evaluation of one’s own recording inevitably involves an analytical bifurcation: on the one hand, the internal means by which an interpretation was formed are intimately known; on the other, the aural experience of the recording, heard objectively, can reveal discrepancies between intention and realization and may also highlight features which were not conscious to the interpreting mind. (53)

I must admit that I did not consciously work out a gestural narrative for my performance of Op. 109 back in 2012. Nevertheless, my interpretation was certainly influenced by some idea of overarching organization for the piece, as I was familiar with Bazzana’s (1992) analysis of Op. 109 in light of the Hegelian triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

There were several reasons for choosing to analyze performances of a Beethoven sonata. First of all, the thirty-two sonatas of Beethoven occupy a central place in the piano repertoire, and numerous recordings of the sonatas, and of Op. 109 in particular, are available. (However, video recordings of Op. 109 are not as numerous as audio recordings, which is a limitation that will be addressed later.) Moreover, Op. 109 (like Opp. 101, 110, and to some extent 111) reflects the tendency in Beethoven’s late style to treat the multi-movement sonata as an organic whole, rather than a collection of self-standing movements. As such, Op. 109 offers a compelling case for an overarching gestural narrative. It should be noted that Goldstein (1988) has given a thorough analysis of different recordings of another Beethoven sonata (Op. 111). However, Goldstein did not have the idea of gestural narrative in mind, and she was working with audio recordings.

1.6.2 Data Analysis

Before analyzing the video recordings, I have chosen to analyze the score of Op. 109. My reasoning was that the score was my point of departure in learning this piece, and it seemed fairly safe to assume that this was also the case with Arrau, Barenboim, and Gould. I should emphasize, however, that this stage of my research did not only entail the silent study of the score; I also played through specific passages (and even entire movements) several times in order to remind myself of the physical sensations that arose during performance (see page 15). My gestural-narrative analysis involved three steps, roughly corresponding to Almén’s three levels of
narrative analysis (see page 23). First, I thoroughly examined each movement to get a more vivid grasp of the moment-to-moment gestural experience and to identify the salient gestures within and across movements. Next, I looked for opposing musical elements whose dynamic relationship gave rise to a global narrative, as suggested by Almén’s theory. Finally, I synthesized the results of my analysis into a possible gestural narrative for the entire sonata.

Having come up with a possible gestural narrative, I then tried to determine the extent to which my performance of Op. 109 back in 2012 could map onto this gestural narrative. To do this, I undertook an embodied analysis of my performance. What I call “embodied analysis” is heavily based on the ideas of the movement theorist Rudolf Laban. According to Laban, movement can be perceived from three perspectives, which, in order of increasing abstraction, are 1) direct bodily experience, 2) objective description, and 3) symbolic meaning (Moore and Yamamoto 63). My embodied analysis took all three perspectives into account. Accordingly, I initially played Op. 109 along with my recording in an effort to “relive” the direct bodily experience of performing this piece back in 2012. I kept track of the physical sensations that resulted from doing this. Then, I observed my video recording to come up with objective descriptions of the salient gestures. This proved to be a challenging task. As dance/movement therapists Cruz and Koch explain, “The gap between what humans perceive and what they can describe is especially large in movement observation” (2012: 50). However, I found it tremendously helpful to adopt Laban’s conception of movement as an evolution in space-time, in which the weight of the body is brought into flow (Laban and Lawrence 1974: 66). Thus, each movement is regarded as consisting of four “motion factors”: space, time, weight, and flow. Each motion factor has two opposite poles, indulging and contending:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indulging</th>
<th>Contending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPACE</td>
<td>flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>sustained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEIGHT</td>
<td>light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLOW</td>
<td>free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2. Laban’s motion factors (McCaw 2011: 199)

The first three motion factors (space, time, weight) can be combined to create eight “effort actions”, each of which is performed with either free or bound flow:
Intriguingly, Laban believes that there are also “incomplete efforts” or movements with less than four motion factors. Movements with three motion factors are called “drives”, while movements with only two motion factors are called “inner attitudes”. Thus, one can see that these incomplete efforts become increasingly like psychological states:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DRIVE</th>
<th>MOTION FACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spell</td>
<td>weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4. Drives consist of three motion factors (McCaw 2011: 204)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INNER ATTITUDES</th>
<th>MOTION FACTORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile</td>
<td>flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near</td>
<td>weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awake</td>
<td>space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adream (Dreamlike)</td>
<td>flow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.5. Inner attitudes consist of two motion factors (McCaw 2011: 204)

Such a systematic approach to movement observation has been used in a variety of contexts (Moore and Yamamoto 132). Notably, in the field of music, Laban Movement Analysis has already been applied to the gestures of choral conductors (Billingham 2009; Jordan 1996).
According to Cruz and Koch, “Laban created a specialized language to describe the visible dynamics of movement that enables those who use it to more quickly grasp what is seen in motion and communicate it to others more effectively” (51). In addition to using Laban’s effort actions to describe my gestures, I have also provided still images from my video recording for greater communicative clarity. Finally, I took note of the emotions and impressions that arose from making these gestures and discussed what their significance might be for the overall gestural narrative.

While Laban Movement Analysis offered a powerful tool for gesture observation, there was one particular area where I felt that a more specialized approach was needed: face perception. Indeed, Matsumoto and Hwang assert that the face is “the most complex signaling system in the body” (2013: 15), and facial expression has been the subject of extensive study. In particular, I am influenced by the pioneering research of Paul Ekman, who believes that “emotions manifest certain facial patterns that can be universally recognized” (Ambady and Weisbuch 2011: 482), and who has developed an elaborate Facial Action Coding System (FACS) for a thorough analysis of facial expression (Ekman and Friesen 1978). While I did not feel that my research warranted the level of detail afforded by FACS (which is specifically intended for researchers of facial expression), I did draw upon the insights provided by Ekman in works that are intended for a wider public (Ekman 2003; Ekman and Friesen 2003).

Having applied the abovementioned procedures of embodied analysis to my own performance, I then proceeded to apply them to the performances by Arrau, Barenboim, and Gould. In other words, I endeavoured to establish an empathic connection with these performers by watching and imitating them. My ultimate aim was to try to experience their performances from their perspectives. This kind of attempt at understanding another’s perspective through observation and imitation may seem unconventional, but it is actually quite common among therapists, who would mirror their clients in order to enhance their empathy for those clients (McGarry and Russo 2011: 178). In fact, such kinesthetic empathy is fundamental to dance/movement therapy, in which “mirroring and resonating… are implemented during movement sessions as main tools of deeply understanding others’ experience” (Fischman 2009: 43). Nevertheless, I take the view that empathy involves both emotion sharing through imitation (Simulation Theory) as well as more effortful cognitive reconstruction of another’s perspective (Theory Theory). As Goldman succinctly puts it, “Mirroring [a smile] reproduces in the observer only happiness, not happiness
about X or about Y” (2011: 43, original emphasis). Perry and Shamay-Tsoory reviewed neuroscientific findings that indicated that “empathically accurate… judgments depended both on the activation of structures within the human [mirror neuron system], thought to be involved in emotional empathy, and on the activation of regions implicated in mental state attribution, or cognitive empathy, such as the medial prefrontal cortex” (2013: 189). This suggests that it would not be enough for me to observe and imitate the different performers; even if certain emotions were to emerge within me during imitation, I would not be able to attribute those emotions to the specific motivations of each performer. In order to deepen my connection with Arrau, Barenboim, and Gould, I consulted documents about and by each of them to get a better sense of their individual views on music in general and on Beethoven’s music in particular. Fortunately, these performers are quite articulate, and there are numerous books, documentaries, and interview transcripts available. I argue that consulting these documents has enhanced my understanding of how these performers experienced their performances of Op. 109. Consequently, I was able to determine how their experiences could be described as gestural narratives, and whether their gestural narratives were similar to or significantly different from the one I propose.

The method of embodied analysis discussed in this section has the potential to be both rigorous and imaginative at the same time. I believe that it is also in line with the methodology of “embodied artistic inquiry” (Hervey 2012) or “practice as research” (Nelson 2013), which is becoming more widely accepted in research in the arts.

1.6.3 Limitations

While video analysis can be “enormously data intensive” (Knoblauch 72), it has also been criticized for lack of breadth. That is, due to the sheer quantity of data that I had to deal with, it was necessary that my research be focused on a single work by a single composer. Thus, it remains to be seen how applicable the idea of gestural narrative would be with other works by Beethoven or by other composers. Moreover, I have chosen to concentrate solely on piano music because the piano is my primary instrument. Considering the concept of empathy through simulation, it was reasonable to believe that I could only attain the most intimate understanding of performances on the instrument with which I am most familiar.
The cinematic techniques used in certain recordings posed challenges for my research. Unlike the recording of my recital, which was made by one motionless camera throughout, the recordings of Arrau, Barenboim, and Gould take advantage of multiple cameras, sometimes offering a view of the entire stage, and sometimes zooming in on the performer’s hands or face. While this probably creates an engaging aesthetic experience for most viewers, it also made it difficult for me to accurately imitate certain passages.

Another drawback is that video recordings of instrumental performances are currently not as numerous as audio recordings. This put a great constraint on the pieces that could be analyzed, as it was difficult to find many video recordings of the same work. Even though more audiovisual materials are becoming available online, I have chosen only video recordings that are commercially available on DVDs. My reasoning was that the sound and picture quality on a DVD tended to be better than what could be found online. Of course, fidelity was an important factor to take into account because I was imitating the various performers.

1.7 Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 provides a detailed score-based analysis of Op. 109 as a gestural narrative. Chapters 3 to 6 offer video-based analyses of performances of Op. 109 by the four performers. Chapter 7 summarizes the research results and draws conclusions about music as gestural narrative. Suggestions for future study are also given.
Chapter 2
Beethoven’s Op. 109 as a Gestural Narrative

2.1 Overview

Beethoven worked on the E-Major Sonata, Op. 109 during the summer of 1820 and likely finished it by the fall of the same year (Lockwood 2003: 385). In a thorough study of the genesis and structure of this work, Marston shows that the movements were written in an “unusual order” (1995: 259). First of all, the material that was to become the opening movement was originally intended as an independent piece of a pedagogical nature. After Beethoven decided to use this material as the first movement of the sonata, he proceeded to write the third-movement theme, then the second movement, and finally the third-movement variations (ibid.). Considering this strange compositional history, it is quite remarkable that Op. 109, in its final form, demonstrates “fully mastered coherence” (Lockwood 387). Through a detailed score-based analysis, this chapter aims to uncover the structural and expressive means of achieving such unity as well as to discuss the implications for a plausible gestural-narrative interpretation. Specifically, I will explore the role of the G♯-B and G♯-B melodic motions in creating inter-movement coherence, and I will also explain how the interaction between lyrical and contrapuntal tendencies, as represented by certain salient gestures across the sonata, can be understood as articulating an overarching romance narrative. But first, I offer a brief overview of the work’s organization.

Cast in three movements, Op. 109 reflects the marked tendency in Beethoven’s late style to defer the structural weight toward the end of the piece; the first two movements are relatively brief, while the third movement is the substantial culmination of the entire musical discourse. Many commentators have noted the compactness of the first movement. In fact, according to Tovey’s (1931) analysis, the “transition” and “closing theme” are completely absent in this highly economical sonata form. This means that the primary and secondary themes are starkly juxtaposed. Moreover, the same kind of stark juxtaposition operates at a larger structural level in the striking contrast between the first and second movements. While also in sonata form, the second movement in the tonic minor is “fundamentally different in character” (Brendel 1990:
the dreamy quality of the first movement seems to be negated by the visceral immediacy of the second movement. This intense inter-movement opposition is resolved in the variation-form third movement, which synthesizes “the essence of the first with the aspirations of the second” (ibid.). The variation theme that both opens and concludes this movement is neither earthbound nor ethereal; it simply hovers as if transfixed.

### 2.2 First Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPOSITION</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>RECAPITULATION</th>
<th>CODA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-8</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>16-21</td>
<td>49-57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>BM</td>
<td>to Cm?</td>
<td>EM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22-41</td>
<td>58-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gm to BM</td>
<td>61-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42-48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, form diagram

Like Chopin’s Second Ballade (see Chapter 1), the first movement of Op. 109 is based on the dramatic opposition of two themes. Upon first hearing, the primary theme may give the impression of being quite simple and conventional (see Example 2.1). In playing this theme, the pervading physical sensation is likely to be one of calm wholeness, as the hands comfortably alternate two-note figures and work together to create single harmonic units. Note that the left hand is generally content to follow the right hand’s pattern of alternating ascending and descending figures. Nevertheless, the texture is more complicated than it may at first appear because the hands are not perfectly equal in their roles. The right hand is bound to feel more grounded than the left hand because Beethoven’s notation requires “finger pedalling” for each two-note figure in the right-hand part. Meanwhile, if the eighth rests in the left-hand part are observed during performance, the bass would not be as sustained as the melody (which is written in quarter notes), and it also “hovers in syncopation behind the notes of the melody, hardly touching the ground” (Brendel 1990: 68). This may feel slightly awkward for the pianist, as the bass provides the harmonic foundation for the melody, and bass notes generally sound more satisfying when they arrive before, rather than after, melodic notes. In fact, in the first movement of the G-Major Sonata, Op. 31, No. 1, Beethoven deliberately delays the bass notes in order to achieve a comical effect (Rosen 2002: 165). However, a comical effect is probably not intended at the start of Op. 109, as the expression marking here is dolce. Basically then, the theme seems to be flowing gently, but not with self-assured elegance.
Harmonically, the underlying progression of the opening measures is the rather commonplace descending third sequence. As Uhde (2012[1968]: 903) remarks, Beethoven had already used the same sequence (with essentially the same soprano and bass lines as well) in the refrain from the finale of the G-Major Sonata, Op. 79, which is a relatively minor work. Nevertheless, I believe that the unassuming harmonic conventionality is entirely appropriate here because it makes the theme sound improvised. This is because the improvising musician often relies on well-learned, conventional patterns as the basis for spontaneous elaboration. And indeed, the texture of fluid arpeggiation in the primary theme is reminiscent of a prelude, which is precisely the sort of music that would traditionally be improvised as a warm-up or an introduction to a more substantial piece. Of course, one should not forget that Beethoven was recognized by his contemporaries as a formidable improviser (Skowroneck 2010: 58).

Nevertheless, several features of the theme suggest that this music is more than a notated extemporization. For instance, beginning the movement with a smoothly flowing sequence in which a root-position tonic chord is supposed to sound like an upbeat does not strike me as being the most intuitive gesture for an improviser. In fact, Stanley points out that “the first two sketches for Op. 109 that include bar lines place the first chord on the downbeat of a complete \( \frac{4}{4} \) measure” (2000: 97).1 Furthermore, the sketches reveal that the subtle articulatory inflections required in the right-hand part were carefully thought out, rather than spontaneously conceived.

---

Example 2.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 1-10

\[\text{Vivace, ma non troppo.} \quad \text{sempre legato}\]

\[\text{Adagio espressivo}\]

---

1 If Beethoven had kept this original metric placement for the opening of Op. 109, the resemblance to the refrain from the finale of Op. 79 would be even stronger.
(Bazzana 1992: 28-29). Overall then, the primary theme may be regarded as being quasi-improvised; its apparent artlessness is actually the result of meticulous planning.

“Apparent artlessness” is perhaps the most apposite way of understanding the exceptional precocity of the primary theme. As Rosen points out, “To establish the tonic, to state the first theme, and to modulate to the dominant – all this takes approximately seven seconds” (230). But this seems far too precocious; if the music were to continue at this rate, we would have an exceedingly short movement.

Because of the lack of transitional material, the primary and secondary themes appear to be in direct confrontation. Beethoven maximizes the dramatic potential of this confrontation by making the two themes as dissimilar as possible. Table 2.2 offers a summary of the contrasting characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Secondary Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vivace, ma non troppo</td>
<td>Adagio espressivo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost purely diatonic</td>
<td>more richly chromatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duple meter</td>
<td>triple meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relatively little dynamic fluctuations</td>
<td>frequent dynamic contrasts and fluctuations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consistent texture of alternating two-note figures</td>
<td>heterogeneous texture; making use of chords, arpeggios,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between the hands</td>
<td>and runs to cover a wider range of the keyboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, comparison of primary and secondary themes

The order in which the tempi of the two themes occur contributes much to the arresting quality of their juxtaposition. Preceding a first-movement sonata form with a slow introduction would definitely not be unusual, as demonstrated by the first movements of Opp. 13, 78, 81a, and 111. But, according to Tovey, “nothing short of a serious dramatic event can suddenly check the course of a quick movement and then proceed in a slow tempo, nor can the slow music be less than solemn in such a position” (257). Moreover, the rich chromaticism of the secondary theme is painfully expressive; the entrance of the theme on a diminished seventh chord in m. 9 (see Example 2.1) already “casts a deep shadow on the dominant key that had been so quickly established” (ibid., 258). Marked forte, the breaking of the right-hand chord is an effective way of emphasizing the unexpected diminished seventh harmony. While breaking the chord, the pianist can sense an accumulation of power in the right hand, as all five fingers gradually
become involved in building up the sonority: an embodied *crescendo* from the thumb to the fifth finger. Then, in a gesture that continues the pattern of right hand/left hand alternation established in the primary theme, the left hand echoes the right hand’s shocking pronouncement with a more deliberate scalar climb up to the same pitch (A) an octave lower. The left hand actually has the potential to make the A even more emphatic than the right hand could because the pitch would now be played by the powerful thumb, rather than the fifth finger of an outstretched hand. But this potential remains unrealized, as the sudden *piano* marking deemphasizes the left hand’s melodic apex. Thus, one can sense the suppression of a potent expressive urge here. The secondary theme is plagued by several such vacillations, which may be conveying a state of inner turmoil.

Measures 12-14 present a varied repetition of mm. 9-11 (see Example 2.2). The expressive diminished seventh harmony of m. 9 is amplified in m. 12; the wide-ranging arpeggio in the right hand expands the upper registral space by taking the top A of m. 9 an octave higher. This bold gesture is supported by the left hand’s registral expansion in the opposite direction to a sustained low F\# octave, which is the first prominent bass event in the movement to take place on a downbeat. The overall effect is that of sudden blossoming, and the registral contrast between the hands here already foreshadows the powerful climax that is to come near the end of the third movement (mm. 169ff). The octaves at the end of m. 12 leave the music harmonically ambiguous, paving the way for the disorienting D\# major harmony of m. 13. In playing the rising figuration in m. 13, pianists who are acquainted with Beethoven’s “Emperor” Concerto may be reminded of the soloist’s cadenza-like elaboration of the sustained orchestral E\# major harmony at the start of the recapitulation in the first movement; after all, there is no tactile difference between E\# major and D\# major. In fact, the harmonic daring and the variety of figurations in mm. 12-15 do suggest cadenza-like exploration. At the same time, however, there is convincing underlying coherence. As Bazzana explains, “The rhythm, dynamics, pedal markings, and lush textures conspire in mm. 12-15 to emphasize… three notes in the lowest register: F\#-D\#-B, the very notes of the dominant triad” (1992: 9). Therefore, despite the seemingly unpredictable nature of the surface exploration, the music is still essentially confirming the modulation to the dominant.
The development section begins in m. 16 with the return of the *Vivace* material, but with the hands now exchanging their roles (see Example 2.3). In contrast to the dominance of a right-hand melody over a left-hand accompaniment, which has been typical of much of the keyboard music from the early Classical period onward, the propensity for the egalitarian sharing of materials between the hands appears to be a special hallmark of Beethoven’s late piano writing. For the performer, this means that each hand must be capable of doing essentially what the other hand has done before (see also pages 66 and 73).

An ascending sequence based on the two-chord unit from the primary theme is initiated (mm. 16-17), but it is quickly abandoned in favour of a new melodic line in the left hand (mm. 18-21), which is then taken up by the right hand in an altered form (mm. 22-25). For me, this whole passage (mm. 16-25) is associated with the feeling of loss; the texture here is similar to that of the primary theme, but the initial diatonic purity is not preserved. Instead, the music is now perturbed by poignant chromaticism, such as the diminished seventh sonorities of mm. 23-24. But more intriguingly, the melody in mm. 22-25 is strikingly similar to the melody of the
Klagender Gesang (Song of Lament) from Op. 110, which, notwithstanding the notation in A♯ minor rather than G♯ minor, features the exact same pitches (see Example 2.4). (To my knowledge, this melodic connection has not been noted by other scholars.) Interestingly, Schiff (2007) thinks that the Klagender Gesang melody itself is a quotation of the alto aria “Es ist vollbracht” (It is finished) from Bach’s St. John Passion, which is an intertextual association that further deepens the lament connotation of the melody in Op. 109.

Example 2.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 16-25

Example 2.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 110, III, mm. 8-10

From this psychological nadir, the music proceeds to build up to the radiant retransition (see Example 2.5). The right-hand melodic line rises gradually but inexorably in mm. 26-42 to a stratospheric B, which is then insistently maintained throughout the retransition (mm. 42-48). Meanwhile, in the left hand, the two-note figures expand intervallically to become broken octaves, which begin to roam widely in mm. 26-38; the athleticism required to play these left-
hand octaves helps to drive the music forward. In mm. 39-42, the treble and bass feature diverging stepwise lines that take both of the pianist’s arms away from the centre of the body. Though not as dramatic, this gesture does remind me of a gymnast performing a middle split; the tension arising from the contrary motion generates a strong thrust into the retransition. In the retransition, the right hand remains in the same position, articulating the upper quarter notes with physical impulses that are always oriented toward the fifth finger, as opposed to the thumb. In contrast, the left hand continues to alternate fifth-finger emphasis with thumb emphasis.

Example 2.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 26-46

After so much leaping around, it should feel pleasant to finally have the left-hand broken octaves move by smaller increments at the start of the recapitulation (see Example 2.6). Furthermore, it is no longer necessary to alternate fifth-finger emphasis with thumb emphasis in breaking the octaves, so the left hand can now simplify its motion; indeed, there are no eighth rests here, and Beethoven’s slurring seems to indicate that there should be a connection between the top note of each octave with the bottom note of the next octave, which would encourage a comfortable
transfer of weight between the thumb and the fifth finger. This allows the left hand to confidently deliver the now-complete scalar bass descent from E to E; instead of having B in the second half of m. 51 to correspond to the second half of m. 3, there is now F#. It is almost as if the descending bass line from B to B (mm. 38-42) that precedes the retransition gave rise to the urge for wholeness that inspires this alteration. The right hand, however, needs to work harder now, as it is supposed to project the soaring melodic line, which actually runs great risk of being overpowered by the resonant bass, especially on the modern piano. If Liszt were writing this passage, I imagine that he would undoubtedly employ octave doubling to strengthen the melody. However, I believe that Beethoven had good reasons for not doing this. First, the right hand must physically struggle to bring out this melody, and this physical struggle reflects the musical struggle; it has not been an easy journey to reach the return of the primary theme, and this hard-won return should still be delivered in the spirit of dignified determination. Second, the transparency of the texture is desirable here because Beethoven switches the two voices in the right hand; rather than having the even flow of quarter notes in the upper voice as in the exposition, the return of the primary theme presents the “Scotch snap” in the foreground, and the performer should make this subtle change clear to the audience.

Example 2.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 47-57

The return of the secondary theme does not recapitulate the same harmonic surprise (namely, by merely transposing the D# major harmony from m. 13 down a fifth to G# major), as it would no longer be so surprising (Tovey 259). Instead, Beethoven introduces an epiphanic C major harmony in m. 62, which is marked fortissimo, thus making it the loudest point in the movement
(see Example 2.7). Rosen writes that “it should sound exceptional” (231). The rhythmic compression of the figurations in mm. 60-62 (in comparison with the corresponding mm. 11-13 in the exposition) makes the contrast between active fingerwork and chordal statement more clearly defined, possibly suggesting the impression of a more declamatory style of musical delivery. Beethoven compensates for the rhythmic compression of mm. 60-62 with a more uniform, leisurely descent in broken thirds a sixth apart in mm. 63-64. The tonic harmony is strongly confirmed on the downbeat of m. 65 because the treble and bass coincide here, unlike the analogous moment in the exposition (m. 15).

Example 2.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 58-65

The *Vivace* tempo is reestablished in the coda, which brings back the texture of the primary theme in mm. 66-74. But then, an extraordinary event occurs: for the only time in the movement, the fluid, regular texture of the primary theme is disrupted within a *Vivace* section itself. This unique passage (mm. 75-85) features chromatic wanderings in a chordal texture reminiscent of
the beginning of the secondary theme; indeed, the diminished seventh chords from both m. 9 and m. 58 make multiple appearances (see Example 2.8). This is therefore an important moment of synthesis whose long-range implications will be discussed later. For now, I should note that this passage is actually well integrated into the rest of the coda. As Rosen points out, mm. 75-77 are an augmentation of mm. 73-74, thus forming an effective linkage (231).

Example 2.8. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 71-99

The movement concludes with a curious fluctuation between C♯ and C♮ (mm. 86-91). It is C♯ that prevails (mm. 92-97) – at least for the moment. In m. 97, the left hand crosses over the right hand to regain the G♯-B figure in the very same register that the right hand forcefully presented it at the start of the recapitulation. This aspiring gesture appears to serve as a tender reminder of what has been accomplished so far. However, the struggle is still far from over. The final tonic chord, with ♯ rather than ♯ in the upper voice, does not arrive on the downbeat; it sounds more tentative than conclusive.
To summarize, it should be clear that the first movement is based on the extreme contrast between the primary and secondary themes. In fact, the two *Adagio* sections (that is, the two statements of the secondary theme) seem very much like gigantic parentheses. (Even visually, they look quite distinct in the score.) Bazzana insightfully observes that “the *Adagios* could, with a little rewriting at the seams, be lifted whole from the surrounding texture, leaving a pleasant, perfectly intelligible, even tightly unified bagatelle” (1992: 5). In other words, the purpose of the *Adagio* sections is to transform a “bagatelle” into a dramatic sonata form by providing an antithetical opposition to the *Vivace* material.

Inspired by William Blake, Mellers (1983: 200) offers an interpretation of the primary and secondary themes as “Innocence” and “Experience”, respectively. The gentle, straightforward primary theme could be portraying a naive protagonist, who is characterized by carefree precocity (see page 42). However, this carefree precocity is quickly checked by the secondary theme, with its alarming diminished seventh outburst and self-doubting vacillations. One could perhaps imagine the protagonist coming face to face with the tough reality of quotidian existence, which tends to reduce idealistic enthusiasm. Indeed, the increased chromaticism of the ensuing *Vivace* section, combined with the possible lament connotation of mm. 22-25 (see page 45), indicates that the protagonist does not remain unaffected by the debilitating influences of the secondary theme. Yet, he is determined to keep going, and the music gradually builds up to the return of the primary theme, now transformed into a vigorous statement of determination. The restatement of the traumatic secondary theme is handled more gracefully, as the satisfying tonic arrival in m. 65 demonstrates. The abovementioned striking passage in the coda (mm. 75-85) incorporates characteristics of the secondary theme into the *Vivace* tempo of the primary theme; it is as if the protagonist is pausing to reflect on the lessons gleaned from his experiences. The fluctuation between C♯ and C♭ could be depicting a momentary lapse into regretful thoughts, which are promptly dispelled as C♯ is established. Nevertheless, the protagonist is about to be confronted by an even greater trial. Beethoven’s pedal marking indicates that there should be no silence between the first and second movements; there is no time to take a breath before plunging into the “inferno” (Schiff 2007).
2.3 Second Movement

With startling violence, the second movement in E minor immediately establishes itself in superlative terms: extremely fast (*Prestissimo*) and extremely loud (*fortissimo*). The first part of the primary theme (mm. 1-8) is a granitic statement that celebrates the uncompromising power of negation. The main melodic tones in mm. 1-2 are G and B, which offer the minor-mode rejection of the melodic G→B motion that initiates the first movement. (To be sure, the fluctuation between C and C near the end of the first movement already presaged this long-range major/minor conflict.) Meanwhile, the bass is essentially descending stepwise from E to E, so it harks back to the true bass line of the primary theme in the first movement as well (Rosen 230). However, in contrast to the offbeat, floating quality in the first movement, the bass line here “scrapes into the earth” (Brendel 2001: 75) by strongly articulating all the downbeats with solid octaves.

The underlying structure of this passage is actually quite simple: first-species counterpoint between the soprano and bass, featuring contrary motion throughout:
Example 2.10. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 1-8, reduction

Having this skeletal outline in mind, performers can become more sensitized to the expressiveness of the surface non-chord tones in the right hand (such as the G in m. 3 and m. 7). This can help them to guard against the tendency to rush through the eighth notes; a tendency that would make the passage sound more frightened than frightening. Also important to the pacing of the passage is the awareness of the basic rhythmic pattern: long-long-short-short-long, which is clearly stated by the left hand. Even though the right-hand part is more rhythmically active at the surface level, Beethoven’s slurring here still supports this underlying rhythm. First, pianists would probably find that the most natural way to play the right-hand material involves changing fingers on the repeated notes (B and E). This can already give an embodied awareness of demarcating the slurred groupings because the hand would need to lift itself from the keys (even if momentarily) and change positions, thus automatically avoiding legato connections between the groupings. This feeling of lift in the right hand coincides with the larger rhythmic columns in the left-hand part and can help to delineate them. In mm. 7-8, the left-hand octaves articulate rising fourths in an audaciously angular gesture that finishes the phrase with a burst of energy. The much-needed silence that follows provides the listener with the opportunity to process the turbulent opening. For the performer, this moment of silence can be used to mentally prepare the imminent change in character.

The second part of the primary theme (mm. 9-24) seems to be conveying a nervous reaction to the menacing first part. Marked piano, a new four-measure unit is obstinately repeated with little modification (see Example 2.11). The voice exchanges between the soprano and tenor in mm. 9-10 are obscured by the contrasting rhythms of the two voices; the rhythm of the soprano is derived from m. 1, while the tenor features a new rhythm to complement it. As a result, the tenor audibly echoes the soprano’s sustained notes (A and B) in an agitated gesture that is reminiscent of the start of m. 9 in the first movement (see page 43). In contrast, the more rhythmically well-aligned homophonic texture in mm. 11-12 offers some relief from the agitation of mm. 9-10.
Altogether then, this four-measure unit (mm. 9-12) can be seen as a larger gesture that progresses from anxiety to greater poise. However, when the unit is repeated in mm. 17-20 and mm. 21-24, the original gestural trajectory is altered such that there is no longer any opportunity for relaxation. This is largely due to the reduced rhythmic definition of the right hand in mm. 19-20 and mm. 23-24, which is caused by the syncopated alto line. Physically, it becomes rather challenging for the pianist to keep track of which fingers to hold and which fingers to release in playing the two voices with one hand (and the problem is not made any easier by Beethoven’s insistence that the upper voice should still be smoothly connected). This physical awkwardness contributes to the sense of increasing nervous tension. Although the upper voices are quite active throughout mm. 9-24, the bass remains anchored on the dominant pedal until the second half of m. 24. Thus, despite all the complex rhythmic interplay, the music would appear to be in a great hurry to go nowhere. Perhaps one could imagine a highly-strung person who is constantly pacing about without really accomplishing anything.

![Example 2.11. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 8-23](image)

After the hectic activity of the preceding material, the plain low-register unisons at the start of the transition (mm. 25-28) may come across as being bleakly ominous (see Example 2.12). The main tones in mm. 25-26 are G-E-B, which can be considered as the inversion of the main tones at the start of the primary theme (G-B-E in mm. 1-3). Whereas the primary theme began by soaring with defiant energy, the transition now begins by plunging into mysterious depths. Even though the simplicity of the texture provides a welcome moment of respite for the pianist, some attention may have to be devoted to the repeated Bs in both hands in m. 26 to ensure the togetherness of the attack. When played with precision, these repeated Bs can communicate
tense foreboding that adumbrates the authoritative repeated octaves of the closing theme (mm. 57-65). In mm. 29-32, the right hand presents a chromatically altered version of mm. 25-28 two octaves higher, now harmonized by meandering lower voices to take the music to the dominant of B minor. Because of the a tempo marking in m. 33, it can be assumed that the un poco espressivo indication in m. 29 also implies a slight ritenuto (Taub 2002: 188). This lends a wistful quality to the material that has just been stated so austerely, as if one were poignantly questioning a fatalistic pronouncement.

Example 2.12. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 24-44

Just as the transition begins by inverting the first part of the primary theme, the secondary theme begins by inverting the second part of the primary theme. Indeed, the secondary theme starts out with a similarly structured four-measure unit (mm. 33-36). However, unlike the contained nervous drive throughout mm. 9-24, the music now threatens to break out of control in the extended restatement of the unit (mm. 37-42). Overall, the theme proceeds from greater rhythmic independence among the voices toward a more intense unitary inclination. The soprano and alto merge to become octaves in mm. 39-42, thus amplifying a single treble line. The left hand plays a compound line consisting of an F♯ pedal in the bass and a more active tenor above it. The tenor mainly produces parallel tenths with the soprano, but the two voices do not always coincide
perfectly (mm. 35-36 and mm. 39-40). However, in mm. 41-42, the rhythmic pattern in the tenor is shifted to lock in with the amplified treble line, reinforcing the obsessive repetition of the rising pattern established by the latter since m. 39. Also note that the left hand is required to gradually stretch wider (from a fifth in m. 33 to a tenth in m. 41), and this stretch exerts a palpable “pull” on the bass F pedal, eventually succeeding in coaxing it to move up to B. It seems that an increasingly stressful buildup is verging on a panic attack.

A crescendo is in effect in mm. 35-42, before a piano is given on the downbeat of m. 43. Taking the placement of these dynamic markings literally (which is in keeping with Beethoven’s propensity for sudden dynamic drops), the pianist would make the last eighth-note chord of m. 42 the loudest point in the passage. This could be especially moving, as it denies the urge to arrive strongly on the downbeat of m. 43 and thus gives the effect of a stifled cry of anguish. Schiff (2007) perceives the descending chromatic bass line in mm. 43-48 as an instance of the passus duriusculus, which was traditionally employed by Baroque composers to represent profound suffering. Physically, both hands have to negotiate different configurations of black and white keys in this passage, making it feel like various obstacles must be overcome. In contrast, mm. 49-54 are more harmonically static, calmly alternating between C major and its dominant seventh. Such emphasis on C major may serve to remind the listener of the prominent C major moment in the first movement (m. 62). For the performer, the calmness of C major is experienced as comfortable white-key engagement, which differs markedly from the preceding tricky combinations of white and black keys. Nevertheless, this moment of calm proves to be ephemeral; C major and its dominant seventh turn out to be the Neapolitan and German sixth of B minor, and they lead forcefully to the dominant of this key.
The closing theme (mm. 57-65) makes use of invertible counterpoint to achieve a brilliant effect. As Rosen explains, “Double counterpoint at the octave is a common academic device, but nobody, as far as I know, ever employed it before Beethoven for a spectacular exploitation of the different registers of the keyboard” (232). I see this as a gesture of conquest; the enjoyment of fluency as the hands confidently explore the keyboard terrain. Despite the energetic registral expansion (mm. 57-60) and contraction (mm. 61-64), the music is basically grounded in F♯, which becomes amplified across several registers, then refocused into a single octave on the downbeat of m. 65. The pure F♯ octaves in m. 65, which can be regarded as encapsulating all the tension that has been gradually accumulating since the arrival of the F♯ pedal at the start of the secondary theme (m. 33), resolve satisfyingly to B octaves, launching into the development section with elemental force.


The development section begins by presenting the primary theme in B minor (mm. 66-69). Nevertheless, due to the fact that the treble now commences with 1 rather than 3, the melodic line has to climb further in order to reach 1 an octave higher in m. 68. This results in B-D-F♯-B, as opposed to D-F♯-B (which would parallel the original G-B-E in mm. 1-3). It is as if the appetite for conquering massive registral space still needs to be satiated here. After this impressive climb, however, the energy quickly fizzles out, as the melodic line falls back to the
initial pitch. Note that the left-hand octaves become single notes in mm. 68-69, thus thinning out the texture. The bass line of the primary theme (mm. 66-69) is then transferred to the right hand in mm. 70-74, but the treble part is not transferred to the left hand. This means that Beethoven chooses to let the potential for treating the primary theme itself in double counterpoint remain latent until mm. 112-119 in the recapitulation (see Example 2.16). For now, the texture has become less active; the left hand offers a measured tremolo, like a timpani roll, above which a smooth two-part canon based on the bass line from the primary theme unfolds (mm. 70-82).

Example 2.15. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 75-104

In playing the tremolo, the pianist has to cope with the paradox of constant motion (as manifested in the alternation of the thumb and the fifth finger to play an even flow of eighth notes) coexisting with a near stasis (in the pitch content). Meanwhile, the right hand has to master the canon by itself. This can be a demanding exercise (especially if one carefully observes the slurring for each voice here), and I think that it helps to convey an expressive tension that is integral to this passage.
As the left hand moves from B to C in m. 79, Beethoven seems to be giving us yet another retrospect on the “exceptional” C major harmony from the first movement; this time, the reference is perhaps even more obvious because the chord is in root position. This moment of retrospection becomes increasingly abstract and weightless as it progresses. Indeed, the music appears to be in danger of grinding down to a halt. The tremolo stops in m. 83, leaving only suspensions to carry forward momentum. In the retransition (mm. 97-104), the suspensions themselves disappear, and the texture is reduced to plain, floating chords. In an almost enigmatically oversimplified way, these chords provide a summary of the learned devices of melodic inversion and invertible counterpoint, which have been featured prominently in much of the materials from the exposition. It is as if the secrets of Beethoven’s craft were offered to us, crystallized to its essence.

Example 2.16. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 99-119

Intriguingly, the retransition ends with an F♯ major chord (m. 104), which is the dominant of B minor, rather than E minor. And yet, in an impetuous gesture of “harmonic slash” (Drake 1994: 294), the recapitulation simply announces itself in E minor in the following measure like a brutal interruption.
The recapitulation gives the impression of even greater austerity than the exposition. Notably, the nervously rambling second part of the primary theme is omitted, and this produces increased structural tightness. Moreover, there is an intensified aura of contrapuntal rigour. As previously mentioned, the first part of the primary theme is subjected to invertible counterpoint. (It is worth noting that when the bass line is transferred to the right hand in m. 112, Beethoven introduces an octave leap that initiates a suspension – a gesture that is reminiscent of mm. 83-84 in the development section, but more energetic because of the greater physicality involved here.) Furthermore, the head motive of the transitional material is presented in a stretto-like manner in mm. 124-131 for a more dramatic buildup to the secondary theme. The coda (mm. 168-177) cleverly synthesizes the closing theme and the primary theme by using the descending scale as the “common denominator”:

![Example 2.17. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, mm. 168-177](image)

In the left hand, the idea of four “hammer-blows” on B followed by a descending scale from G to B (mm. 170-174) comes from the closing theme. However, the scalar descent is now presented in uniform rhythm and extended down to F#, which becomes the starting point of the angular upward gesture first stated in mm. 7-8. In other words, a simplified version of the primary theme’s bass line (which, after all, is essentially a descending scale from E to E) is also being presented in mm. 173-177. Meanwhile, the treble line in mm. 171-177 gives an abstract of pitches from the upper voices of mm. 2-8, climbing inexorably to finish the movement with a vehement snarl.

Overall, Mellers sees in this movement “the suggestion of a lunacy-provoking tarantella” (208). However, I think it may be more fruitful to describe it as “manic-depressive”. In other words, even though the second movement apparently does not feature the kind of blatant dualism found in the first movement, I believe that beneath its more unified textures and figurations, two opposing forces are actually at work. But unlike the opposition that occurs between the themes in
the first movement, the opposition here is inherent within the themes themselves. For example, in the first part of the primary theme (and in mm. 57-60 of the closing theme as well), one can discern two contrasting elements: the active and aggressively rising treble line is stated against the grandeur of the more inert bass notes. Uhde discerningly observes that the temperamental character of the treble line dominates the exposition and recapitulation, while the composed character of the bass line is explored in the development (917). Therefore, it may not be too farfetched to suggest that a kind of “psychological invertible counterpoint” operates over the course of the entire movement; if the exposition and recapitulation tend toward mania, then the development tends toward depression.

If we imagined a naive protagonist having to cope with harsh reality in the first movement, then that movement was understood as portraying a struggle against an unsympathetic outside force. In this movement, we can imagine him confronting a far more terrifying antagonistic force. This force may be interpreted as stemming from his own psyche, though this is not the only possible interpretation. After all, I think that one can also easily conceive of the mania of a real and potent transgressive might plunging the well-meaning protagonist into a state of depression.

### 2.4 Third Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Var. I</th>
<th>Var. II</th>
<th>Var. III</th>
<th>Var. IV</th>
<th>Var. V</th>
<th>Var. VI</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-16</td>
<td>17-32</td>
<td>33-64</td>
<td>65-96</td>
<td>97-112</td>
<td>113-152</td>
<td>153-187</td>
<td>188-203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung. Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo</td>
<td>Molto espressivo</td>
<td>Leggermente</td>
<td>Allegro vivace</td>
<td>Etwas langsamer als das Thema. Un poco meno andante ciò è un poco più adagio come il tema</td>
<td>Allegro ma non troppo</td>
<td>Tempo I del tema. Cantabile</td>
<td>Cantabile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, form diagram

There is a pause between the second and third movements, which helps to prepare both performer and listener for the impending lengthy musical discourse. Never before has Beethoven employed the form of theme and variations for a finale in a piano sonata (Rosen 233). But now, he writes a substantial set of variations that is truly “the expressive focus” (Taub 189) of the entire work. Table 2.4 displays the overall planning, in which the theme and six variations upon it are followed by a virtually verbatim restatement of the theme. Despite the apparent contrasts in
tempi, dynamic levels, and textures, all six variations still closely “orbit” the theme. In fact, the sixteen-measure harmonic structure of the theme is adhered to quite strictly almost throughout. As Mellers puts it, the “self-contained theme… remains radically unchanged, however various its variations” (213).

Example 2.18. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 1-16

The nobly rising bass line (mm. 1-4) is a welcome contrast to the falling bass line of the first two movements. More importantly, though perhaps not immediately perceptible, the theme actually offers a commentary on the conflict between G♯-B and G♯-B that was conspicuously presented at the start of the first two movements (see page 51). As Drake explains, “The line rises [from G♯] to B in the first half of the theme and then settles back to close on G♯” (295). Thus, the G♯-B interval governs the whole theme, rather than being featured as a local melodic detail. Poised and carefully paced, the symmetry between the G♯-B ascent and the B-G♯ descent reflects a more philosophical perspective that transcends personal struggle and addresses the common concerns of humanity. (I will provide more evidence for this interpretation later.) Incidentally, Uhde notices a connection between the melodic line in mm. 1-2 and the mysterious unison figure from mm. 25-26 in the second movement (901):
Latent in this theme is “the potential for both contrapunctal and songful elaboration” (Ofcarcik 2013: 86). The contrapunctal tendency can be observed in the voice exchanges between the soprano and bass (G♯ ♭ E and D♯ ♭ B), which will be highlighted in the two-part texture of the third variation. Furthermore, the first half basically proceeds from I to V four times, in slightly different ways. By repeating this most basic two-chord progression, Beethoven builds a simple yet solid framework that can support the contrapunctal ingenuity of the fourth and fifth variations. Meanwhile, the lyrical element is also crucial to the theme, as demonstrated by Beethoven’s indications (Gesangvoll and cantabile) and his use of a choral texture with mainly conjunct, singable lines (if one disregards the arpeggiations that are more idiomatic to the keyboard, of course). Overall, in its tightly symmetrical construction, its sarabande-like second-beat emphasis, and its return after all the variations are stated, Beethoven’s theme recalls the theme from Bach’s Goldberg Variations, which is designated as an “Aria”.

In playing the theme, the pianist can experience the wonderful sensation of being involved in a kind of intricate dance in which the two hands always tend to find their way toward each other: for example, in the initial contrary motion (mm. 1-2) and the ensuing gentle exploration of the right hand’s territory by the left hand (mm. 3-4). In contrast to the first half, the second half is more harmonically active, while the melodic line is more restricted in range; the hands do not need to wander as widely, yet every little movement is imbued with harmonic significance. In mm. 9-11, the left hand maintains an inner-voice B pedal with the thumb, while simultaneously negotiating the bass line with the other fingers. This gesture already gives a foretaste of the less physically comfortable outgrowth of this material in the final variation. The arpeggiation in m. 14 is especially moving because, unlike the unsupported right-hand gesture on the downbeat of m. 9 in the first movement, both hands now partake of the same impulse, working together to consummate an expressive reminder of the dominant ninth harmony from m. 85 in the first movement.
The first variation (see Example 2.20) realizes the lyrical potential of the theme. Operatic in conception, the ornate right-hand melody is accompanied by a straightforward, slow waltz rhythm. Nevertheless, this texture is not slavishly maintained throughout; the music becomes more polyphonic toward the cadences in mm. 23-24 and mm. 27-28, demonstrating the fluidity with which Beethoven shifts his emphasis back and forth between vertical and horizontal thinking. Moreover, on the second and third beats of mm. 25-26, the left-hand upper line shares the right hand’s melodic motivation by presenting two-note ascents that are elaborated upon by the right-hand chromatic gestures. Thus, the pianist must be constantly aware of the changing roles of the left hand (from sensitive accompanist to equal partner) and weigh each tone/chord accordingly. The opening right-hand gesture is imaginatively designed to imitate the difficulty of singing a high note. Of course, pianists do not naturally feel the tension of reaching a high note in the way that singers do. But the gesture of reaching toward the fifth finger in playing the octave leap helps them to embody the sense of expressive effort that singers would experience in singing the high B. Mellers describes the “seraphic grace” (214) of this variation, which may be the result of its hovering quality; due to the insistence on B, the melody seems to be suspended in midair. The stratospheric A in m. 29, marked sforzando, is a melodic peak that no human voice can attain, and it is perceived as exceptionally expressive for precisely this reason.

Example 2.20. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 17-32
The second variation is actually a double variation; the repeat of each half is written out because it features different textures from the initial statement. Each half opens with a broken-chord figuration (mm. 33-40, mm. 49-56) that is reminiscent of the *Vivace* material from the first movement. However, there is no finger pedalling (with its attendant sensation of “stickiness”) in the right hand here, and the even rhythmic flow of interlocking sixteenth-note figures creates a light, transparent texture in which the melody seems to have “evaporated” (Mellers 214).


Because the figures are divided between the hands, the main challenge for the pianist is to play in such a way that the two hands function as a single unit with a uniformity of attack and timing. The varied repeat first introduces a contrasting texture with gently repeated chords in the left hand, above which a two-measure motive overlaps with itself in the same register (mm. 41-44, mm. 57-60), arguably producing a kind of *Augenmusik* in which polyphonic subtleties are visible on the score, but cannot be brought out clearly during performance. (It is interesting to note that the overlapping interplay in the two upper voices in mm. 41-44 looks ahead to the opening of the *fugato* fifth variation.) The right-hand motive is certainly lyrical in character, but it is still a far cry from the integral tunefulness of the first variation. In other words, this material seems to represent the search for song, rather than being a fully-developed song in its own right. The varied repeat then concludes with a synthesis of the two contrasting textures presented; the hands alternate sixteenth notes, but now playing chords rather than single notes and dyads (mm. 45-48, mm. 61-64). (These chords can be seen as growing out of the left-hand part in mm. 41-44.) Due
to the blend of chordal thickness and rhythmic clarity, one could describe this passage as translucent rather than transparent.

Example 2.22. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 41-46

In playing mm. 61-64 in particular, I sense a melodic urge in the right-hand octaves, which is not wholly fulfilled because the sixteenth rests cut short the singing resonance of each melodic tone (see Example 2.23). Overall, the second variation encapsulates both lyrical and contrapuntal aspirations, much like the theme itself.

Example 2.23. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 60-64

The third variation brings polyphonic ingenuity to the foreground (see Example 2.24). The quick tempo (Allegro vivace), coupled with the change in meter from $\frac{4}{4}$ to $\frac{2}{4}$, makes this variation much too fast for a songful delivery of each note. Instead, what is underscored here is the same sort of
brilliant display of double counterpoint that we already encountered in the second movement. As in the previous variation, the repeats are written out because slight modifications (to the sixteenth-note material) and elaborations (of the eighth-note material) are introduced. This variation is technically demanding because the pianist must essentially work against the fact that the hands are a mirror image of each other. Thus, material that feels comfortable in one hand may feel extremely awkward when assigned to the other hand. For instance, I struggled a great deal to find a feasible fingering for the left hand in mm. 65-67, but the same material seems to “play itself” when it is transferred to the right hand in mm. 69-71. Indeed, in both the Henle and the Wiener Urtext editions, the fingering for the left hand is more complex than that for the right hand. Example 2.24 shows the passage from the Henle edition, fingered by Conrad Hansen:

Example 2.24. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 65-74

It must be noted, however, that the contrapuntal rigour, which challenges the pianist to think beyond biomechanical comfort, is not merely a superficial flaunting of erudition. Rather, already inherent in this active two-part texture is “the vision of a singing multitude” (Uhde 927; die Vision einer singenden Menge). As such, I think that the intense rhythmic activity throughout this variation gives us a glimpse of a potential path to the state of ecstasy – a path that will be thoroughly explored in the last variation.

The first half of the fourth variation features two lyrical subjects that are treated in imitative counterpoint. The two subjects are as follows:
Both subjects seem to trace little arcs in tonal space, such that the imitative texture based on them gives the impression of a delicately interwoven musical fabric in which a melodic thread is continuously being spun out, with frequent registral shifts that provide different illuminations to the same material. For example, the first subject is initially stated in the soprano, then reappears in its original form in the tenor range (m. 99), and finally in the bass (m. 101):

Incidentally, this carefully crafted “sonic kaleidoscope” (Taub 191) may be an allusion to the third variation from the Goldberg Variations:
The intricate texture of the first half gives way to the hypnotically pulsating harmonies of the second half. In playing the measured tremolos here, both forearms would pronate, which is physically easier to accomplish than pronating one forearm while supinating the other (as the pianist is required to do at great speed in the opening of Schubert’s Fantasie in C Major for violin and piano, for example). Meanwhile, the right-hand chromatic gestures on the second beat of mm. 105-106 recall mm. 25-26 from the first variation, similarly commenting on the harmonies from a detached height. In both the Henle and the Wiener Urtext editions, the accents and sforzando markings in m. 107 are placed on the strong subdivisions of the beats, which is how they appear in the autograph. However, both Rosen (234) and Schnabel (1985[1949]: 390) prefer having these accents and sforzando markings on the weak subdivisions of the beats, which is how they appear in the original edition. This is no idle discrepancy because, first of all, emphasizing the weak subdivisions would be more efficient in this passage, as three fingers in each hand would be involved in accenting chords, instead of using the lone fifth finger to reinforce single notes. Furthermore, it creates a stronger metric dissonance that is then resolved satisfyingly in m. 108. The climactic point of the variation (m. 109), coinciding with the only fortissimo marking in the movement, synthesizes the first subject from the first half with the broken-chord figuration from the second half in a deeply affecting outpouring.
Like the third variation, the fifth variation brings contrapuntal discipline to the foreground. This time, Beethoven writes a learned fugato that is reminiscent of the “Credo” from the Missa solemnis (Drake 296), which was a contemporaneous work with Op. 109. The opening statement harnesses the strength of the lower register of the piano for a solid, monumental sound; Schiff (2007) appropriately describes this variation as being “made of marble”. The paucity of slur markings, combined with the detached touch required for the active eighth-note line (in mm. 121ff), likely indicates that a clean, crisp tone is to be achieved through strongly articulated fingerwork.

In the second half (mm. 129-152), the subject is intervallically stretched almost beyond recognition (and even extended deep into the bass in mm. 135-136). Although linear thinking is definitely essential to this variation, Beethoven still manages to contain the apparently overriding
horizontal logic within the symmetrical phrase structure of the theme. In fact, the only structural departure from the theme is the additional repetition of the second half (mm. 145-152), which likely serves to provide an opportunity for the music to unwind into the next variation. Despite the erudite air that pervades this variation, the sheer joy in the physicality of keyboard playing probably led Beethoven to write the virtuosic rising sixths and thirds in the right hand in mm. 135-136 – an extravagant gesture that would be hard to imagine in a fugue by Bach.

Example 2.30. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 128-137

In m. 137, Beethoven introduces in the left hand a new countersubject that features repeated notes. Because repeated notes can be awkward to play on the piano (see page 28), the pianist may choose to broaden the tempo somewhat to preserve the clarity of each note. The execution of the right-hand leaps (which become particularly wide in mm. 141-143) would in turn benefit from the broader tempo. For example, the leap to the high A in m. 143 would sound more emphatic if it is not rushed through.

Example 2.31. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 138-147
The sixth variation is the culmination of the third movement (and indeed the entire sonata). The whole variation is built upon the process of rhythmic diminution, which is operating at two different layers. First of all, it must be pointed out that the dominant pedal is present throughout this variation (with the exception of brief leaps to the tonic pedal in mm. 159-160 and mm. 167-168); initially in both hands (mm. 153-168), then becoming thunderous in the bass (mm. 169-176), and finally ringing in the high register (mm. 177-187). The dominant pedal is subjected to the following rhythmic diminution:

Example 2.32. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, Var. 6, diminution of the V pedal

Meanwhile, in parallel with the diminution of the dominant pedal, the melody itself undergoes the same treatment, though it never reaches the final step of becoming a trill:

Example 2.33. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, Var. 6, diminution of the melody

It is essential to understand that the basic pulse remains the same throughout; it is simply subdivided into more active rhythmic values as the variation progresses. Because both layers of diminution are present in both hands throughout mm. 153-168, the pianist must “partition” each
hand into two sounding units: one responsible for the dominant pedal and the other for the melody or bass line of the theme.

![Example 2.34. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 153-157](image)

Of course, this task becomes increasingly arduous as the rhythmic values grow shorter. By m. 165, the physical tension of maintaining the autonomy of the moving lines in triplets while still keeping the trills as smooth and even as possible becomes almost too much to handle, and this corporeal struggle undoubtedly contributes to the mounting intensity of the music. When Beethoven finally allows each hand to articulate just one layer in m. 169 (that is, melodic elaboration in the right hand against the V trill in the left hand), the pianist can experience a sense of physical liberation that coincides with the climax of the movement.

![Example 2.35. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 167-171](image)

Here, a remark should be made about the significance of the trill, which, as the outcome of the diminution process, sounds throughout mm. 165-187. First of all, the diminution involves
employing a rhythmic *accelerando* while maintaining the same harmonic pacing from the theme, which allows Beethoven to achieve a remarkable synthesis between rhythmic vitality and harmonic stability. It is like observing the whirling dervishes, whose spinning bodies appear physically unchanged, even though the dancers themselves may be having an out-of-body experience – literally, an “ecstasy” – because of the unceasing whirling. The trill encapsulates such a paradox. When considered as an alternation of two notes, the trill represents dizzying speed. However, when considered as a totality, or as a means of producing a certain sound colour, the prolonged trill can be almost trancelike in nature. Therefore, the trill offers a particularly apposite setting for the apotheosis of the theme – for presenting the theme as simultaneously itself and “outside of” itself.

Against the earthquake-evoking bass trill, the broken diminished seventh chord of m. 169 is like a majestic rugged peak from which one can glance across an immense musical span back to the widely arpeggiated diminished seventh chord from m. 12 in the first movement and suddenly realize that the present climactic eruption has been lying in wait for a long time. On the modern piano, the performer must make sure that the sonorous bass trill does not “drown out the rest of the texture” (Rosen 234). Of course, it would be physically easier for the right hand to generate sufficient volume if Beethoven had written thick, solid chords for it to play. But I believe that the quasi-improvised arpeggiations here sound more effective precisely because of the sense of effort that is required to project them above the rumbling bass; after all, a moment of rapture may well be permeated with pleasurable pain.

In m. 177, the bass trill is transferred to the high register, while the active figurations are taken over by the left hand. Just as ecstasy is experienced as an overwhelming totality, this exchange of materials allows each hand to “know” the role of the other hand intimately, thus giving an embodied awareness of comprehensive grasp. Above all of this tumult, melodic tones from the theme appear in the topmost eighth notes like jubilant little bells. Therefore, the right hand must play the trill with the thumb and forefinger, while periodically stretching out to play these melodic “bells” with the fifth finger. This gesture is perhaps an amplification of the opening gesture of the first variation; it may similarly have its origins in the desire to embody expressive vocal difficulty on the keyboard (see page 63).
It is truly astonishing to observe that, despite the apparent state of abandon that this variation progresses toward, the process of rhythmic intensification and the resulting apotheosis all occur within the balanced structural framework derived from the theme. Only an extra three measures are added to the end of the variation (mm. 185-187) to transition into the concluding restatement of the original theme. Beethoven’s pedal marking indicates that a mist of blended tonic and dominant harmonies is to be created during this transition. Once this mist clears up, the theme reappears almost exactly as it was – but not quite. One notable difference from the initial statement is the absence of the *mezza voce* indication; there is now only *cantabile*, which seems to imply that a fuller singing tone would be appropriate. Indeed, the addition of octave doubling in the bass in mm. 192-194 infuses the theme with greater depth and warmth. Furthermore, the return of the theme cannot possibly be experienced in the same way as before because much has happened in between. Even if the theme itself does not change in significant ways, our perception of it certainly changes a great deal, as it is now informed by all the possibilities that were explored in the intervening variations.

### 2.5 Salient Gestures

Based on the thorough discussion of each movement provided above, I suggest that the sonata as a whole indeed features the interaction of two key elements, as predicted by Almén’s theory of musical narrative. These two elements – the lyrical and the contrapuntal – find their expression in certain representative gestures from the first and second movements, before finally becoming reconciled in the third movement. It is crucial to note that the distinction between the lyrical and the contrapuntal is essentially one between “monism” and “pluralism”, which are concepts that
are not understood here as abstract ideals, but rather as being deeply rooted in the pianist’s embodied experience.

The lyrical tendency of the first movement immediately manifests itself in the primary theme, which, if played in solid chords, would sound very much like a chorale. Nevertheless, this is not yet a fully developed song because the texture is far too uniform and nondescript; it is not easy to abstract a memorable tune from it. One can perhaps imagine a protagonist who possesses an innocent inclination to sing, but apparently lacks the craftsmanship to do so convincingly at the moment. Significantly, the secondary theme interrupts the flow of the primary theme with a different sort of lyrical material: an arioso, which can be considered as half aria, half accompanied recitative (Rosen 185). There is certainly more melodic declamation in mm. 9-11, though it still falls short of achieving a long, singing line, and it dissolves into figurations in mm. 12-15. It is only in mm. 78-85 in the coda that the synchronized choreography between the hands offers a tantalizing vision of the masterly songfulness of the third-movement theme. Therefore, the first movement can be interpreted as an embarkation on a quest for a song that cannot yet be attained.

The second movement violently denies the lyrical aspirations of the first movement with the stark opposition of line against line (thus realizing the essential meaning of “counterpoint”). Although the polyphonic conception conveys the impression of intimidating intellectual discipline, there seems to be deeper psychological motivations for the movement, which I described as “mania” and “depression”, and which are embodied in the contrasting gestures between the hands in the first part of the primary theme and in the closing theme (see page 60). Whether regarded as an inner conflict of antagonistic tendencies, or as an externalized conflict between the transgression and the order-imposing hierarchy, the manic-depressive character creates a disturbingly aberrant quality that permeates this movement.

The break before the start of the third movement allows for the possibility of psychological detachment from the lyrical-contrapuntal dichotomy that operated across the first two movements (as there had been no break between them), thus paving the way for the attainment of a more clear-sighted perspective and the resolution of the overarching conflict. Indeed, the third-movement theme already demonstrates that tunefulness and contrapuntal rigour need not be the opposing forces that they were portrayed to be in the first two movements. Rather, there can be a
mutually enriching dialogue between them in a well-crafted and expressive song. The lyrical, unitary impulse is experienced as a well-coordinated, intricate dance between the hands, while the contrapuntal, pluralistic tendency is embodied in the voice exchanges whose contrary motion is paradoxically played in the same manner (that is, toward the thumb) in both hands. It is worth noting that Beethoven originally called the theme Gesang mit innigster Empfindung and only changed Gesang (Song) to Gesangvoll (Songful) in the first edition (Stanley 107). I am convinced that this theme is the song that the protagonist has been searching for in the first movement; it is only through the intense struggle of the second movement that he is able to find the means to produce “one of the sublimest songs ever created by man” (Mellers 211). That this song may epitomize a kind of perfected beauty is demonstrated by the fact that no variation departs significantly from its structure. Moreover, at the end of the movement, the song is simply reaffirmed like an eternal truth that remains untarnished by the passage of time. Such an interpretation is not so fanciful when one considers the following passage from a letter that Beethoven wrote to Maximiliane Brentano, the dedicatee of Op. 109, on December 6, 1821:

A dedication!!! Well, this is not one of those dedications which are used and abused by thousands of people – It is the spirit which unites the noble and finer people of this earth and which time can never destroy. It is this spirit which now speaks to you and which calls you to mind and makes me see you still as a child, and likewise your beloved parents… (Anderson 1961: 931-932)

I think that the above passage contains important clues for a global narrative interpretation of this work. According to Frye, there is one narrative archetype that is characterized by the sort of “perennially childlike quality” and “extraordinarily persistent nostalgia” (186) that Beethoven seems to be referring to in his letter: the romance.

2.6 Op. 109 as a Romance

Frye believes that the most essential element of the romance is the idea of “the quest” (187). Specifically, he sees the romance as a successful quest that consists of three principal stages: “the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero” (ibid.). The three movements of Op. 109 seem to correspond with these three stages. In the first movement, the primary theme gives us a depiction of the protagonist on his quest for song, while the secondary theme represents a “minor adventure”. It is interesting to note that the harmonically adventurous moment in the return of the secondary theme (mm. 60-62) is a
microcosm of the large-scale tonal conflict of the sonata; the G♯-G♯-G♯ motion in the bass line here reflects the E major-E minor-E major trajectory across the three movements:


The “crucial struggle” then unfolds in the second movement, where the pluralistic tendency of counterpoint threatens to destroy the protagonist’s vision of beautiful song. The blunt juxtaposition of opposing movements (and, on a smaller scale, opposing themes in the first movement) reflects the dialectic structure typical of the romance, where every character “tends to have his moral opposite confronting him, like black and white pieces in a chess game” (Frye 195). After this brutal strife, the silence between the second and third movements comes across as being quite meaningful, as it could perhaps represent the “ritual death” of the protagonist, before the “resurrection” in the third movement.

Frye writes that the quest in a romance is “the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality” (193). Thus, the heartwarming song that is the third-movement variation theme fulfils the protagonist’s lyrical desire and offers much consolation after the neurotic propensity of the second movement. Nevertheless, it has also absorbed some of the contrapuntal inclination from the second movement, which now lends the song a dignified, rather than intimidating, air. In other words, the song “[maintains] the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience” (ibid., 201).
Frye also mentions that during the last phase of the romance, there is a change from active to contemplative adventure (202). This seems to be true of the third movement, where the variations explore different aspects of the theme without really developing or changing it. Even in the ecstasy of the final variation, the harmonic structure of the theme remains unyieldingly firm, and one senses that this is the spiritual bliss of hard-earned wisdom, rather than the erotic bliss of intemperate youth.

Overall then, Beethoven’s Op. 109 can be understood as a romance based on the quest for song. A comparison between the third-movement variation theme and the first-movement primary theme reveals how much has been accomplished, as the protagonist progresses from quasi-improvised latent songfulness to a highly refined song with enough integrity to spawn six contrasting variations without losing its identity. According to this reading, the protagonist has learned much from his adventures and, consequently, is now able to reach what Beethoven might well have called “a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy” (Drake 280).
Chapter 3
A Performance of Op. 109 by Chairat Chongvattanakij

3.1 Overview

Having developed a plausible gestural narrative for Beethoven’s Op. 109 from a close score-based analysis, we now have a detailed framework that can be used to critically compare how various performers engage with the same score and to determine whether their experiences can be understood as a similar gestural narrative. This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of my own live performance of Op. 109 at my first Master’s recital in 2012. I chose to analyze my performance first in order to take advantage of the fact that I have privileged access to the thought processes behind my interpretive choices. As explained below, by observing the video recording of my recital, I was able to watch myself from a more detached third-person perspective, while still remaining deeply aware of my intimate contact with the music from the first-person perspective. This allowed me to develop sharpened skills of gesture observation and interpretation, which I then applied to the other three performers (as will be discussed in Chapters 4-6).

I will show that there is generally a close correspondence between the gestural narrative offered in this chapter and the one offered in the previous chapter. Of course, this is not surprising, as I am responsible for both of them. However, the score-based analysis undertaken in the previous chapter was informed by the experience of sitting at the piano and playing Op. 109; in other words, it tended to privilege the instrumental gestures made from the first-person perspective. In contrast, the video-based analysis presented in this chapter is informed by the experience of watching a pianist performing Op. 109; it tends to focus on the expressive gestures as viewed from the third-person perspective. Even if the pianist, in this case, is me, I must admit that I noticed numerous gestures in the video recording that I do not recall ever being consciously aware of in the moment of performance. Indeed, I was quite fascinated by the process of deciphering the meaning of gestures that appear at once foreign and familiar to me. What aided me tremendously in this process was my embodied familiarity with the piece itself, and it is the unfolding dialogue between certain musical features and my signifying body across the piece.
that I want to capture in the following discussion. It will become clear that my gestures tend to reflect how I perceive the music to “move” from moment to moment, and that the overall dynamics of my gestural evolution across Op. 109 can be understood as articulating a romance narrative. In the discussion that follows, still images from my video recording are provided alongside score excerpts with arrows to indicate where the gestures occur.

3.2 First Movement

My head “floats” upward and to the right as I begin playing, demonstrating that the primary theme commences with an “off the ground” quality because the bass tones consistently hover behind the melodic tones. Due to the finger pedalling, the two-note figures in the right hand are heard quite distinctly, while the left-hand figures sound like a murmur; in other words, the lyrical inclination of the right hand cannot find adequate support from the left hand at the moment. I acknowledge the authentic cadence in m. 4 by broadening the tempo and leaning forward with my upper body, coming closer to the keyboard to finish the phrase with care. I then give an emphatic nod at the introduction of the A♭ in m. 5, welcoming the new element that signals the precocious modulation to the dominant:

In addition to making a crescendo, I also push the tempo in mm. 6-8, and my head “flicks” upward at each of the two right-hand “ascending sixths” on the second beat of m. 7 and m. 8; despite the different voicing in m. 7, I uniformly audiate B-G♭ and C♭-A♭ as the upper line, only giving more emphasis to the latter. Thus, my head “flicks” coincide with what I hear as the
largest treble leaps so far, as I sense the music aspiring toward the expected B. Overall, the more
driven tempo and the restless head “flicks” create the impression of striving to accomplish too
much too soon, which usually does not lead to unqualified success. Indeed, I already anticipate
the upcoming diminished seventh shock by breathing in through my slightly open mouth, making
a sort of inaudible gasp near the end of m. 8, while withdrawing my left hand from the keyboard
to give sole attention to my right hand, which is about to make a dramatic statement:

Figure 3.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 8: Chongvattanakij

The right-hand diminished seventh chord that initiates the secondary theme on the downbeat of
m. 9 is rolled quickly and decisively. However, there is no gradual accumulation of power from
thumb to fifth finger, but rather a suddenly more pronounced top A played by the fifth finger.
(This may be because I subconsciously associate the smaller note size of the first four pitches
with less significance.) The left-hand reaction to this surprising gesture is strong; each note of the
ascending tenor line (D♯-E-F♯-G♯-A) is played by the thumb for emphasis. At the subito piano
halfway through the measure, I give more attention to the descending treble line. Thus, the
overall effect is that of rising (D♯ to A) and falling (A to D♯) “vectors” interacting between the
hands, producing the first inkling of the song-denying contrapuntal severity that is to come in the
second movement. When the two hands unite for the thick C♯ minor harmony on the second
eighth-note beat of m. 10, I let my head drop down, feeling the gravity of the chord with this
“slashing” motion. Reaching the cadential Ӽ on the second beat of m. 11, I look up from the
keyboard and let my eyes wander into the distance. This gesture creates a sense of
weightlessness; it contains the motion factors of space, time, and flow – but not weight. Recall
that Laban describes this particular incomplete effort as the “vision drive” (see page 35). This is therefore a brief moment of delicate contemplation, which I also embody in the upward “floating” of my right wrist as I hold the D♯:

For an instant, it seems that an authentic cadence in B major would be possible; in other words, there is a glimpse of hope that the aspiration of the primary theme would now find fulfilment. But I shake my head on the last beat of m. 11, and this “wringing” gesture reflects the turn figure and chromaticism that frustrate the anticipated resolution and lead into the same diminished seventh sonority as in m. 9, but now amplified into a wide-ranging arpeggio that is supported by the deep bass octave. The situation has worsened; the novel D♯ major harmony in m. 13 receives a vigorous nod to affirm its powerful disorienting effect. But then, I straighten my back and “glide” my upper body forward in playing the chromatic slides (F希望自己-F♯ and A♯-B) at the end of m. 13, showing that the music manages to transport itself to the dominant in a direct yet spellbinding way. At the espressivo marking in m. 14, I actually play faster, before lingering on the melodic peak (B) at the sixth sixteenth-note beat of the measure. I then make an accelerando through the cascading triplet figures in parallel sixths in the second half of the measure because I hear the upcoming scalar descent in m. 15 as a compression of the main tones from the triplet figures, and I want to create a sense of organic outgrowth:

In m. 15, the left-hand ascending F♯-B tetrachord is played with “dabbing” flat fingers, allowing me to articulate the staccato markings without undue emphasis. However, the low B, which is marked sforzando, is delivered with the curved middle finger in a moderate “punching” effort, after which my left hand “floats” upward briefly, then “slashes” downward to the side of my body, as if to cut off the sound. After all, this low B is only a sixteenth note in length, and my gestural sequence appears to convey a tentative celebration of the attainment of the dominant.

The Vivace material returns in m. 16, but with the hands now switching their roles. Nevertheless, I still project the right-hand figures more strongly because I find the seemingly unpredictable climb toward G♯ here more interesting. At the time of my recital, I was not aware that the left-hand part also features an important melodic line in quarter notes (mm. 18-21) that is transferred to the right hand in m. 22. Consequently, this line sounds rather obscured in my performance. I slow down as I reach the G♯ peak in the right hand, and I also take a slight breath afterward (by momentarily lifting both hands while still holding down the damper pedal) to delineate the start of the sempre legato melody. I do this to highlight what is in fact the first lengthy lyrical phrase to emerge in the movement, even though I did not notice the possible melodic connection to the Klagender Gesang from Op. 110 (see page 45) at the time. Furthermore, the harmonic syntax in mm. 20-21 seems to demand a certain amount of “preparation time” because a Phrygian cadence in C♯ minor is immediately followed by the dominant of G♯ minor. In my opinion, playing this passage strictly in time would actually sound somewhat odd.
As mentioned on page 44, I feel that there is something quite poignant about mm. 16-25, and my facial expression particularly reflects this at the diminished seventh chords in mm. 23-24; the drooping eyelids and the open mouth with the corners of the lips pulled downward can be perceived as characteristics of sadness (Ekman 2003: 95):

![Figure 3.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 23: Chongvattanakij](image1)

As the melodic line starts to rise in m. 26, my facial expression quickly changes; the slight thrusting forward of the jaw and the staring eyes can be associated with anger (ibid., 134-135), but I actually want to suggest the quiet strength of resoluteness, as the music now begins a long, gradual buildup to the forceful restatement of the primary theme:

![Figure 3.5. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 26: Chongvattanakij](image2)

At the first sfp marking in m. 33, I make a rapid head “flick” to the right to accompany the sudden emphasis. However, the subsequent sfp markings do not receive such gestural treatment. This is partly due to the fact that the left-hand broken octaves become rather athletic in mm. 33-38, and I need to keep still and fix my eyes on this activity for better accuracy. Throughout mm.
34-46, my upper body is bent forward, coming quite close to the keyboard; it is as if the resulting feeling of tension in my abdomen helped me to internalize the accumulating musical tension:

![Figure 3.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 40: Chongvattanakij](image)

When the dominant pedal is reached in m. 42, my right hand remains in the same position, so I continue to devote visual attention to my left hand, which now produces two complete “loops” (B-E^[#]_5-F^[#]_7-D^[#]_5) that I also embody in the small circular motions that I make with my torso in mm. 42-45. In mm. 46-48, what initially promises to be a third loop ends up giving rise to a different continuation, creating the impression that an imaginary musical projectile is launched as a result of the centrifugal force that was applied to it in the two complete loops. Accordingly, I stop the circular motion of my torso here and straighten my back to prepare myself for the propulsion into the *forte* return of the primary theme:

![Figure 3.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 47: Chongvattanakij](image)
In playing the first phrase of the primary theme at the start of the recapitulation, the sense of effort involved in projecting the soaring right-hand melody over the resonant broken octaves in the bass is clearly visible on my face. The closed eyes, lowered eyebrows, and tightly pressed lips communicate the strain of physical exertion (see Figure 3.8). One could imagine, for example, that someone carrying a heavy load would make a similar facial expression. Applying Laban Movement Analysis to this tense expression, I can perceive an incomplete effort in which the three motion factors operating are weight, time, and flow. Quite appropriately, Laban calls such a “spaceless” state the “passion drive” (see page 35).

In contrast to the careful finishing of the phrase in m. 4, there is a veritable feeling of release and relief in the corresponding m. 52; the authentic cadence now washes away all the tenseness from my facial expression, and I even “flick” my right hand from the keyboard momentarily in a celebratory flourish after the cadence. I then take a pause in the middle of m. 52 in order to allow some time for the massive reverberation from the forte statement to dissipate, so that the beginning of the next phrase, which is marked piano, can be heard distinctly.

I still make an “inaudible gasp” (see Figure 3.2) to precede the rolled diminished seventh chord that ushers in the Adagio material once more in m. 58. However, this gasp is briefer than the previous one, as if I were becoming desensitized to this harmonic “surprise”. Furthermore, the Adagio material is now played somewhat faster than in the exposition, giving the impression that I do not have to suffer through its intense chromaticism as much as before. On the second beat of m. 60, I experience a similar “vision drive” as in the analogous spot in m. 11 (see Figure 3.3).
But because of the addition of the A♭ chromatic passing tone in the left hand, I also make a discreet nod (like a gentle “dab” of the head) to acknowledge this new detail while still being absorbed with looking into the distance. I try to be quite precise with the rhythmic compression on the third beat of m. 60 (albeit sacrificing some clarity of tone in the effort). This allows me to feel the tension of the diminished seventh chord on the last eighth-note beat of the measure more strongly, as demonstrated by the sudden bending forward of my upper body and the strained expression on my face. (Overall, the posture is similar to the one shown in Figure 3.8.) When the tension is released on the downbeat of m. 61, as the bass G♯ shifts to G♭ to create the novel dominant seventh harmony of C major, my upper body springs backward, and I launch into the rapid right-hand arpeggio. At the fortissimo resolution to the epiphanic C major harmony in the next measure, I make a robust “flicking” action with my entire upper body, acknowledging the dynamic highpoint of the movement.

When the C major triad morphs into the tonic E major triad near the end of m. 62 through the C-B and G-G♯ chromatic slides, I straighten my back just as I did in the corresponding spot in m. 13. However, because the music does not simply taper off as before, but actually makes a crescendo to a sforzando emphasis on the last chord of the measure, my upper body now “glides” backward rather than forward, as if the growth in sound were pushing me away from the instrument. In making this gesture, my body seems to become larger than it really is, giving me the momentary feeling of grandness and authority as I affirm the tonic chord:

Figure 3.9. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 62: Chongvattanakij
Then, in m. 63, I shake my head to reflect the quiet alternation between D♯ and E in the right hand, and this gentle “wringing” gesture comes across as being a tender reproach for the preceding dramatic outburst.

The descending broken thirds a sixth apart in mm. 63-64 are played with articulate “punching” fingers. The result is an almost metallically bright sound that only becomes more subdued as the figuration reaches the lower register. I then take some time to prepare the satisfying arrival of the root-position tonic chord in m. 65. After playing the resonant low E on the downbeat of m. 65, my left hand “floats” up from the keyboard, as if to coax more sound out of the instrument (see Figure 3.10). Unlike the corresponding spot in the exposition (m. 15), this “floating” gesture is not followed by a downward “slashing” gesture that appears to cut off the sound. After all, the bass E here is a quarter note in length, unlike the low B in m. 15, which is a sixteenth note in length. The unimpeded “floating” gesture in the left hand reflects the longer-lasting resonance and also encourages the right hand to “float” through its ascending broken E major harmony, which seems smoother and warmer than the descending broken thirds of the preceding measures because my fingers now make a “pressing” rather than “punching” effort to carry the tone steadily upward. In short, I appear to be luxuriating in this uplifting tonic harmony.

As the coda begins in the luminous high register, I react by blinking once, and then “flicking” my eyebrows upward briefly. Raised eyebrows can be associated with surprise (Ekman and Friesen 2003: 37), and I am subtly displaying my pleasant state of wonder here, as the primary theme has become fragmented, and it is presented in an unfamiliar, albeit scintillating, manner.
Observing Beethoven’s slurring, I clearly articulate the short phrases in mm. 66-74 to highlight the exchange of the thematic fragments between the hands that seems to be transpiring in an idyllic setting; at nine measures in length, this is the longest unbroken stretch of diatonic purity in the entire movement. But this moment of idyllic wonder vanishes on the downbeat of m. 75, where a quarter rest serves as a friendly jolt that paves the way for a more profound realization. It is interesting to note that there has been no real break in sound until this point in the movement. Thus, both hands “flick” off the keyboard to emphasize the novelty of the silence.

The chords in mm. 75-76, which are both followed by quarter rests, are executed with curiously contrasting gestures between the hands: the right hand “glides” forward to depress the keys, then “floats” upward at the rests, while the left hand makes minimal motion and remains close to the keys throughout. Therefore, the right hand portrays the relationship between sound and silence, while the left hand emphasizes the underlying harmonic continuity that is still present in spite of the rests, thus helping me to transition smoothly into the upcoming chorale-like texture.

As previously discussed, the chorale-like texture in mm. 78-85 may be providing a glimpse of the beautiful song that is to come in the third movement (see page 75). I certainly subscribed to this reading at the time of my performance, and my gestures here can be understood in this light. First of all, in playing the diminished seventh harmony in m. 77, I already start to shift my gaze away from my hands, though still continuing to look downward. Then, in m. 78, when the upper voice leaps from G to C and the inner-voice E moves to E to produce the exquisitely yearning augmented triad on the second beat, I find myself looking up into the cavernous space of the hall just as I did in m. 11. But as I carry out this action here, my upper body also noticeably “floats” backward, such that my eyes do not appear to be focused on any particular spot. Overall then, there is a wandering quality to my gaze, as if I were searching for the fully absorbing lyrical expression that is not yet achievable.

I hear the F# dominant seventh harmony on the second beat of m. 84 as the peak of the chorale phrase; the wide registral contrast between the hands as well as the open voicing of the right-hand chord itself gives this harmony a special sense of spaciousness. Unfortunately, however, my right hand is not large enough to span the tenth required here, so I have to break the chord. As I spread out my right hand to do this, I also crane my neck upward and close my eyes momentarily, thus magnifying the reaching effort of my hand. In fact, this magnified reaching effort may help to enhance the expression of a potent lyrical desire.
As the tension lessens into the B dominant ninth harmony on the downbeat of m. 85, I cast my head down to express regret that the most explicitly hymn-like statement in the movement is about to be left behind. I linger on the C♭-B in m. 89 and m. 91, while pushing forward the tempo on the C♭-B in m. 90. Beset by the dark cloud of uncertainty from this C♭-C♭ fluctuation, my eyebrows are lowered and my eyes are closed throughout these three measures. When C♭ is finally affirmed in m. 92, I open my eyes and shake my head to dismiss all doubts, making an accelerando as the music ascends to regain the naivety of the high register. In a thoughtful reference to the start of the recapitulation (see page 49), the left hand crosses over the right hand to reach the stratospheric G♭-B figure, and I shut my eyes tightly as I deliver this delicate reminder. The final tonic chord is played with well-controlled forward “gliding” motion in both arms, with the elbows “floating” outward to reflect the comforting roundness of the sound.

To summarize, my gestures in the first movement may be perceived as depicting the dynamics of “innocence” and “experience” that was discussed in Chapter 2 (see page 50). In playing the “innocent” primary theme, I convey an impatient desire to reach the dominant through the emphatic nod at the introduction of A♭ in m. 5 and the head “flicks” in mm. 6-7 as the treble line aspires toward B. This naive recklessness is suddenly checked by the inaudible gasp that accompanies the diminished seventh shock of “experience” at the start of the secondary theme. My tempo fluctuations and variety of gestures throughout the secondary theme lend a fluid, malleable quality to this fantasia-like material, which seems appropriate for evoking the state of uncertainty after an alarming setback. Because I continue to project the somewhat erratic right-hand ascent to high G♭ in mm. 16-21, this state of uncertainty is maintained at the start of the
development section, despite the return of the more uniform texture of the primary theme. Prolonged uncertainty gives way to sorrow, as my facial expression in mm. 23-24 most clearly demonstrates. But then, sorrow is transformed into resolute strength, which is embodied, for instance, in the tension that I feel in my abdomen as I remain close to the keyboard throughout mm. 34-46, while the music builds up to the *forte* recapitulation. The circular motion of my torso in mm. 42-48 shows that I take advantage of the “centrifugal force” of the retransition in order to launch myself into the strong restatement of the primary theme, where the effort expended in projecting the treble line over the resounding bass contributes to the passionate delivery. The return of the secondary theme is not as powerfully affecting as before; for example, the “uprightness” of the *sforzando* chord in m. 62 (which is represented in the straightening and backward “gliding” of my upper body) and the relaxed upward “floating” through the pleasant root-position tonic harmony in m. 65 suggest a more successful management of a stressful situation. The chorale-like passage in mm. 78-85, which synthesizes characteristics from the primary and secondary themes, provides a vision of the noble goal – the full-fledged song – that cannot yet be attained. The lyrical longing here is expressed through my searching gaze in m. 78 as well as my reaching effort on the F dominant seventh harmony in m. 84.

### 3.3 Second Movement

Although there is no pause between the first two movements, my facial expression undergoes a dramatic change for a split second, just before I unleash the elemental negating force of the tonic minor in the second movement. (In fact, this expression happens so quickly that I would not have noticed it at all had I not observe this segment of the video recording frame by frame.) But there is little doubt as to what expression this is; the intently glaring eyes and the tightly pressed lips are indicative of anger (Ekman 135). It is like I am preparing to launch myself into combat:
In playing the threatening first part of the primary theme (mm. 1-8), my body language reveals the prevalence of “punching” efforts; my head and torso tend to move in rapid, forceful bursts that mainly emphasize the downbeats. As I plunge my hands deep into the keys to begin the movement, my whole upper body “slashes” upward; it is as if, in obedience to Newton’s third law of motion, the downward force of my hands causes this strong reaction in the opposite direction. Curiously, my left foot also “glides” backward as I do this. I finish the phrase by “flicking” my right hand fairly high into the air, like throwing caution to the wind. (However, this gesture also helps me to better pace the music because it guards against the temptation to deny the rests in m. 8 their full value and rush into the next section; after all, I cannot immediately play if my hand is in midair.)

In contrast to the angular gestures that lend intimidating authority to the first part of the primary theme, the second part (mm. 9-24) is characterized by more fluid gestures that evoke nervous
volatility. (As mentioned on page 34, Laban would use the terms “bound flow” and “free flow” to describe these two types of gestures, respectively.) This passage features the obsessive repetition of a four-measure unit with very little alteration. Taking into account the minor changes in mm. 19-20 and mm. 23-24 in particular, I suggested that this four-measure unit could be interpreted as progressing from greater to lesser tension in mm. 9-16 and then actually doing the reverse in mm. 17-24 (see pages 52-53). Nevertheless, my gestures, which are organized in a cyclical pattern according to the four-measure unit, do not seem to reflect any reversal in gestural trajectory. Generally, my head “punches” downward at the start of the unit, then “floats” back up around the middle of the unit. Interestingly then, my body language here conveys a slightly different gestural understanding from the one I arrived at through my score-based analysis; it appears that during actual performance, I am more inclined to maintain obsessive regularity, which imparts greater nervous tension to the passage.

As the transitional material unfolds in the menacing low register (mm. 25-28), my posture gives the impression that I am trying to “engulf” the keyboard; after all, a menacing force can have this kind of subtle and insidiously permeating quality:

![Figure 3.14. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 28: Chongvattanakij](image)

Then, the right hand restates the material two octaves higher in m. 29, and I raise my eyebrows to acknowledge the upward registral transfer. Although I take the *un poco espressivo* here to signify a slight *ritenuto* (see page 54), I really only start to apply it in mm. 31-32. As I do so, I gradually straighten my back and “float” my head upward; such postural expansion coincides
with the expanding contrary motion between the treble and bass in these two measures, and helps to prepare the arrival of the secondary theme.

The secondary theme begins with a four-measure unit (mm. 33-36) that is quite similar to mm. 9-12. Indeed, if it were subjected to an obsessively repetitive treatment as well, my gestures would probably take on a cyclical nature to portray this. However, the unit is restated only once, and it evolves radically in this restatement (mm. 37-42). First, I highlight the absence of the right-hand tie in m. 37 (as compared to m. 33) by “wringing” my head to the right at the rearticulation of the C#.

The passage then builds up through the frenzied octaves in mm. 39-42, which require rapid “flicking” motion of my right wrist. The athleticism of this instrumental gesture, in turn, creates the visceral intensity that propels the music to the *rinforzando* marking in m. 42. I offered an interpretation of the *subito piano* on the downbeat of m. 43 as a “stifled cry of anguish” (see page 55), and my facial expression here seems to reflect this interpretation: I open my mouth as if to utter something, but at the same time close my eyes tightly as if to suppress the urge to do so. Thus, even though I was not aware of the specific *passus duriusculus* connotation that Schiff associates with mm. 43-48 at the time of my performance, my facial expression in m. 43 can be regarded as evoking suffering:

![Figure 3.15. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 43: Chongvattanakij](image)

When the bass A♭ (which is enharmonically G♯) in the second half of m. 48 moves to G in the following measure to produce the dominant seventh of C major (thus giving a kind of déjà vu experience of mm. 60-61 from the first movement), I look noticeably more tranquil, as if enjoying a brief moment of solace. Meanwhile, as I hold the F♯ with my right middle finger, my right elbow “floats” outward and up, which obviously produces no audible effect, yet visually communicates an expressive *crescendo* through the sustained tone:
In mm. 51-52, the right hand introduces a short motive that essentially reiterates the pitch G in a seemingly light, innocent way. To emphasize this new character, I give a nod at the staccato G on the downbeat of m. 52, approving of the apparent positive change of fortune. However, the motive becomes disturbingly transformed in mm. 55-56, as the G falls to F♯, and the dominant seventh of C major is reinterpreted as the German sixth of B minor. Accordingly, I suddenly “press” my upper body forward to feel the rising tension in m. 55, before “slashing” it backward in the next measure at the establishment of F♯ as the steely dominant of B minor.

I see the closing theme (mm. 57-65) as being militaristic in character, and I try to bring out this character by reinforcing the marching regularity of the octaves. In particular, I make barely perceptible head “flicks” at the four left-hand F♯ octaves in mm. 57-58 in order to better internalize the rhythmic drive and the resolute fixation on F♯ here. As mentioned on page 56, I actually understand the entire closing theme as a massive accumulation of tension through an amplification of F♯ across different registers. This tension is finally released at the beginning of the development section, as the long-anticipated B arrives in stark octaves (m. 66), which are delivered with a powerful “punching” effort into the keys. This exertion is so strong that it affects almost my entire body. As in m. 1, my upper body “slashes” upward in reaction to the “punching” effort of my arms. However, the reaction here is more explosive; it is almost like I am doing a vigorous push-up from the keyboard. Furthermore, my left foot, which has been relatively motionless ever since its “gliding” effort in m. 1, suddenly “slashes” backward, reminding me of the kind of motion that a runner would make in taking off from the starting line:
In mm. 66-69, my head “dabs” left and right as I seek to visually monitor the progress of both my hands, which are relatively far apart and also tend to move in contrary motion. Although these head “dabs” are made in order to improve note accuracy, their very necessity helps to emphasize the fact that much registral terrain is being conquered here. In contrast, the left-hand measured tremolo in mm. 70-82 offers a hypnotic stillness, which I embody by keeping my head down and staring absorbedly at my hands. The facial expression is in fact similar to the one shown in Figure 3.12, albeit less tense. Moreover, the relative stillness of my head and torso here contributes to an overall impression of passive brooding, rather than active belligerence.

Meanwhile, my right hand manages to play the two voices of the canon smoothly, though without being able to clearly bring out the overlapping slur markings that Beethoven indicates. Moreover, in m. 79 in particular, I feel that harmonic articulation should in fact trump Beethoven’s slurring. As discussed on page 58, when the tremolo moves from B to C in m. 79 to create a root-position C major triad, one can hear yet another reference to m. 62 from the first movement. Therefore, I prepare this moment by slowing down toward the end of the preceding measure (and raising my eyebrows as I do so), then making a slight break in the middle of...
Beethoven’s slurs in order to establish the C major harmony. Sensing the hopefulness of this harmony, I look up for the first time in nine measures, opening my mouth slightly as if to indicate that I can finally breathe normally again:

![Figure 3.18. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 81: Chongvattanakij](image)

However, by m. 83, the music seems to lose its bearings and begins to wander aimlessly. To show this, my torso and head make little “floating” gestures with frequent and unpredictable changes in direction. Then, my head “dabs” at each of the dotted-quarter-note chords in m. 95 to help prepare the fermata chord in the next measure. In other words, to depict the music grinding down to a halt (see page 58), the flexibility of “floating” transforms into the directness of “dabbing”, as if an imaginary force of friction is unceremoniously stopping the free gestural flow. Having played the fermata chord, both hands “float” upward, then land gently on the pianissimo E minor chord in m. 97. The registral shift, the contained dynamic level, and the proximity between the hands induce me to lean closer to the keyboard. The resulting posture is perhaps not unlike that of a conductor trying to cue the delicate entrance of a contrasting group of instruments.

As to be expected, there are many gestural parallels between the exposition and the recapitulation. Therefore, I will only mention the notable differences in certain passages from the recapitulation. First of all, the ferocity of the first part of the primary theme becomes more consuming because the material is now prolonged through treatment in invertible counterpoint in mm. 112-119. Moreover, the octave leaps that Beethoven adds to the right hand in m. 112 and m. 116 require more physical involvement, and my “punching” efforts consequently become stronger. The second part of the primary theme is not recapitulated, so the transition is immediately heard in m. 120, beginning in the higher register this time. Indeed, the initial
radiance of what is essentially a broken C major harmony seems to offer the promise of a light at the end of the tunnel. Accordingly, I prepare this moment of optimism by lifting my right hand and letting it “float” briefly before sinking it softly into the key to play the E:

![Figure 3.19. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 120: Chongvattanakij](image1)

However, by m. 124, the same material is transferred to the ominous low register, before rising in a quasi-stretto fashion, with poignant harmonic twists that bring the music ineluctably to the dominant of E minor. Perceiving this unfortunate turn of events, I make a very subtle sighing gesture in m. 130:

![Figure 3.20. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 130: Chongvattanakij](image2)

Much material that follows does not feature noteworthy gestural differences, so I will skip to the coda. First of all, the energy that has accrued throughout the closing theme (mm. 158ff) seems to let up too abruptly in mm. 166-167. (In contrast, recall that the similar gesture in mm. 65-66 propelled the music forcefully into the development section.) To reflect this, both my hands
“flick” up from the keyboard after playing the E octaves, as if the keys were radiating intense heat. The harmonized echo in mm. 168-169 is played quickly and quietly, like shyly uttering an apology for an earlier act of rashness. My right hand then “flicks” inward toward my torso to emphasize the timid character. The concluding eight measures of the movement can be understood as an imperious buildup to a “vehement snarl” (see page 59). I stretch the beats on the repeated Bs in mm. 170-171, giving the impression of a roller coaster train overcoming the initial inertia before a scream-inducing dive. The final chord is released with a “slashing” gesture in both hands (albeit with a more prominent upward curve in the right hand’s trajectory), and I end up with clenched fists on my lap, thus finishing the movement with decisive energy:

![Figure 3.21. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Chongvattanakij](image)

To summarize, my gestures can be understood as reflecting the disturbing manic-depressive character that operates like a psychological invertible counterpoint across this movement (see pages 59-60). The hyperactive quality of mania finds ample opportunity for expression in the exposition and recapitulation, where my gestures tend to be quick and active. From the outset, my aggressive “punching” efforts in mm. 1-8 and my compulsively repetitive gestural pattern in
mm. 9-24 establish the interaction between the two high-arousal states of anger and anxiety. Also note that, unlike the tentative attainment of the dominant in the first movement (see page 83), the arrival of the dominant minor in this movement (m. 66) is downright explosive, as it involves making a kind of vigorous push-up from the keyboard as well as a backward “slash” of my left foot (see page 95). In contrast to these signs of energetic mania, the depressive mood that pervades much of the development section notably manifests itself as the self-absorption of mm. 70-78 (where I keep quite still and simply stare at my hands) and the unfocused drifting of mm. 83-96 (where I make frequent “floating” gestures in various directions, as if undecided – and uninterested in deciding – what purposeful course of action to undertake).

3.4 Third Movement

Even though the second movement is relatively short, I can still recall feeling exhausted after embodying its manic-depressive character. Therefore, I gratefully take advantage of the break before the third movement, pausing for seventeen seconds to rest and prepare myself for the substantial conclusion of the sonata. Furthermore, in light of the interpretation of this inter-movement silence as a kind of ritual death after the crucial struggle (see page 77), it seems quite appropriate to take such a lengthy pause.

While the upward “floating” gesture of my head at the start of the first movement helped to establish the light, airy character of an incipient song, the slow “sliding” forward of my upper body with my head tilted downward as I am about to begin the third-movement variation theme reflects my overall preoccupation with carefully voicing each chord in order to impart lyrical substance to every tone of this long sought-after song. With fingertips poised on the surface of the keys, my right wrist “floats” up and down, as if I am “taking a breath” with my right hand before gingerly “pressing” down to “sing out” the first chord:
I described the experience of playing the variation theme as a kind of “intricate dance” (see page 62), and the prevalence of gentle “floating” gestures in my upper body throughout mm. 1-16 reflects this experience. Against the underlying “floating” quality, I also make other gestures to highlight specific features of the theme. For example, I raise my head and look up when the soprano line rises to B on the third beat of m. 4, and my head “floats” left and right as I play the turn figure in m. 6. To emphasize the enhanced Phrygian cadence at the end of the first half, I make an “engulfing” gesture (similar to the one shown in Figure 3.14) while creating the crescendo to the augmented sixth chord on the last beat of m. 7. I feel that the authentic cadence in G♯ minor (m. 12) is the most wistful moment in the theme (because it offers a more moving harmonization of the treble 3 than the initial tonic), so I take some time before the resolution to the root-position G♯ minor triad on the third beat, playing with closed eyes and bowed head:
There are a few notable gestural differences in the repeats. For instance, in playing the repeat of the first half, my upper body “glides” forward in crossing the bar line between m. 2 and m. 3. This serves to reinforce my delivery of mm. 1-4 as a single unit, rather than observing the slur markings to articulate the subdivision into two-measure units as I did the first time through. In the repeat of the second half, I give a nod on each of the last two beats of m. 10 in order to urge my left hand to engage in a two-note dialogue with my right hand, thus subtly calling attention to the latent polyphonic inclination of the theme here:

In m. 14, the two hands collaborate to produce a moving reminder of the dominant ninth harmony from m. 85 in the first movement, and I keep quite still while glancing downward and away into the distance, as if recalling the vision of lyrical beauty that is now successfully transformed into reality:
The first variation is even more tranquil and songful than the theme, and I continue to make smooth “floating” gestures here. In particular, to embody the expressive vocal gesture of reaching for the high B in mm. 17, 19, and 21 (see page 63), I consistently “float” my head upward, while also supinating my right forearm as I hold the B with the fifth finger (thus making the other four fingers “float” upward from the surface of the keys):

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the melodic peak on the downbeat of m. 29 is the most striking moment in the second half. I highlight it by “gliding” closer to the keyboard to play the high A with the right hand, opening my mouth as if it were humanly possible to sing this note. However, it is actually the tenor’s echo of the pitch A on the second beat of the measure that appears more gesturally noticeable; I delay this echo by “floating” my left hand for a split second
above the keys before “pressing” down firmly. Although the two As are three octaves apart, this gesture still makes me think of a metaphorical hammer (the tenor A) coming down strongly on the nail (the high A) to secure it in place:

![Figure 3.26. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 29: Chongvattanakij](image)

The light pointillistic texture at the start of each half of the second variation is played with “dabbing” fingers and relatively quiet hands. The playfulness of this passage inspires me to react with small “dabbing” and “flicking” gestures in my head and shoulders. In fact, at the beginning of the second half (m. 49), there is even a brief hint of a smile on my face. In contrast, the thicker, more sustained sound of mm. 41-44 and mm. 57-60 finds bodily expression as broader “gliding” gestures in my torso. When the two contrasting textures become synthesized in mm. 45-48 and mm. 61-64, I hold down the pedal through the rests to keep the bass notes sounding, while lightly “flicking” my right hand upward after playing each sixteenth-note chord or octave to feel the “space” of the rests.

The brilliant third variation features virtuosic double counterpoint that spans a wide range of the keyboard. Confronted with this technical challenge, I find myself “dabbing” my head left and right several times during the first half to watch the progress of the agilely “flicking” fingers, as the hands diverge from each other only to converge and repeat the process again. As I supervise the mechanical aspect of playing here, my facial expression seems to convey a somewhat tense concentration, as if figuratively walking a tightrope:
Curiously, I accent the last left-hand octave of m. 89 and m. 90, and even “flick” my left shoulder upward each time I do so. Although these accents are not indicated in the score, they perhaps serve to add some interest to what could easily become a monotonous sequential repetition. I make a *ritenuto* in the last two measures of this variation to prepare the more spaciously flowing character of the fourth variation, which follows without pause.

The first half of the fourth variation presents an intricate imitative texture in which a melodic thread is continuously being spun out (see page 67). This seemingly endless “spinning out” is portrayed through the almost constant left-and-right “floating” gesture of my head. Then, the second half begins with softly undulating harmonies, and I keep my head still while “gliding” my upper body forward. I shut my eyes tightly at the high-register chromatic commentary on the second beat of m. 105 and m. 106, as if afraid that some imaginary precious object made of glass would fall from a height and break. For reasons discussed on page 68, I choose to place the accents and *sforzando* markings on the weak subdivisions of the beat in m. 107, making slight forward “slashing” gestures with my head and shoulders to give a kind of expressive convulsion to these emphases. The *fortissimo* moment (m. 109) does not come across as being the loudest outpouring in the movement. Nevertheless, by leaning quite close to the keyboard, I do give myself the feeling of putting more weight into each tone:
The resolute, visceral energy of the fifth variation immediately manifests itself through the strong “punching” effort of my fingers for a consistent *marcato* attack. After all, Beethoven writes an initial *forte*, then adamantly reminds the performer with three subsequent *sempre forte* indications (mm. 123, 129, and 137). In conjunction with the robust playing, my facial expression conveys the kind of stoic determination that is also shown in Figure 3.5:

Interestingly, when the three upper voices combine forces to articulate the intervallically stretched beginning of the fugue subject in mm. 141-143, the “punching” effort that has been localized in the fingers is amplified to the whole right hand, which now functions as a single unit that sometimes leaps to a great height before plunging downward into the keys:
At the third statement of the second-half material (mm. 145-152), I play softly as required, and establish a slightly broader tempo, which allows the busy left-hand part to be heard more distinctly. I then make quite a substantial *rallentando* in the final two measures of this variation to lead organically into the reattainment of the original tempo of the theme in the sixth variation.

In playing the first two measures of the sixth variation, I appear to be calmly “sending forth” the sound by “gliding” my hands forward into each chord, then “floating” my right forearm upward to reflect the *portato* articulation. When the alto and bass lines are played *legato* in the following two measures, I gradually “press” my upper body down toward the keyboard to indicate the smoother flow. The change to $\frac{3}{8}$ in m. 157 induces relaxed left-and-right swaying motion of my torso. However, the return to $\frac{3}{4}$ and the diminution to thirty-second notes on the last beat of m. 160 prompt me to keep more still, and my eyes tend to look upward and away into the distance. When the thirty-second notes become trills on the last beat of m. 164, my face shows visible signs of the tension that I also experience in both hands (see page 72):
It may be recalled that, in the first movement, I made a kind of inaudible gasp in anticipation of the diminished seventh outburst at the start of the secondary theme. Now, at the climactic arrival of the diminished seventh harmony in m. 169, I open my mouth, but not for a brief gasp as before. Rather, my mouth is slightly agape almost throughout mm. 169-187, as if I were producing an impossibly lengthy exhalation that serves to release all the tension that has been accumulating through the process of rhythmic diminution. Overall, I am successful in projecting the treble arpeggiation over the resounding bass trill in mm. 169-176. In particular, I take advantage of the fact that the principal tones in the right-hand part in mm. 172-176 all occur on the first of every four-note group and can conveniently be played by the powerful thumb. In contrast, the bell-like melodic tones in mm. 177-184 require more vigorous “punching” effort from the weak fifth finger of the outstretched right hand, and I think that the sense of physical striving here reflects the heavenward aspiration of the melody:
As the music becomes suspended in an ethereal mist of tonic and dominant in mm. 184-187, I keep quite still, looking downward with barely open eyes. When the *pianissimo* is reached on the last beat of m. 187, my upper body begins to “glide” slowly forward just as it did at the start of the movement, but now coming even closer to the keyboard to warmly acknowledge the return of the theme, which feels more familiar and intimate because its various aspects have been explored in great depth in the variations. The theme is played a touch more slowly than at its first appearance. Generally, I also make fewer and smaller gestures than before. For example, I no longer close my eyes and only give a slight hint of a nod at the authentic cadence in G♭ minor (m. 199), thus transforming the formerly wistful quality of this moment (see Figure 3.23) into calm resignation. The final chord is played by “gliding” both hands forward, then “floating” them upward and holding them about an inch above the keys while gradually releasing the damper pedal. At last, both hands gently “float” onto my lap, as I close my eyes for a brief moment before the sound of applause is heard.

Figure 3.33. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 203: Chongvattanakij
At the time of my performance, I was not consciously thinking about the third movement in terms of the interaction between songful and contrapuntal tendencies. However, in playing the variation theme, I appear to be aware of both these tendencies; the pervasiveness of my sustained “floating” gestures throughout the theme reflects my preoccupation with bringing out the prevailing sustained, lyrical quality, while my nods in m. 10 serve to highlight the dialogue between the treble and bass at this point, thus demonstrating some sensitivity to the polyphonic potential inherent in this hymnic theme. In playing the variations, I was mainly concerned with creating sharply-defined characterizations in order to clearly illuminate the different aspects of the theme. Accordingly, my gestures tend to be strongly contrasting from variation to variation; for example, the “floating” effort on the high Bs in the operatic first variation imitates the vocal difficulty of reaching a high note, while the “dabbing” and “flicking” gestures in the second variation help to convey the playfulness of the light, pointillistic texture. The return of the theme gives the impression of greater composure than at its first appearance, as evident in the fewer and smaller gestures that I make here. Moreover, for me, the final gesture of placing my hands on my lap and closing my eyes is associated with tranquility. This is probably because of my childhood experience: when I was attending elementary school in Thailand, there would be brief meditation sessions every morning, during which students would be asked to lay their hands on their laps (though with the palms facing up), shut their eyes, and quiet their thoughts.

3.5 Conclusion

Overall, my performance of Op. 109 can be understood as articulating an overarching romance narrative based on the successful quest for song. The latent songfulness at the start of the first movement is expressed through the weight of the right hand’s finger pedalling in “singing out” the treble line, which nevertheless does not find sufficient encouragement from the murmuring left-hand figures. It is only in mm. 78-85 in the coda – where the two hands become synchronized in playing the chorale-like texture – that my searching gaze (m. 78) and reaching effort (m. 84) suggest that there is a higher lyrical ideal that must be striven for.

The second movement indeed comes across as being the crucial struggle that threatens to shatter the songful aspiration; nowhere else in the sonata do I make such forceful “punching” efforts as in the stark two-line texture of the primary theme in this movement. Furthermore, mm. 83-96 in the development section can be considered as the most depressing moment in the entire work, as
my purposeless “floating” gestures here reflect the state of being lost in the enigmatic contrapuntal weaving, thus appearing to stray hopelessly away from the path to lyrical fulfilment.

As previously mentioned, the lengthy pause that I take after the taxing second movement possibly signifies the ritual death that precedes the ultimately positive outcome of the quest: the attainment of the third movement variation theme as the desired uplifting song (see page 100). Though I am mainly preoccupied with projecting the soprano line of this theme, I do not neglect the contrapuntal element that now serves to enrich the songful expression (see previous page). My calm posture at the very end of the piece can be perceived as evoking the act of meditation, perhaps suggesting that the contemplation of lyrical beauty paves the way for greater spiritual awareness.
Chapter 4
A Performance of Op. 109 by Claudio Arrau

4.1 Overview

In this chapter, I describe my attempt at establishing an empathic connection with Claudio Arrau in order to determine how his performance of Op. 109 could be understood as a gestural narrative. As Arrau himself once stated that “the capacity for empathy is one of the most important qualities in an interpreter” (Horowitz 56), I allow myself the hopeful belief that, were he still alive today, Arrau would not find my endeavour objectionable.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are two complementary paths to empathy: the first is imitative and emotional, while the second is reconstructive and cognitive in nature. Thus, in addition to observing and imitating Arrau’s performance of Op. 109 in order to become more attuned to him at a basic kinesthetic and emotional level, I also consulted several sources to develop a better grasp of Arrau’s thoughts and beliefs, often as expressed in his own words. Three of these sources proved especially valuable: Joseph Horowitz’s book Arrau on Music and Performance, which offers transcripts of his conversations with Arrau as well as with other prominent musicians who were acquainted with Arrau; Victoria von Arx’s recent book Piano Lessons with Claudio Arrau, which sheds important light on Arrau’s pianism and aesthetic values through an exploration of his role as a pedagogue; and Arrau’s edition of the Beethoven sonatas (published by C.F. Peters in 1978), which provides much insight into his approach to Beethoven’s music and to Op. 109 in particular.

Before discussing Arrau’s performance of Op. 109 in great detail, however, it is beneficial to give a brief overview of his philosophy of piano playing. Indeed, I felt that it was quite appropriate to analyze Arrau’s gestures because Arrau himself believed in the inseparability of corporeal motion and musical expression (Arx 2014: 76). For example, as a teacher, Arrau found it extremely difficult to convey a certain musical concept to his students without also explaining the nuances of bodily movement involved in bringing it about (ibid., 73). Undoubtedly, the physicality of playing the instrument was integral to Arrau’s musical experience. As he said to Joseph Horowitz, “At times, I feel very much like a dancer” (104). And it is in light of
Horowitz’s perceptive remark that “to see [Arrau] is to hear him” (114) that I now proceed to discuss Arrau’s performance of Op. 109 at the Beethovenfest Bonn in 1970. As the discussion progresses, it will become evident that although Arrau’s gestures can be quite different from my own, the dynamics of their evolution across the sonata can nevertheless be perceived as similarly articulating a romance narrative based on the quest for song.

4.2 First Movement

Arrau’s head “floats” slightly to the left as he begins playing, and the inner corners of his eyebrows are raised. According to Ekman, the angling upward of the inner corners of the eyebrows is a reliable sign of sadness (97), and I can certainly sense a tinge of sorrow here – a kind of tender sorrow that may serve to convey Beethoven’s dolce indication for this incipient song. Indeed, it will be seen that Arrau appears to make this facial expression consistently at notable lyrical moments throughout the sonata.

Figure 4.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 0: Arrau

The two-note figures in each hand are clearly played, creating a fluid, egalitarian interaction between the treble and bass. Arrau begins a noticeable accelerando at the start of the crescendo marking in m. 4. With regard to this detail, it is interesting to note that Arrau advises his student Mario Miranda during a lesson on Chopin’s Second Ballade that one can “go a little faster” when making a crescendo (Arx 210), as this probably enhances the buildup effect of the increase in volume. However, having such a rapid buildup so early on in the movement strikes me as being a little excessive, and this unusual feature is likely a reflection of the surprisingly precocious

---

All images in this chapter are from this source.
modulation to the dominant. But then, Arrau compensates by slowing down considerably in mm. 7-8, as if realizing that the quest for the dominant has been too hastily undertaken, and it must be abandoned for now. Overall, the first eight measures already demonstrate quite a bit of tempo fluctuations, and this may be indicative of Arrau’s conviction that Beethoven’s late sonatas generally “have be played in a more improvisatory manner, and with more rubato” (Horowitz 162).

In Arrau’s edition, a bracketed breath mark is placed above the bar line preceding the change to Adagio espressivo, which suggests that Arrau wants the shocking start of this new material to be well demarcated. In his performance, Arrau certainly takes a breath by briefly “floating” his right hand upward here. However, he also keeps the damper pedal down, so there is a continuity of sound. In fact, despite the presence of an eighth rest in the left-hand part at the start of m. 9, Arrau still holds both F♯s from the broken octave at the end of m. 8, making it feel like these F♯s are providing the foundation for the broken chord in the right hand that follows. Therefore, one could actually hear a seven-note upward arpeggiation of the alarming diminished seventh harmony, as if a terrifying scream were prolonged and amplified:

![Example 4.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 6-10: Arrau](image)

I can definitely sense an accumulation of power from the thumb to the fifth finger in the right hand on the downbeat of m. 9; each finger “presses” down firmly (see Figure 4.2a), and when the left hand offers a solid echo of the diminished seventh harmony, the right wrist reacts by “pressing” downward (Figure 4.2b), as if to reinforce the grip on the depressed keys. The right hand then “glides” forward (Figure 4.2c) and “floats” upward (Figure 4.2d), before gently “dabbing” (Figure 4.2e) the fifth finger to play the G♯ that follows.
This sequence of minute gestures helps to prepare the piano marking which begins at the G♯, and which provides a strong contrast to the forte at the start of the measure. Actually, Arrau believes that abrupt changes in dynamics are essential to Beethoven’s musical language (Horowitz 208), and consequently, his edition of the Beethoven sonatas employs numerous “s” markings to denote subito dynamic contrasts. Because Arrau qualifies the piano indication in m. 9 with an “s”, and because a sudden drop in volume from forte to piano requires a slight stretching of the beat in order for the start of the piano material to be clearly audible, the abovementioned gestural sequence likely helps Arrau to achieve a pacing for the passage that feels most natural to him.

At the thick C♯ minor harmony on the second eighth-note beat of m. 10, Arrau makes a hardly perceptible “wringing” gesture with his right hand after playing the chord, almost as if he could create a vibrato (or Bebung) for emphasis. Intriguingly, he “floats” his right wrist upward while holding the D♯ on the second beat of m. 11, which is similar to what I do at this exact spot to convey a sense of weightlessness (compare Figure 3.3 with Figure 4.3 below):
As Arrau makes the crescendo on the third beat of m. 11, he gradually intensifies the “punching” effort of his fingers, strongly articulating the turn figure and the chromatic ascent to the wide-ranging arpeggio in the next measure. The vigorous “punching” effort is maintained in the arpeggios of mm. 12-13, which Arrau actually mentions in the spoken liner notes to his 1970 LP recording of the complete Beethoven sonatas, describing them as “reaching out into the infinite altogether”. Although I do not accord such metaphysical significance to these arpeggios, I do think that the resonating quality that results from Arrau’s “punching” effort adumbrates the climactic outpouring of mm. 169ff in the third movement. Furthermore, these arpeggios perhaps remind Arrau of the concluding measures of Op. 110, where the apparent effect of a reverberation ad infinitum is described by Arrau as a “rise to the heavens” (Arx 291):

![Example 4.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 110, III, mm. 209-213](image)

Arrau nods his head twice (coinciding with the forte marking on the downbeat of both m. 12 and m. 13), whereas I only nod my head once (albeit more vigorously) to emphasize the D♯ major harmony in m. 13. He then “glides” his upper body to the right as the music slides chromatically from D♯ major to B major. At the start of m. 14, each thirty-second note in the treble line is distinctly articulated; the more sustained motion of his left hand provides a supportive calmness that allows the treble line to rise to the B melodic peak in a leisurely manner. As the music grows dynamically in the second half of the measure, the starting note of each triplet figure gradually becomes more strongly projected with “dabbing” effort from the entire hand. The “dabbing” then becomes more prominent when the left hand plays the ascending tetrachord in m. 15. Indeed, Arrau’s edition gives a bracketed forte marking on the second beat of this measure (see Figure 4.4), which suggests that he understands the crescendo from m. 14 to be a substantial one. The “dabbing” of his left hand in playing the tetrachord contributes to this surge in sound:
Because of the camera angle, it is difficult to discern whether the low B in the left hand is played with the fifth finger alone, or perhaps with the fourth and fifth fingers together. I think that the latter is more likely because I can see Arrau do this quite fluently in playing other passages, such as the left-hand broken octaves in the development section. Moreover, by experimenting at the keyboard myself, I have come to feel that putting two fingers on the same key can give greater power and sense of security. In any case, it is evident that Arrau allows his wrist to “press” downward as he plays this B in order to cushion the impact with the key, thus avoiding a harsh sforzando. In his teaching, Arrau cautions against “hitting” the piano, and advocates the use of “weight” to produce a tone that can be powerful without ever being “ugly” (Arx 231). Overall, it can be seen that, like me, Arrau employs a variety of gestures throughout the secondary theme to impart a dynamic quality to the fantasia-like material.

As the right hand ascends the B major scale in the second half of m. 15, the left hand “floats” silently alongside it, thus amplifying the rising motion (see Figure 4.5a). The left hand then settles on the surface of the keys that it is about to play, already poised to begin the development section even as the right hand finishes up the scale that concludes the exposition (Figure 4.5b).
By waiting eagerly to play, the left hand enhances the sense of continuity across the exposition-development boundary. For Arrau, it is no trivial matter whether an inactive hand remains in contact with the keys or not. For instance, he chides his student Mario Miranda for lifting his hand from the keyboard during the intervals when it does not need to depress the keys, while relying on the damper pedal to connect the tones: “People watch you, and [when] you lift your hand, they do not feel the connection” (Arx 210). But the more crucial implication here, in my opinion, is that the performer himself cannot truly feel the tonal connection when making these hand-lifting gestures, and this can affect the quality of the sound that is produced.

At the return of the Vivace material in m. 16, Arrau definitely brings out the left-hand part more distinctly than I do, and consequently, there is an egalitarian collaboration between the two hands, just like at the beginning of the movement. Arrau does not take a breath in the middle of m. 21 as I do, but the entrance of the lengthy right-hand phrase is well projected, making it obvious that the treble line, which presents the most explicitly lyrical material in the movement so far, should now occupy the foreground of the listener’s attention. Arrau stretches the beats in m. 24, and this serves to highlight the diminished seventh harmony as well as to prepare what he interprets as a subito piano on the downbeat of the following measure. As the music grows through a series of filled-in rising fourths in the upper line, Arrau tends to “glide” his upper body forward slightly in a cyclical pattern that reflects the sequential buildup. The occurrences of the forward “gliding” are indicated by the arrows in Example 4.3 below:
Arrau consistently “flicks” his head to the right at each sfp marking in mm. 33-41, which helps to magnify the “punching” effort of his right hand on these emphases. Recall that I similarly “flick” my head to the right in this passage, albeit at the first sfp marking only. Therefore, I sense a more determined insistence in Arrau’s body language here. As the pitch B is reached in both treble and bass at the start of m. 42, Arrau “glides” his body forward. His eyes then open wider, and his eyebrows are raised, as if to convey anticipation of a major event:

Of course, the anticipated major event is the forte return of the primary theme on the second beat of m. 48. But first of all, I described mm. 42-48 as two complete “loops”, followed by an incomplete third “loop” that propels the music into the recapitulation (see page 85). Whether or not Arrau understands the passage in a similar way, he certainly slows down considerably in mm. 46-48 (that is, the incomplete third loop) to underscore the departure from the pattern established in mm. 42-45. In tandem with this, he “flicks” his head with each of the three right-
hand broken chords that immediately precede the return of the primary theme. Then, to demarcate the return of the primary theme itself, Arrau “floats” his right hand upward, before “pressing” down strongly on the initial G♯ with his thumb. As he does this, he appears to be looking at his right hand, and he “flicks” his head twice to emphasize not just the G♯, but the G♯-B figure. I believe that there is an intensely concentrated expression on Arrau’s face as he plays the G♯-B figure, but this is hard to ascertain because his head already begins to turn away from the camera on the downbeat of m. 48. Nevertheless, I can see that his eyes are either partially or fully shut, which may be indicative of the exertion required to project the right-hand line over the resonant left-hand broken octaves. Indeed, I entertain the notion that Arrau’s facial expression at this point in the movement may be similar to my own (see Figure 3.8).

In a lesson on the first movement of Beethoven’s Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110, Arrau explains to his student Mario Miranda that to convey the psychology of the recapitulation, which is “a matter of returning to the foundation where [Beethoven] began”, he should slow down at the end of the retransition, then “hesitate” before playing the first chord of the recapitulation.
(Arx 268). In light of the discussion of Arrau’s gestures above, I think that Arrau considers the same approach to be equally valid at the analogous moment in Op. 109.

In playing the *forte* restatement of the primary theme itself, Arrau gives full substance to each tone, and he even takes some time to confirm the authentic cadence in m. 52. Furthermore, he no longer makes a conspicuous *accelerando* in the consequent phrase as he did before. Therefore, there is now a greater sense of breadth to the primary theme, which may be seen as representing the transformation from youthful impetuosity into mature confidence. The accumulation of power from the thumb to the fifth finger is more noticeable in the broken diminished seventh chord at the start of m. 58, as Arrau begins more softly with the thumb, then grows rapidly in volume to the fifth finger. He may be doing this to maintain the “freshness” of the return of this harmonic surprise. As if shocked by the intensity of this gesture, he “flicks” his head backward somewhat aggressively. (He may have done this in the corresponding spot in m. 9 as well, but it is not visible in the video recording.) The right-hand B♯ and C♯ at the start of m. 59 also receive much emphasis; Arrau uses the strong thumb and third finger to “punch” the keys, and the resulting powerful sound arguably cannot be achieved through the seemingly peculiar 5-4 fingering recommended by both the Henle and the Wiener Urtext editions. Arrau’s emphasis on these pitches may serve to highlight the fact that the B♯ (which rises to C♯) offers an enharmonic pun on the C♯ in m. 62 (which falls to B).

The most notable gesture of the movement occurs on the last chord of m. 60; Arrau “wrings” his arms up and down vigorously as he holds this diminished seventh chord (see Figure 4.8). While this gesture does not produce any audible effect, it certainly succeeds in grabbing my attention. Imagine touching the arm of an unsuspecting individual and applying the same “wringing” effort; this is likely to provoke a startled response because there is a palpable urgency to the gesture. Therefore, Arrau is probably conveying to the audience that something momentous is about to happen; namely, the change in key signature that paves the way for the brief yet exhilarating celebration of C major harmony. In the arpeggios of mm. 61-62, Arrau employs robust “punching” fingers for fullness of tone, while also clearly articulating the different rhythmic values. In general, Arrau believes that rhythmic clarity is crucial to the vitality of Beethoven’s music (Horowitz 166).
The descending broken thirds a sixth apart in mm. 63-64 are played with “dabbing” fingers for a non-\textit{legato}, twinkling sound. Arrau does not really make a \textit{diminuendo} on the third beat of m. 64 as the score prescribes. However, he does slow down, and he strongly projects the low bass E on the downbeat of m. 65, sumptuously highlighting the welcome arrival of the root-position tonic chord. Curiously, Arrau’s left hand remains on this quarter-note bass E for almost triple its notated value before finally “floating” to join the right hand in the upper register. Recall that in the second half of m. 15, Arrau similarly accompanies the rising treble line with a “floating” gesture in the silent left hand. But because the left hand remains on the bass note for quite some time here before “floating”, I get the feeling that the upward broken E major harmony is securely grounded in the bass E, while being gently stretched away from it at the same time. In other words, Arrau seems to be relishing the solidity of the tonic resonance.

Arrau brings out the exchange of the thematic fragments between the hands in mm. 66-74 distinctly. However, rather than strictly observing Beethoven’s slurring, he creates a more seamlessly flowing texture throughout. In Arrau’s edition, a \textit{mezzo forte} is suggested as the endpoint of the \textit{crescendo} in m. 74. Nevertheless, in his own performance, Arrau actually tapers off dynamically, while also holding back the tempo. I can scarcely hear any gap in sound at the quarter rest on the downbeat of m. 75 because the pedal is still preserving much of the resonance from the preceding chord. Moreover, I have the impression that Arrau plays the second-beat chord of m. 75 too soon. But this may be due to his preference for picking up the original tempo immediately after a \textit{ritenuto} (Arx 214); that is, after making the \textit{ritenuto} in m. 74, Arrau perhaps mentally executes the \textit{a tempo} right on the quarter rest at the start of m. 75, which causes the rest to come across as being somewhat briefer than expected. In any case, the chords in mm. 75-76 are certainly sustained across the bar lines, robbing the quarter rests in mm. 76-77 of much of
their full value. Thus, rather than a well-defined contrast between sound and silence, there seems to be a tendency to preserve the sound beyond its “life expectancy”; in other words, there is a kind of lingering aural halo to each chord. Though not clearly shown in the video recording, Arrau seems to be “floating” his arms outward at each of the chords in mm. 75-76 to reflect the expansive resonance, which helps to prepare the expressive chorale-like phrase that follows.

As the chorale-like phrase unfolds in mm. 78ff, Arrau keeps the inner corners of his eyebrows raised for a sad expression that is similar to the one shown in Figure 4.1. However, the sadness here appears to become more profound on the second beat of m. 81, where the fall of the treble line by a minor sixth and the addition of octave doubling in the bass contribute to the increased solemnity. Accordingly, Arrau lets his body droop, as his facial expression conveys the anguish of someone who is weeping:

According to Joseph Horowitz, Arrau was a relatively small man whose hands seemed disproportionately large (5); a photograph from Horowitz’s book shows that Arrau could span an octave from the thumb to the forefinger. Therefore, unlike me, Arrau would have no difficulty playing the more widely-spaced chord in the right hand on the second beat of m. 84 solidly. Nevertheless, his eyebrows are raised here, as if to communicate that an expressive reaching effort is still involved in stretching out his right hand to attain the C♮ (see Figure 4.10a). As this F♯ dominant seventh chord resolves to the B dominant ninth chord in m. 85, Arrau’s head “floats” to the right, and there is a tense expression on his face for a brief moment (Figure 4.10b). I think that Arrau may be particularly affected by the interval of the ninth between the B and the C♮ in the outer voices because he states that the ninth in Classical music “always expresses pain” (Arx 286).
In Arrau’s edition, there is a bracketed breath mark before m. 86, and he actually opens his mouth slightly as if to take a breath before calmly immersing himself in the texture of the primary theme one last time. The minute but persistent raising and lowering of his eyebrows in mm. 89-97 may be correlated with the sense of uncertainty arising from the C♯-C♭ fluctuation. The last chord is played with a little burst of downward “pressing” motion from the upper body, as if letting out a magnified sigh of relief.

To summarize, Arrau’s gestures throughout the first movement can be understood in terms of the interaction between “innocence” and “experience”, even though the dynamics of this interaction are not quite the same as what I discussed in the previous chapter (see page 90). Arrau’s pacing of the “innocent” primary theme suggests a restless quest for the dominant that is all too easily abandoned. Due to his use of the damper pedal, the shocking diminished seventh harmony at the start of m. 9 seems to arise from the primary theme like some kind of anomalous outgrowth, which arguably makes it even more disturbing than if it were clearly separated from the preceding material. The vigorous “punching” effort on the arpeggios in mm. 12-13 can be associated with Arrau’s idea of reverberations that “reach out into the infinite” (see page 116). Interpreted in this manner, these arpeggios perhaps depict the exposure to the virtually limitless possibilities of “experience”, which can be both exhilarating and frightening at the same time. At the return of the *Vivace* material in m. 16, Arrau recovers the egalitarian interaction between the hands that characterized the opening of the movement, presenting the semblance of reassuring uniformity after the disorienting vacillations of the secondary theme. Nevertheless, the stretching of the beat in m. 24 to highlight the diminished seventh harmony betrays the inner turmoil that
underlies this passage. The cyclical “gliding” effort of Arrau’s upper body as the treble line rises in mm. 26ff and the consistent head “flicks” on the sfp markings in mm. 33-41 convey unwavering perseverance, as the music builds to the forte recapitulation. The steadier pacing of the restatement of the primary theme creates the impression of more seasoned confidence. But the Adagio material interrupts in m. 58 with greater urgency than before, as Arrau intensifies the emphasis on the broken diminished seventh chord at the start of the measure (see page 121). His notable “wringing” effort at the end of m. 60 prepares the listener for the brilliant arpeggios of mm. 61-62, which open up a resonant world of possibilities that is now represented by the novelty of C major, before the music finally settles firmly in the tonic E major, with the left hand lingering on the bass E on the downbeat of m. 65 to provide a comforting foundation. It is almost as if the comforts of home can only be truly appreciated after one returns from a difficult journey abroad. The sad facial expression that Arrau displays during the chorale-like passage (mm. 78-85) will become more prominently featured during the heartwarmingly lyrical third-movement variation theme; that is, he appears to be giving us a foretaste of the more poignant songfulness that is to come.

4.3 Second Movement

With the damper pedal held down, Arrau waits for the sound of the last chord of the first movement to decay to almost nothingness. As he waits, the initially neutral facial expression becomes tense; the inner corners of the eyebrows are pulled down toward the nose, and the lips appear to become tightly pressed together (see Figure 4.11). These features can be interpreted as signifying anger (Ekman 135). However, Arrau does not offer an intent gaze as I do at this point (see Figure 3.12), so I read his expression as being suggestive of dignified displeasure, rather than forthright anger. Then, with a “flick” of his head, Arrau releases the pedal so suddenly that a thump can be heard a split second before he launches energetically into the second movement. In a conversation with Joseph Horowitz, Arrau explains that, sometimes, in the late Beethoven sonatas, “one movement erupts, in a completely different mood, out of the one before it” (159, original emphasis).
In a powerful manifestation of contrapuntal severity, Arrau presents the strong contrast between the active treble line and the solid bass octaves in playing the first part of the primary theme, giving the impression of an energetic approach that nevertheless does not come across as being overly aggressive; the aggression here is stylized rather than unrestrained. In the second part of the primary theme (mm. 9-24), Arrau tends to “dab” his head according to the harmonic rhythm of the four-measure unit that is obsessively repeated:

However, this is not done in a rigid manner throughout. The addition of the alto line in mm. 17-18 and mm. 21-22 creates a stronger drive toward the second beats, and Arrau’s “dabbing” head expresses this urge toward syncopation. At the same time, the shifting of the alto line in mm. 19-20 and mm. 23-24 contributes to the blunting of the rhythmic profile, and his “dabbing” effort accordingly becomes less well defined in these measures. Altogether then, the evolution of Arrau’s “dabs” appears to reflect an alteration in gestural trajectory in mm. 17-24, as I described in Chapter 2 (see page 53). Overall, it is as if he wants to break out of a kind of compulsive behaviour, but cannot quite do it.

Arrau does not play the low-register repeated Bs at the start of the transition (mm. 26-27) in a tight march-like rhythm, but instead treats them as part of a fluid four-measure phrase. More
poetically speaking, if mm. 25-28 should offer a fatalistic pronouncement (see page 54), then it is not one made by military drums, but rather by the lamenting bass voice of a minstrel who sings of a tragic battle of old. In fact, Arrau admits that he finds it useful to think vocally (Horowitz 101), and he believes that the pianist “should try to shade all passages, to do what the Germans call ‘beseelen’ – to put your soul into it” (ibid., 102). Although Arrau’s tempo at the un poco espressivo marking in m. 29 does appear to be somewhat more held back than it was in m. 25, he actually slows down more considerably in mm. 27-28; by looking at the timeline of the audio waveform shown in Figure 4.12, I can confirm that Arrau takes more time on the low-register phrase (mm. 25-28). Therefore, this phrase comes across as being more hesitant and regretful, while the harmonized version of it in the higher register (mm. 29-32) is characterized by slightly greater forward momentum.

After the intense buildup in volume in the first part of the secondary theme (mm. 33-42), Arrau could take advantage of the subito piano on the downbeat of m. 43 to create the effect of a stifled cry of anguish (see page 55). He actually does this quite impressively in his 1966 audio recording of the sonata for Philips (see Figure 4.13a), but he seems to neglect the subito piano in the 1970 video recording that is the focus of the present discussion (Figure 4.13b). However, due to the fact that the video recording documents a live performance, it is entirely possible that Arrau loses sight of this detail in the heat of the moment. (As a performer myself, I can certainly empathize with this.) Another possible reason may be that, in the large space of the concert hall, Arrau simply finds it more effective to continue projecting each tone relatively strongly for the sake of audibility.
Arrau emphasizes the downbeat of both m. 45 and m. 47 by “wringing” his head downward (see Figure 4.14). This helps to preserve the integrity of the meter against the syncopated entrances of the treble F♯ and E. Indeed, Arrau remarks that “syncopations need something to syncopate against” (Arx 273); otherwise, they would not be perceived as syncopations and consequently would not produce sufficient rhythmic interest. Moreover, Arrau squeezes his eyes shut as his head “wrings” downward, as if plagued by some heavy burden. Therefore, I think that the “wringing” gesture also serves to communicate the suffering that the descending chromatic bass line in mm. 43-48 connotes (see page 55):

As the right hand holds the F♯ in m. 49, Arrau brings out the left-hand part, embodying its rising motion in the “gliding” of his upper body forward and upward. He then looks up from the keyboard for a moment, as if finally relieved of the abovementioned heavy burden. This may be due to the opportune discovery of the C major haven in mm. 49-54.
In the Henle edition, there is a crescendo through mm. 55-56 to forte in m. 57. However, in Arrau’s edition, a fortissimo is suggested on the second beat of m. 56. In his performance, he actually makes the downbeat of m. 56 the loudest point, and he “flicks” his head on each beat of this measure. Here, then, is an example of a performer’s intuition overriding unquestioning fidelity to the letter of the text. The distortion of the right-hand motive from mm. 51-52 to make it fall from G to F♯ in m. 56 helps to articulate the arrival of the cadential Ӿ in this measure, while the subsequent measures serve to prolong the dominant. Arrau likely feels that the arrival of the cadential Ӿ itself is more important than the dominant prolongation that follows, and thus shapes the music in a way that departs from a strict reading of the markings in the score.

In playing the running eighth notes in the closing theme (mm. 57-65), Arrau appears to be throwing his fingers into the keys in a marvellously athletic gesture. Meanwhile, he tends to put two fingers on the lower notes of the left-hand octaves in mm. 57-60. In fact, it appears that he even uses the third, fourth, and fifth fingers on the lower note of the repeated F♯ octaves to give extra strength (see Figure 4.16). While Arrau does this quite effortlessly, I found it awkward to do exactly what he does because my hand is not as large, and my fifth finger happens to be unusually short as well. But by experimenting with smaller intervals, such as sixths and fifths, I could definitely appreciate the sense of absolute solidity afforded by having the thumb on one key and three fingers on the other. However, I discovered that once the hand started moving quickly across the keyboard while still maintaining this essentially “two-pronged” shape, there was a tendency to also strike the keys adjacent to the desired ones. This is probably the reason that Arrau only uses this fingering on the repeated F♯ octaves.
Arrau agrees with me that the start of the development section should be forceful; his edition recommends a *fortissimo* on the downbeat of m. 66. Nevertheless, his performance does not strike me as being especially emphatic at this point. The camera is zoomed in on his hands, and I perceive no vigorous “punching” effort that would parallel my “push-up” from the keyboard (see page 95). Therefore, though he may intend it, Arrau’s playing does not offer the kind of highly pronounced structural articulation that my playing offers here; he seems to prefer a more matter-of-fact progression across the exposition-development boundary.

Arrau remarks that during his formative studies with Martin Krause in Berlin, he was required to play all of the preludes and fugues from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in different keys (Horowitz 39). This training inculcated a strong ability to hear polyphonically – an ability that Arrau demonstrates in playing the right-hand canon in mm. 70-82. Arrau’s edition provides an important clue into how he achieves the transparency of voicing in this passage. Note that there is a bracketed accent at the start of each entry in the canon, which Arrau does not treat as an assertive emphasis, but rather as a subtle nuance that helps to clarify the texture:
In mm. 83-86, Arrau gives more weight to the dotted half notes in the left hand to highlight the changing role of the bass from a pedal point to an actively moving line that interacts more fully with the other voices. The retransition (mm. 97-104) strikes me as being a special moment for Arrau because he plays extremely softly here. (His edition suggests a triple piano for the passage.) Daniel Barenboim believes that Arrau can achieve two distinct sound qualities, which he describes as “full-bodied” and “ethereal” (Horowitz 219). I certainly hear the “ethereal” quality of the retransition, especially because Arrau’s playing has been consistently “full-bodied” up to this point. As Barenboim insightfully notes, “If you played everything with a thick, full sound, it would be unbearable” (ibid.). Thus, with exquisitely refined motor control that is outwardly manifested as small “dabbing” and “gliding” efforts by fingers that hardly leave the surface of the keys, Arrau invites his audience into a soundworld at once extraordinary and ephemeral; it vanishes without a trace at the fortissimo return of the primary theme in m. 105.

Like my own performance of this movement, Arrau’s performance demonstrates many gestural parallels between the exposition and the recapitulation, so I will skip to the coda. After the brazen B-B-E octaves of mm. 166-167 (each of which is delivered with a “flick” of the head), Arrau leans closer to the keyboard to play the piano chords in mm. 168-169, glancing up briefly as he “dabs” his fingers into the keys. The suggested tenuto markings on the left-hand B-B-E in mm. 168-169 in Arrau’s edition indicate that he hears these measures as a harmonized echo of the B-B-E octaves in mm. 166-167. His posture and facial expression may be interpreted as conveying a kind of half-shocked, half-rueful reaction to an imposing statement:

Figure 4.17. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 169: Arrau
Then, the suggested accent markings in the last eight measures reveal Arrau’s understanding of the underlying polyphonic conception of the passage; the texture thickens through the gradual addition of voices. And as the texture thickens, Arrau’s face recaptures the expression of dignified displeasure that he displayed at the beginning of the movement (compare Figure 4.18 with Figure 4.11). The last three chords are played with three head “flicks” that are so energetic that they appear more like “wrings” that convey imperious rejection.

Figure 4.18. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Arrau

To summarize, Arrau’s playing in this movement can be interpreted as essentially presenting two contrasting characters, which may be described as “mania” and “confusion”. Like in my own performance, the high energy of mania manifests itself in the exposition and recapitulation in Arrau’s performance. First of all, he launches himself into the second movement with a look of dignified displeasure that probably reflects his description of the music as “erupting” in a completely different mood from the previous movement (see page 125). In playing the first part of the primary theme, Arrau forcefully highlights the contrast between the treble and bass lines, but not with belligerence. The rambling response to this material (mm. 9-24) reveals both the tendency toward nervous compulsiveness and the unfulfilled urge to escape it. Here, it may be appropriate to remark that Arrau actually believes that anxiety can be used for the purpose of reaching greater psychological depths (Horowitz 56). Indeed, I find that there is something quite compelling about Arrau’s controlled anxiety throughout much of this movement, for I think that it demonstrates his willingness to accept and project his own vulnerability, which helps to draw the listener emotionally closer to him. In the development section, controlled anxiety is transformed into hypnotic intensity in the left-hand measured tremolos, while the clarity of
Arrau’s polyphonic playing brings out the complexity of the texture throughout mm. 70-96, conveying a multiplicity of equally valid viewpoints, and making it hard to decide which one to follow; it is as if one were preoccupied with weighing competing options in one’s mind. This indecisiveness culminates in the ethereal sound of the retransition, as if one ends up being lost in abstraction or utterly paralyzed by overthinking.

4.4 Third Movement

Arrau does not take a lengthy inter-movement pause; only five seconds of silence separate the last chord of the second movement from the first chord of the third movement. It is as if he were anxious to leave behind the negative energy of the second movement in order to commence something new and more hopeful. Moreover, the brevity of the pause contributes to a better sense of continuity across the movements, perhaps exemplifying what Garrick Ohlsson describes as Arrau’s “titanic sense of flow” (Horowitz 228).

Arrau’s edition preserves Beethoven’s original description of the variation theme as Gesang mit innigster Empfindung, rather than acknowledging the change from Gesang to Gesangvoll in the first edition (see page 76). I find this fact rather significant because I think that it provides a valuable clue into Arrau’s approach not only to the theme itself, but actually to the third movement as a whole; that is, he treats the theme as a deeply-felt song, and all the variations upon it tend to maintain a fundamentally songful inclination, in spite of their apparently contrasting features.

In playing the theme, Arrau makes slow, gentle “floating” gestures with his head and torso to reflect the flowing quality of the music. At the same time, he raises the inner corners of his eyebrows as he did at the start of the first movement (see Figure 4.1), albeit more frequently now, as if affected by the touching profundity of each chord:
On the downbeat of m. 5 as well as m. 13, Arrau actually plays the bass note before the right-hand broken chord. Even though I am accustomed to playing the bass note together with the first note of the right-hand broken chord, I still find Arrau’s version to be quite natural and convincing. This may be because it is reminiscent of the way he played the broken harmony in m. 9 from the first movement (see Example 4.1), thus creating an effective inter-movement link.

After trying out the fingerings that Arrau provides for the theme, I am led to the conclusion that these fingerings are designed for the purpose of achieving maximum legato throughout. The finger substitutions recommended for the left hand in m. 6 and m. 8 are a case in point (see the score excerpt in Figure 4.19 above). I think that a judicious use of the damper pedal would render them unnecessary. However, they do help the performer to embody the connections between the tones, which is what Arrau seems to be aiming for, as his fingers carry out complex yet efficient maneuvers that allow both hands to engage in a kind of dance that is far more intricate than the one that characterizes my performance of the theme.

The first variation preserves the deliberate tempo of the theme, allowing even the fastest rhythmic value (that is, the ornamentation on the last beat of m. 19) to unfold in a relaxed manner. Because of the deliberate tempo, and because the piano tone can only decay after a key is depressed, I think that Arrau finds it helpful (or perhaps even necessary) to make sustained “floating” and “gliding” gestures while holding down a depressed key in order to give himself the illusion of producing a sustained tone. For instance, in mm. 17, 19, and 21, he supinates his right forearm while holding the high B with his fifth finger, thus allowing the other four fingers to “float” upward. (As discussed on page 103, I also make the exact same gesture here.)
Equally notable is Arrau’s caress of the right-hand $F_\sharp$ on the second beat of m. 20 in the repeat of the first half; he “glides” his hand forward, then gracefully “floats” his wrist:

Arrau slightly stretches the third beat of both m. 25 and m. 26 to underscore the chromatic non-chord tones in the right hand, which create poignant dissonances against the left-hand chords. Then, at the melodic peak on the downbeat of m. 29, his right hand continues to hold on to the lower A with the thumb even after having played the higher A with the fifth finger (see Figure 4.22). This gesture gives the feeling of being firmly rooted in the keys, which imparts strength to the melodic peak. Unlike me, Arrau does not give any gestural emphasis to the left hand on the second beat of the measure (see page 103).
While I interpret the start of the second variation (mm. 33-40) as being playful, Arrau’s playing does not seem to reflect the same interpretation. Instead of light, detached playing, he chooses to connect the tones (his edition suggests a slur marking for each two-note figure), and he employs the pedal for added resonance. Furthermore, Arrau tends to hold the sixteenth notes beyond their notated value, and this tendency becomes especially noticeable in mm. 39-40. The result is a rich, warm sound, rather than a transparent, lighthearted one. Indeed, Arrau is convinced that “humour has nothing to do with music” (Horowitz 169), and he even specifically cautions against “playfulness” in interpreting Beethoven’s piano works (ibid., 168).

Arrau attempts to clarify the overlapping of the upper voices in mm. 41-44 by accentuating the half notes with “pressing” effort of the thumb in order to show the continuity of the two-measure motive. By consistently doing this, however, I think that the entrances of the motive become obscured, and it remains difficult to hear the polyphonic subtleties that Beethoven notates in the score. (Nevertheless, I find that Arrau is more successful with the voicing of mm. 57-60 in the second half of the variation.) Because of Arrau’s fluid sense of phrasing, the even alternation between the hands in m. 45 gradually becomes an elegant “swung” rhythm by m. 48. Thus, Arrau avoids metronomic “dabbing” in favour of the rubato pushes and pulls of a longer line. This well-phrased line already foreshadows the more explicitly lyrical melody-and-accompaniment texture in mm. 61-63. After strongly projecting the right-hand melody in these measures, Arrau brings out the bass C–B motion in m. 64, which seems to offer a reply to the C–B motion in the treble line in m. 62. I have not paid much attention to this detail myself, but Arrau’s playing suggests to me the possibility that the C–C fluctuation here may be related to mm. 89-97 in the coda of the first movement.
Arrau does not play the brilliant double counterpoint of the third variation at a breakneck pace. (As will be seen in Chapter 6, however, the same cannot be said of Glenn Gould.) In my opinion, this probably reflects his belief that passagework must be treated as “rapid melodies” (Horowitz 102), such that each tone is still played out clearly and with dynamic shading. For example, in discussing the trio from the second movement of Op. 110 during a lesson, Arrau asks his student Mario Miranda to phrase the winding right-hand part according to smaller groups of two and three eighth notes, telling him to practice these groupings slowly and exaggeratedly in order to train himself to create dynamic and articulatory shadings that would subsequently remain audible at the original fast tempo (Arx 275). I think that Arrau must have applied the same meticulous approach to the running sixteenth notes in the third variation of Op. 109. He “flicks” his head on the main beats of the first eight measures of the variation, which serves to establish a larger pulse that he sometimes stretches and compresses. The flow of sixteenth notes adjusts itself to this flexible larger pulse, such that Arrau can avoid the kind of mechanically even playing that he derisively calls the “typewriter approach” (Horowitz 102).

Arrau’s tempo for the fourth variation struck me as being so unhurried as to be almost meditative. For comparison, consider that he plays the theme in two minutes and thirty seconds, and the fourth variation in three minutes and eight seconds. This means that the fourth variation is approximately twenty percent slower than the theme. The reason for Arrau’s deliberateness, aside from the tempo indication (Etwas langsamer als das Thema), may be the piacevole marking at the start of the variation, which perhaps encourages him to fully luxuriate in each tone. In playing the first half, Arrau tends to “float” his head left and right as I do. However, these “floating” gestures are not made as frequently, and they appear to serve the practical purpose of allowing him to monitor certain changes in his hand position. Overall, I get the impression that Arrau is calmly in control of the intricate weaving of the musical texture. (In contrast, my body language indicates that I am more preoccupied with the unfolding of every little curling pattern.) Arrau’s edition suggests the use of the soft pedal in the first two measures of the second half, which implies that he wants to create a special colour for the pianissimo pulsating harmonies here. Then, like me, Arrau also places the accents and sforzando markings on the weak subdivisions of the beats in m. 107. His bodily gestures parallel the growing intensity of these emphases; the “gliding” forward of the head and torso on the accents becomes concentrated into head “dabs” on the sforzandi, finally culminating in affirming head “flicks”
when *forte* is reached in m. 108. At the *fortissimo* moment in the following measure, Arrau looks at his right hand and leans closer to the keyboard, which is similar to what I do at this point (see Figure 3.28). Perhaps this gesture helps him to feel the tremendous weight in the right-hand outpouring. At the very end of the variation, Arrau “glides” his right hand forward on the G♯ before “floating” it upward. Meanwhile, his left hand similarly “glides” forward on the E – making a finger substitution as it does this – but then remains in contact with the depressed key for a while longer (though the camera angle makes it hard to observe this detail in Figure 4.23). I feel that these gestures help to create an embodied connection to the start of the fifth variation because Arrau’s hands are already poised to do what they have to do: the left hand will be playing the same E, while the right hand needs to transport itself down two octaves. Thus, there is a sense of kinesthetic continuity despite a slight break in sound between the two variations:

Arrau’s skilful polyphonic playing is highlighted in the *fugato* fifth variation. First, the subject is always played *legato*, which makes it quite audible throughout. In his edition, Arrau adds dashed slur markings that mostly coincide with the appearances of the subject. Nevertheless, he also believes that one should not bring out the subject so prominently that everything else is neglected: “The important thing in the fugue, in establishing the fugue is… how [the subject] is illuminated from various points. It is [how it interacts] with the other voices” (Arx 284). Indeed, I notice that Arrau is able to clarify the polyphonic texture by giving different articulations to different materials. For instance, I find the contrast between the *legato* inner-voice sequence based on the tail of the subject and the *marcato* upper-voice running eighth notes (played by active “punching” fingers) in mm. 124-128 particularly effective:
At the piano repetition of the second half (mm. 145-152), Arrau “glides” closer to the keyboard to portray the abrupt drop in dynamic level. He then makes a substantial rallentando in the final two measures of the variation to prepare the return of the original tempo of the theme. The last chord is especially delayed, and he slowly raises his head and “floats” his right wrist upward, as if to embody the expectant tension of the dominant harmony (see Figure 4.24). It is noteworthy that no previous variation concludes with an unambiguous dominant chord that resolves to the initial tonic of the next variation. Therefore, Arrau may be underscoring the uniqueness of this moment. Arrau’s pupil Germán Diez explains that Arrau conceives of the dominant-tonic relationship in terms of tención and detención, and he associates a ritardando or rubato with tención and the recovery of strict tempo with detención (Arx 214).

There is certainly a recapitulatory feel to the beginning of the sixth variation, which is not only brought about by the return to the original tempo of the theme, but also by the presentation of a melodic thread that is by far the most closely related to its melody. Perhaps it is because the sixth variation initially appears so reminiscent of the theme that Arrau’s face recaptures the same
expression that he frequently made while playing the theme itself (compare Figure 4.25 with Figure 4.19):

When the time signature changes to $\frac{3}{8}$ in m. 157, Arrau chooses to keep the eighth-note pulse constant; he writes “[\(\frac{3}{8} = \frac{1}{4}\)]” in his edition. However, this seems to be a peculiar decision, as the beats in mm. 157-160 essentially become elongated, causing it to feel like the music is suddenly proceeding at two-thirds the original speed. In fact, Rosen thinks that playing the passage in this manner is “too odd to be convincing” (234). Nevertheless, Arrau may be following the precedent set by the fourth variation, which was similarly in $\frac{3}{8}$ and unfolded at a slower tempo than the theme.

Arrau begins to raise his eyebrows on the last eighth-note chord of m. 159, which gives rise to the sensation of stretching the face vertically (see Figure 4.26a). This sensation perhaps reflects the expansion of the vertical interval C-F into C-G on the downbeat of m. 160 to produce an unalloyed C major harmony, marked *subito piano*. When the upper-voice E falls a diminished fifth to A, and the left-hand part shifts down an octave on the second beat of m. 160, Arrau “floats” closer to the instrument and lowers his eyebrows, as if simultaneously weighed down by the deep bass and troubled by the addition of the treble A, which transforms the pure C major harmony into the tension-filled German sixth chord (Figure 4.26b).
In mm. 161-163, Arrau gently “dabs” his head and shoulders forward at the start of each pair of slurred eighth notes in the alto and bass, acknowledging the increased rhythmic activity of the melodic thread. Unlike me, Arrau does not look very tense when he begins playing the trill and the triplets simultaneously in each hand in m. 165. However, by m. 168, I can observe the reappearance of his characteristic head “flicks”, which help to support the intense buildup to the arrival of the thunderous bass trill. Arrau plays this left-hand trill by alternating the second finger on the C₃ with the fourth and fifth fingers on the B. Although I am accustomed to using the thumb and the middle finger on this trill, I was curious to try out Arrau’s fingering, and I found that it did allow for better control; the resulting trill was not as fast and loud, but my hand felt firmly grounded. Arrau strongly demarcates the downbeat chord of m. 169 by “floating” his right hand upward, before “pressing” into the keys. I can sense an enormous weight in this gesture, and I am not surprised to see that Arrau suggests a fortissimo in his edition at this point:
Despite the busy texture throughout mm. 169-187, Arrau projects each thirty-second note very distinctly. I find Sir Colin Davis’s poetic description of the clarity of Arrau’s playing particularly apt here: “Every note is, as it were, a drop of rain hanging on the branch of a tree when the sun comes up” (Horowitz 235, original emphasis). Furthermore, I believe that Arrau is highly aware of an underlying melodic frame that governs the figurations. For example, in mm. 169-170, he accentuates the D♯-C♯-C♯-B descent that serves as the backbone for the right-hand arpeggiation:


Then, in mm. 172-176, Arrau takes advantage of the fact that the main melodic tones in the right-hand part can be played by the powerful thumb, which is exactly what I do as well (see page 108). However, whereas I feel a driving urgency that does not let up until after m. 184, Arrau is careful not to lose sight of the phrase structure even in this moment of climactic outpouring. At the start of m. 176, he makes a *diminuendo* and slows down to acknowledge the conclusion of the second half, before regaining momentum with the ascending scale at the end of the measure to propel himself into the varied repeat. In contrast, I simply rush through the whole measure, eager to reach the ecstatic heights of mm. 177ff. Therefore, Arrau’s playing achieves a greater sense of breadth, and this probably exemplifies his fundamentally vocal approach to this music; Arrau expresses the view that “in the music of the nineteenth century, all the phrasings have to do with the movement of breathing” (Horowitz 102).

The brilliancy of the high-register eighth notes in mm. 177ff is achieved through “punching” fingers that are so quick and strong that they give me the impression of little viper attacks.
Furthermore, Arrau appears to ignore the eighth rests whenever possible, opting to create a more sustained, ringing sound.

After an extreme *rallentando* in m. 187, the theme reemerges, now played slightly more slowly than the first time. The addition of octave doubling in the bass in m. 192 seems to weigh Arrau’s head down, and this action reminds me of what Arrau mentions in connection with the opening chord of the *Adagio ma non troppo* of Op. 110: as one sinks into the chord, one also sinks into “the depths of [one’s] soul” (Arx 280). I think that Arrau may be experiencing something similar here:

![Figure 4.28. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 192: Arrau](image1)

In m. 196, the depth of the octave doubling is abandoned, and Arrau “floats” his head to the right to show the lighter texture. He appears to be painfully affected by the authentic cadence in G♯ minor in m. 199; though difficult to see clearly in the video recording, I believe that Arrau’s facial expression evokes weeping here:

![Figure 4.29. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 199: Arrau](image2)
With the inner corners of the eyebrows raised and the corners of the lips pulled down, his facial expression continues to convey intense sorrow as he lingers on the broken harmony in m. 201, which offers the last poignant reminder of the dominant ninth from m. 85 in the first movement:

![Figure 4.30. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 201: Arrau](image)

Arrau finishes the sonata by casting his head down and sinking into the last chord, making a little head “dab” that looks like a barely perceptible nod that perhaps expresses peaceful ultimate acceptance.

To summarize, Arrau’s approach to the third movement tends to privilege lyrical expression throughout. First of all, the theme itself is treated as a moving song whose gentle “floating” quality evokes the facial expression of calm melancholy that has already been displayed in conjunction with lyrical moments in the first movement. Then, in the variations that follow, even passages that are not likely to be considered as being essentially songful in character are nonetheless played as such. For example, in the fast-paced third variation, the active sixteenth notes come across as being well-phrased “rapid melodies” (see page 137). The contrapuntal clarity of the fifth variation is achieved by giving different articulations to different materials, but the subject itself is always “sung out” *legato*, which makes it sound like a melodic thread that beckons the listener’s attention throughout. And even in the climactic thirty-second notes of the sixth variation (mm. 169ff), Arrau brings out the governing melodic frame and takes some time to “breathe” in m. 176 to better articulate the phrase structure. In the return of the theme, Arrau’s facial expression seems to become even more intensely sorrowful than before, as if he were reluctant to finish this beautiful song and wanted to savour every expressive moment.
4.5 Conclusion

In line with Arrau’s belief that playing with physical freedom can “awaken and release the dormant creative imagination” (Horowitz 243), the foregoing discussion has examined the dynamics and possible meanings of Arrau’s gestures in his embodied engagement with Op. 109. In this concluding section, I propose that the larger narrative that connects the salient gestures that he makes throughout the sonata is a romance based on the quest for song. First, I am fairly certain that Arrau conceives of the sonata as a romance because he generally understands Beethoven’s music as an “endless struggle concluding in the victory of renewal and spiritual rebirth” (ibid., 170). Arrau definitely interprets Opp. 110 and 111 in this way, as he imagines a “rise to the heavens” (Arx 291) at the conclusion of Op. 110 and an “ascent to a mystical ecstasy” (Horowitz 164-165) in the third variation from the slow movement of Op. 111. I do not think that Arrau interprets Op. 109 any differently, for even the arpeggios in the first movement are already perceived as “reaching out into the infinite altogether” (see page 116). Second, I think that Arrau’s romance narrative for Op. 109 is based on the quest for spiritually-fulfilling song because of his general preoccupation with legato playing and his great interest in the singing and physical gestures of good operatic actors (Horowitz 101), as well as because of the specific nuances that can be discerned in this particular performance of the sonata, which highlights the interaction between lyrical and contrapuntal elements (as discussed below).

In playing the primary theme of the first movement, the evenness of the exchange of the two-note figures between Arrau’s hands makes it difficult to hear a conspicuous melody. It is only after experiencing the overwhelming expansiveness offered by the strong “punching” arpeggios in the secondary theme that it becomes possible to eventually deliver the lyrically wistful chorale-like phrase in the coda. The forceful start of the second movement, whose contrast between treble and bass lines is strongly projected by Arrau, immediately presents an opposition to the texture of calm cooperation between the hands at the start of the first movement. Paradoxically, Arrau’s skilful polyphonic playing in the development section of this movement serves to promote confusion, as it becomes challenging to decide which voice to follow from moment to moment. Thus, in Arrau’s hands, the counterpoint of the second movement may be interpreted as denying the unitary impulse of song. In contrast, the pervasive songfulness of the third movement permeates even the more contrapuntally-conceived variations, such that counterpoint may now be considered as subsidiary to songful inclination.
Chapter 5
A Performance of Op. 109 by Daniel Barenboim

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, I describe how Daniel Barenboim’s performance of Op. 109 could be understood as a gestural narrative. As with Arrau’s performance in the previous chapter, my aim here is to give an account of Barenboim’s performance as he might have experienced it. Accordingly, I endeavoured to better understand Barenboim’s inner world of musical experience by imitating his performance as well as by informing myself about his beliefs and values as a performer, which are chiefly expressed in his own words in several books that he wrote or co-wrote. In addition, there is another important source of information that has particular relevance for this chapter: the 2006 video recording of Barenboim’s masterclasses on the Beethoven piano sonatas.

I think that the concept of “gestural narrative” would not be foreign to Barenboim at all. His remark that “when one plays two notes, they should tell a story” (Barenboim and Said 2002: 69) seems to reveal a conception of gesture and narrative as being strikingly interconnected; the minutest progression of events already contains the rich potentialities of an engaging plot. Moreover, like Arrau, Barenboim believes that a unity of body and mind is necessary for achieving naturalness in piano playing. He explains that “the technical means used to overcome certain physical problems will influence the expression” (2002: 6). The aim of this chapter is to address in detail how Barenboim’s live performance of Beethoven’s Op. 109 in Berlin in 2005 exemplifies such an embodied approach to piano playing. In particular, it will be shown that Barenboim’s gestures, like Arrau’s and mine, can be interpreted as communicating an overarching romance narrative based on the pursuit of spiritually-fulfilling song.

5.2 First Movement

Barenboim plays the primary theme with circular counterclockwise motions in his upper body. This fact is notable because the circle has no real beginning and thus appropriately conveys Barenboim’s belief that this piece should already “begin” in the pianist’s mind before the first note is actually played (2008: 8). Moreover, these circular motions coincide with the
foreshortening of the phrase; that is, the first revolution spans the first eight beats, then the subdivision into two four-beat groups is acknowledged with two smaller, briefer revolutions, before the circular path is finally radically “ellipsized” into a more straightforward “dab” on the last beat of m. 8, as if to convey the aborted intention of initiating another subphrase. Example 5.1 shows the durations of the circular motions:

By emphasizing the process of foreshortening with these circular motions, Barenboim creates an effective “structural crescendo” toward the broken diminished seventh harmony on the downbeat of m. 9, where the flowing circular path that characterizes much of the primary theme is interrupted by a sudden upward jerk of the left shoulder, embodying a burst of tension that feels shocking yet inevitable at the same time:

---

1 Barenboim, Daniel. Barenboim on Beethoven: The Complete Piano Sonatas Live from Berlin. EMI Classics, 2006. DVD. All images in this chapter are from this source.
Barenboim makes us realize that despite the calmly uniform surface texture of the primary theme, the underlying process of foreshortening is a powerfully subversive element that propels the music toward the dissolution of this very texture. In other words, the incipient song is not yet structurally sound; it disintegrates due to an internal tension.

Barenboim then clearly brings out the dialogue between the descending soprano line and the ascending tenor line in mm. 9-10, underscoring the perplexity created by the multiplicity of lines. Furthermore, he closely observes the articulatory markings in the second half of these measures to produce a kind of expressive “wringing” gesture, as if lamenting the loss of the simple flowing texture of the primary theme. After making the crescendo at the end of m. 10, Barenboim prepares the subito piano at the start of the next measure by “floating” his right hand upward – a gesture that appears to help him to measure the extra time required for the abrupt dynamic contrast:

![Figure 5.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 11: Barenboim](image)

This is probably because Barenboim attaches particular importance to the dynamic gesture of crescendo followed by subito piano in the music of Beethoven, comparing it to “walking confidently to the edge of a precipice and stopping at the very last possible moment” (2008: 15). Like Arrau and me, Barenboim “floats” his right wrist upward as he holds the D♭ on the second beat of m. 11, feeling the weightless sustain of the tone. He then remains relatively still as he makes the crescendo into the wide-ranging diminished seventh arpeggio of m. 12; after all, this is the same harmony as in m. 9 and arguably does not need extra interest. It is only in m. 13 that Barenboim “presses” his head downward slightly while tensing his facial muscles to depict the
authoritative novelty of D♯ major. In general, Barenboim thinks that in tonal music, the impact of harmony is much greater than that of rhythm or melody (2008: 132), and his playing tends to reflect a strong attention to the harmonic foundation of the music.

After the lingering *espressivo* in the first half of m. 14, where each thirty-second note in the right hand is given full substance, Barenboim makes barely perceptible nods on the first notes of the triplets in the second half of the measure, underlining the governing scalar descent that is then brought to the foreground in m. 15. Indeed, Barenboim’s conception of this passage may be similar to my own (see Example 3.1). Meanwhile, the left hand “dabs” heavily into the F♯-B tetrachord, playing from the fourth finger to the thumb, before letting the fifth finger “punch” into the *sforzando* low B. Thus, there is a sense of completeness as Barenboim employs all five fingers of his left hand to solidly confirm the move to the dominant at the end of the exposition. Then, like Arrau, Barenboim allows his left hand to “float” silently alongside the ascending right hand in the second half of m. 15 to amplify the rising gesture, after which the left hand assumes its playing position for the start of the development section while the right hand finishes up the exposition with its upward scale. As in Arrau’s performance, the silently waiting left hand produces the embodied feeling of connection across the exposition-development formal boundary.

Barenboim does not bring out the left-hand line in mm. 16-21 prominently, opting to maintain the fluid interaction between the hands here. In contrast, the treble line in mm. 22ff, which is marked *sempre legato*, is always clearly projected, initially coming across as a tranquil melody. However, Barenboim begins to show visible signs of agitation when the offbeat *sfp* markings appear in mm. 33-41. Whereas Arrau consistently “flicks” his head with these markings, Barenboim actually “presses” his entire upper body forward, imparting a weightier feel to the emphases. I am convinced that Barenboim shares my understanding of the retransition (mm. 42-48) as comprising three “loops” because his torso makes three clockwise revolutions here, and he also stamps his left foot on the downbeat of m. 44 and m. 46 to mark the beginning of the second and third loops (see Figure 5.3). These loops generate great momentum into the recapitulation because, as Barenboim explains, “repetition, for the ear, is a form of accumulation” (2008: 24).
Barenboim straightens his back as he launches into the recapitulation, giving a stately air to the *forte* return of the primary theme. He appears to be deliberately clarifying the downbeat of m. 49 by accentuating it with a “flick” of his head to the left and taking a slight amount of time. Perhaps he does this to ensure that the listener does not wrongly perceive the second beat of m. 48 as the downbeat. But it should also be mentioned that Barenboim believes that a strong sense of rhythm is related to the feeling of pride, which is an important insight that he gathered from Arthur Rubinstein (2002: 41). Barenboim voices the tenor in mm. 53-54 quite distinctly, making it obvious that the melodic thread has migrated from the soprano to the tenor here, before returning to the soprano again. Therefore, it seems that the primary theme can no longer maintain melodic autonomy within a single voice throughout its course. Moreover, Barenboim may be calling attention to this feature in order to point out the connection to the beginning of the coda (mm. 66-74), which presents the further breaking down of the melodic discourse; it borrows the texture from the primary theme, but is based on the exchange of more fragmented thematic materials between the soprano and tenor.
When the secondary theme interrupts with the diminished seventh harmony on the downbeat of m. 58, Barenboim jerks his left shoulder upward once again. Then, as the left hand echoes this harmony and ascends from G♯ to D in the tenor line, Barenboim raises his eyes, and his gaze wanders into the distance:

This imparts a “floating” quality to the tenor line, as if the experience of the shocking harmony now triggered the immersion into the world of memory; perhaps Barenboim is recollecting the analogous spot in the exposition (m. 9), which had been the poignant first indication that all was not well. Moreover, the “wringing” chords in the second half of m. 58 are now played with an expression of sadness, as conveyed by the raised inner corners of the eyebrows, drooping eyelids with the eyes looking downward, and the lip corners pulled down (Ekman 97-98). This expression lends a wistful quality to the passage:
But by far the most striking gesture of the movement occurs in m. 61, where there is a change in key signature to underscore the extraordinary excursion into C major. The G dominant seventh harmony here sounds powerful, and Barenboim’s “punching” effort into the initial chord is so strong that he suddenly straightens his back in reaction to it, as if he himself were surprised by the sonority:

![Image of Barenboim playing the piano](image)

Figure 5.6. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 61: Barenboim

In both m. 61 and m. 62, Barenboim does not try to clearly distinguish between the different rhythmic values; rather, he seems more preoccupied with maintaining an overall fluid flow that allows him to luxuriate in the unique soundworld of C major.

Like Arrau, Barenboim lets his left hand hold the bass E in m. 65 for much longer than its notated value, probably to better feel the strong foundation of the tonic arrival. In mm. 66-74, the exchange of the fragments from the primary theme transpires in an enthralling manner, as Barenboim’s face remains frozen in what I read as an expression of childlike absorption:
Here, the forward-moving melodic discourse of the primary theme is transformed into the meditative contemplation of thematic fragments, as if one were preoccupied with rotating an object in order to inspect it from different angles.

Barenboim’s arms “float” outward as he plays the chords in mm. 75-76, giving the illusion that each chord possesses a leisurely expanding resonance (see Figure 5.8). In fact, Barenboim is convinced that piano playing requires such an art of illusion in sound. In a discussion with audience members after his masterclass with Lang Lang in Chicago, Barenboim (2006) explains that although a crescendo on a single note or chord is physically impossible to achieve on the piano, one can still produce the illusion of a crescendo if one truly believes in it and can imagine how it unfolds in one’s mind.
Incidentally, there are notable examples in the Beethoven piano sonatas where the performer is actually asked to do this, such as near the end of the first movement from the Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 81a (see m. 252):

Out of the resonance of the isolated chords grows the chorale-like phrase (mm. 78ff) that adumbrates the soulful lyricism of the third-movement variation theme. Barenboim minimizes the “chopping” vertical tendency of the continuous chord-playing required in this passage, striving for a long singing line through skilful dynamic shaping and judicious use of rubato. Like Arrau, Barenboim’s eyebrows are raised as he delivers the highpoint of the phrase in m. 84, enhancing the reaching gesture here. At the return of the texture from the primary theme in m. 86, Barenboim highlights the contrast between the C♯-B and C♯-B motions; for instance, he holds the damper pedal longer on the C♯-B motion in m. 89 for a murkier sound, while the C♯-B motion in the next measure is more distinctly articulated, giving the overall impression that something emerges from the shadows and becomes more easily perceived. I think that Barenboim (2006) must have been after precisely this kind of gradual transition when he told Saleem Abboud-Ashkar during a masterclass on the first movement of the “Waldstein” Sonata that at the juncture between m. 4 and m. 5, one should create the illusion that the G major harmony is still hovering even as one presents the B♭ major harmony. And similarly, at the end of the first movement of Op. 109, the resonance from the ascent to the high register in mm. 92-97 is still audible as Barenboim calmly places the final chord of the movement.

To summarize, the first movement can be read as commencing with a tentative attempt at songful craftsmanship, but eventually achieving the quality of tranquil introspection necessary for envisioning the song that will be attained. The primary theme presents an embryonic song (mm. 1-8) that already contains the seed of its own early demise: namely, the process of
foreshortening. Nevertheless, the secondary theme manages to progress from a state of shock and confusion (as demonstrated by Barenboim’s left-shoulder jerk on the diminished seventh harmony on the downbeat of m. 9 and the ensuing hint of the contrapuntal complexity that is yet to come) to regained composure and confident conclusion of the exposition (as exemplified by his stoic calmness in confronting the amplified diminished seventh harmony in m. 12 and the “completeness” of his left-hand gesture in confirming the dominant in m. 15). The air of composure is preserved at the start of the development section; it is only when the long treble phrase becomes punctuated by sfp markings in mm. 33-41 that Barenboim’s “pressing” upper body betrays great agitation, culminating in the strong “loops” that propel the music into the recapitulation. When the proud restatement of the primary theme is interrupted by the secondary theme once again (m. 58), the wistful quality conveyed by Barenboim’s facial expression may be indicative of painful reminiscence. It is the exceptional soundworld of C major (mm. 61-62), which seems to take even Barenboim himself by surprise, that effectively dislodges pessimistic thoughts, paving the way for the contemplative character of mm. 66-74. The contrast between this contemplative character and the straightforward, goal-oriented character of the opening measures perhaps signifies that the wilful desire that initiates the movement now gives way to unaffected abnegation. And it is this state of mind that makes the attainment of the prophetic chorale-like texture of mm. 78-85 possible.

5.3 Second Movement

I feel that Barenboim does not take Beethoven’s tempo marking for the second movement (Prestissimo) at face value; throughout this turbulent movement, he seems very careful not to play too fast. This is likely because Barenboim firmly believes that the performer can decide on a feasible tempo only after the content of the music has been grasped, not the other way around (2008: 12-13). He probably feels that the content of this movement is quite rich, and certain important details would be lost upon the listener if the performer played at a breakneck pace. Furthermore, in a masterclass with Alessio Bax on the finale of the “Hammerklavier” Sonata, Barenboim (2006) remarks that the performer cannot express disorder without order. In other words, the chaotic energy of this movement must still be presented in an intelligible manner.

As Barenboim launches into the second movement, his feet spread apart, giving me the impression that he has inadvertently run into a thick wall of massive sound (see Figure 5.9). For
me, then, this gesture vividly represents a direct encounter with a formidable opposing force. In the second part of the primary theme (mm. 9-24), Barenboim’s gestures tend to follow the trajectory of the four-measure unit that is compulsively repeated; he generally leans forward twice in the first half of the unit, then leans back more gradually in the second half of the unit. This is quite similar to what I do (see page 93). However, Barenboim’s gestures become more subdued in mm. 21-24, and he tapers off significantly in m. 24, as if finally giving up after his insistent rambling produces no tangible result.

Figure 5.9. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 1: Barenboim

Barenboim is meticulous with the phrase markings at the beginning of the transition (mm. 25-28), giving the passage a fluid, lamenting character, rather than a rigid, menacing one. He chooses to play both Bs on the second beat of m. 28 with the left hand alone. This frees up the right hand, granting it ample time to transfer itself comfortably to the high register, while the left hand resolves the Bs to the E in m. 29. In this way, I think that Barenboim makes it clear that the bass line finishes an idea just as the soprano commences an altered restatement of that idea.

According to Barenboim, it is crucial to understand that there is a difference between volume and intensity; indeed, “the lower the volume, the greater the need for intensity” (2008: 105), and vice versa. I think that Barenboim’s approach to the secondary theme offers a fine demonstration of this inverse relationship. Although the passage begins softly in m. 33, his furrowed brows (see Figure 5.10a) are indicative of an intense concentration (Ekman 140). Then, as the music grows louder and the treble line reaches obsessive heights in mm. 41-42, his eyebrows are raised, perhaps to convey a more outright expression of moderate alarm (Figure 5.10b).
Barenboim then clearly brings out the chromatically descending bass line in mm. 43-48, articulating it as a more predictable counterpoint to the tortuous treble line. Perhaps he is also aware of the *passus duriusculus* connotation of this bass line, and he wants to “suffer” through each chromatic tone.

Against the oscillation between G dominant seventh and C major harmony in the left hand in mm. 51-54, Barenboim’s right hand plays the new motive (G-D-G-G) delicately, especially in the *pianissimo* restatement an octave higher. Furthermore, the upward “floating” of his right hand on the downbeat rest in m. 51 and m. 53 lends a buoyancy to this brief moment of respite. Then, despite the fact that m. 55 only features the start of a *crescendo to forte*, Barenboim plays noticeably louder right away. This is perhaps because he already considers the notated G dominant seventh chord as the German sixth of B minor, and he wants to emphasize the strong chromatic motions to the F₃s in both the bass and the soprano in the next measure.

The closing theme (mm. 57-65) comes across as being highly energetic. Although Barenboim’s tempo remains relatively steady, his articulate fingerwork on the running eighth notes, combined with his sparing use of the damper pedal, produces a dry *marcato* sound that makes the music seem faster than it actually is. It should be noted that Barenboim stresses the fundamental importance of achieving independence of the fingers (2002: 51); in the masterclass with Abboud-Ashkar, Barenboim (2006) comments that the fingers must work to create the core of the sound first, and the pedal is only employed to complement that. I believe that Barenboim is practicing what he preaches in playing the closing theme in the manner described above.
Both Fs on the downbeat of m. 65 are played with the right hand. This means that the right hand can simply remain in the exact same position on the second beat, where the left hand joins in by imitating the right hand’s F octave in the bass, giving the overall physical sensation of a solid reinforcement of the dominant (of B minor), which then powerfully resolves to the B octaves in the following measure. While based on the primary theme, the start of the development section presents a more active climb in the treble (see page 56). Barenboim calls attention to this new feature by slightly stretching the line toward the end of m. 66 (just as the climb is beginning), then regaining the tempo as the line continues to ascend without pause. I find this way of phrasing to be quite organic because it seems like an initial inertia must be overcome before a meteoric rise is possible.

In playing the left-hand measured tremolo in mm. 70ff, Barenboim uses the pedal sparingly at first, creating a quietly intense palpitation that contrasts with the legato canonic voices in the right hand. As the passage progresses, however, he gradually employs the pedal more liberally, eventually transforming the left-hand palpitation into a mist of sound in m. 79, as the pedal point moves from B to C. Here, the tremolo no longer sounds like an alternation of two notes an octave apart, but rather a kind of vibrato elaboration of a single pitch. This allows Barenboim to transition effectively into mm. 83ff, where the tremolo stops and gives way to unelaborated sustained pitches.

In mm. 83-96, I do not feel that Barenboim brings out the interplay between the voices as clearly as Arrau does; he seems to be more preoccupied with shaping the delicate sonorities afforded by the use of the soft pedal. Unlike Arrau’s more straightforward playing, Barenboim takes advantage of minute as well as substantial timing fluctuations to impart a wandering indecisiveness to this passage. For example, he slows down considerably in mm. 93-96 to make the arrival of the ethereal retransition (mm. 97-104) a special event. The sound becomes even more delicate in the retransition, as Barenboim holds back the tempo further and plays extremely softly. Overall then, a “floating” quality permeates mm. 83-104, becoming especially pronounced in the retransition, where the music seems almost suspended in midair.

There are a few spots in the recapitulation where Barenboim makes noteworthy gestures to reflect certain details that differ from the exposition. For example, when the primary theme is
treated in double counterpoint in mm. 112-119, Barenboim “wrings” his head vigorously, making a tense facial expression as he plays the daring octave leaps in the right hand:

![Figure 5.11. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 116: Barenboim](image)

Then, notably, on the downbeat of m. 120, Barenboim finishes the bass line strongly with “punching” effort from the left fourth finger, while the right hand plays piano. Though not specified in the score, this dynamic contrast between the hands is a clever linking technique; the listener follows the bass line to its strong conclusion, then realizes a split second later that another idea has already begun in the treble and immediately devotes attention there. In the return of the *passus duriusculus* passage (mm. 144-149), there are displaced high notes that Barenboim emphasizes by taking some time to reach out for them; this effortful gesture probably helps him to feel the expressiveness of the wide interval:

![Figure 5.12. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 145: Barenboim](image)

Unlike Arrau, who suggests that one can play faster when playing louder (see page 113), Barenboim crafts an imposing buildup in the last eight measures of the movement precisely by holding back the tempo while making a *crescendo*. Barenboim (2006) explains to Abboud-Ashkar that when one wants to create tension, one should avoid the tendency to rush. Like me,
Barenboim finishes the movement with an aggressive “slashing” gesture in both hands, ending up with clenched fists on his lap:

![Figure 5.13. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Barenboim](image)

To summarize, the second movement can be understood as portraying an alarming confrontation with an overwhelming antagonistic force that threatens to bring about a complete paralysis of thought and action. Barenboim’s gesture at the very start of the movement depicts an almost palpably physical contact with some forceful opposition, which leads to a state of anxiety conveyed through the unfruitful repetitive gestures in the second part of the primary theme. Under Barenboim’s hands, the transition comes across as being plaintive, rather than intimidating; perhaps this sentiment is expressed as a reaction to the lack of positive progress thus far in the movement. Then, after some poignant fluctuations, the quiet intensity that first manifests itself at the beginning of the secondary theme finally culminates in the explosive closing theme, where Barenboim’s active fingerwork lends a kind of threatening martial precision to the passage. After such a clear definition of each tone, however, the development section is characterized by progressively nebulous sound quality, which is due to Barenboim’s gradually more generous use of the damper pedal as well as his manipulation of timing and dynamics. Played exceedingly softly and considerably slower than the original tempo, the retransition exudes a ghostly stillness that is not encountered anywhere else in the movement; it is like one has been transported into the eye of the storm. The recapitulation then brings back the turbulent character of the exposition, and the movement is capped off by an imperious buildup to a furious cadence, where the concluding E minor chord is released with clenched fists.
5.4 Third Movement

After such a violent encounter, Barenboim takes a moderately lengthy pause; about nine seconds separate the last chord of the second movement from the first chord of the variation theme. Though Barenboim does not play the theme as slowly as Arrau, there is great calmness in his demeanour; his upper body only engages in small “floating” and “gliding” motions, and his facial expression generally remains neutral throughout. Indeed, in his masterclass with Jonathan Biss on this particular movement, Barenboim (2006) describes his conception of the theme as being controlled, self-evident, and involving no effort. This is a sharp contrast to the striving quality of the foreshortening process at the opening of the first movement. However, Barenboim does make notable gestures to reflect certain local details. For example, after arpeggiating the downbeat chord of m. 5 and m. 13, he tends to further supinate his right forearm, which enhances the expressivity of the upward transfer of weight from the thumb to the fifth finger; it is as if it were possible to continue “rolling” the hand deep into the keyboard:

![Figure 5.14. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 5: Barenboim](image)

Figure 5.14. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 5: Barenboim

Also, like me, Barenboim gazes into the distance as he breaks the appoggiatura-enriched dominant seventh harmony in m. 14. This may be because he similarly hears this sonority as a reminder of a past event: namely, m. 85 in the coda of the first movement.
In the masterclass with Biss, Barenboim (2006) explains that a variation can function as an ornamentation, a transformation, or a commentary. He sees the first variation as a commentary on the theme, and therefore finds it fruitful to play the variation slower than the theme in order to make this function audible. This interpretation is in keeping with Beethoven’s tempo indication (Molto espressivo), which likely implies a more deliberate pacing (Rosen 233). It is curious to note that while Arrau’s playing seems to conform to this interpretation as well, a comparison of the durations of the theme versus the first variation from his video recording reveals that the first variation is in fact rendered slightly faster than the theme, but the less active bass line nonetheless gives the impression of a slower tempo. In contrast, Barenboim truly plays this variation more slowly than the theme, and the result is a quality of profound contemplative calmness that I find quite appealing. I think that Barenboim’s playing epitomizes his own belief that “contemplation and recollection are as important to a performing musician as passionate involvement” (2002: 8).

Like Arrau, Barenboim takes advantage of “floating” and “gliding” gestures to embody the sustained character of the first variation. Moreover, Barenboim tends to “wring” his wrist to emphasize important tones. He does this, for example, when playing the right-hand chromatic passing tones in mm. 25-26, savouring the dissonances against the main harmonies. This “wringing” gesture becomes even more pronounced in the treble line in mm. 31-32, where Barenboim appears to be creating the illusion of Bebung on the tied notes.

Barenboim remarks that “the real expression of the music can only come through the variation of sound” (2002: 194). His approach to the second variation demonstrates this principle. Measures 33-40 and mm. 49-56 are played almost entirely without pedal, allowing Barenboim to create a
light, pure sound from the even interaction between the hands. In contrast, the varied restatement of these materials (mm. 41-48 and mm. 57-64) is characterized by much more generous use of the pedal to produce a resonant sound, which enables Barenboim to bring out certain details prominently against rich accompanimental gestures. For instance, against the constant flow of eighth-note chords in the left hand in mm. 58-60, Barenboim projects a small descending idea (labelled as motive Y in Example 5.3) that seems to gain strength as it is transported upward each measure, becoming hybridized with motive X in m. 60, and eventually blossoming into the strong line in octaves in mm. 61ff:

Example 5.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 57-62: Barenboim

Without any pause, Barenboim unleashes the busy two-part counterpoint of the third variation. Interestingly, he tends to stretch the first note of each group of four sixteenth notes in the first half of the variation, and I initially perceived this as a peculiar rhythmic distortion. But after I tried playing the passage in the same manner myself, I came to realize that Barenboim may be doing this in order to call the listener’s attention to the underlying voice exchanges:²

² I should note, however, that in his studio recordings of this sonata (namely, his EMI audio recording from the late 1960s and his Deutsche Grammophon audio recording from 1984), Barenboim does not do this. It is therefore possible that these minute stretches simply serve the practical purpose of allowing him to feel more technically secure during a live performance.
Example 5.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, mm. 65-69: Barenboim

Then, like me, Barenboim slightly accentuates the last left-hand octave of m. 89 and m. 90, lightly “flicking” his head to the left as he does so. Unlike Arrau and me, however, Barenboim does not slow down significantly in the concluding measures of this variation, and his stricter pacing helps to enhance the feeling that the next variation grows out of this one; that is, due to the shared polyphonic conception of both variations, the fourth variation can effectively be heard as offering a metrical expansion as well as textural thickening of the third variation.

As Barenboim relinquishes the hectic activity of the third variation to embrace the soothing piacevole flow of the fourth variation, his face appears to express relief (see Figure 5.16a), which is gradually transformed into tranquility (Figure 5.16b):

![Figure 5.16](image)

In the second half of the variation, however, Barenboim lowers his eyebrows as he plays the suspenseful C♯ dominant ninth chord on the downbeat of m. 105. He then “glides” his upper
body to the right to devote careful attention to the delivery of the high-register chromatic commentary on the second beat. Barenboim believes that the greatness of a performer lies in attention to detail (Barenboim and Said 2002: 54), and I think that he himself demonstrates this quality notably in m. 107, where the *sforzando* markings are placed on the weak subdivisions of the beat the first time through, then on the strong subdivisions when the passage is repeated. While such fine nuances may seem suggestive of spontaneous expressive choices, they are more likely based upon careful planning and intimate acquaintance with this music. As Barenboim puts it, “spontaneous realization would not [be] possible without all the repetitions and the familiarity resulting from intense study” (2008: 47). The *fortissimo* outpouring in m. 109 comes across as being powerful without any undue stridency. This is because Barenboim surreptitiously reduces the volume of the left-hand accompaniment, so that he does not have to play the right-hand part too strongly but can still give the impression that the treble line is very prominently projected.

I think that Barenboim’s facial expression at the end of the fourth variation shows that he is preparing for the upcoming fifth variation by embodying its resolute character slightly in advance. In particular, one can observe that the inner corners of the eyebrows are drawn down toward the nose, while the lips are becoming pressed together (see Figure 5.17). Generally speaking, these features can be perceived as signifying anger (Ekman 134-135). However, in the absence of intently glaring eyes, I would interpret them as conveying a kind of gritty determination rather than outright anger.

![Figure 5.17. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 112: Barenboim](image)
It should be noted that while Arrau takes about fifty-seven seconds to play the fifth variation, Barenboim takes approximately fifty seconds; this means that Barenboim plays about fourteen percent faster than Arrau. This difference is significant because Barenboim’s rendition is noticeably more energetic and exhilarating. At the same time, however, I also feel that the faster tempo does not afford him the time to achieve the stunning clarity of polyphonic texture that Arrau can achieve at his slower tempo. This is because Arrau tends to rely on articulatory contrasts to distinguish between the different materials, and a slower tempo provides the longer inter-onset interval that makes such articulatory contrasts more feasible, while still maintaining a similar dynamic level for all the voices. However, due to his greater speed, Barenboim needs to rely more heavily on dynamic contrasts between the voices to highlight certain important ideas at certain moments. But this means that he cannot produce the effect of projecting all the voices all the time as Arrau can do. Consequently, Barenboim’s sound seems less solid, but more diversified and colourful. At the second restatement of the second half (mm. 145-152), marked piano, Barenboim creates a playful character chiefly by using detached eighth notes in the bass to evoke a bassoon-like comical sound. (The light “floating” and “flicking” motions of his head and upper body also help to reflect this playful character.) He separates the last three eighth notes of m. 152 from the rest of the measure, shaping them gracefully like a musical curtsy that leads directly into the transformative discourse of the sixth variation.

In his masterclass with Biss, Barenboim (2006) dedicates considerable attention to the sixth variation, which is fundamentally driven by the process of rhythmic diminution (see page 71). With regard to this important feature, Barenboim comments that the performer should not try to articulate clearly-defined rhythmic milestones, but should rather aim for seamless transitions into increasingly active rhythmic values; for Barenboim, this music is about “becoming”, rather than “being”. His performance certainly reflects this conception; from the start of the variation until m. 168, Barenboim’s gestures tend to have a sustained quality that reflects the calm gradual development of the music. As Barenboim himself remarks to Biss, it is only in m. 169 that one can perceive the first sign of tension, which stems from the presence of the diminished seventh harmony. Throughout mm. 169-176, Barenboim phrases the treble figurations according to the underlying stepwise construction. For example, like Arrau, he projects the D♭-C♯-C♯-B descent in mm. 169-170 (and he asks Biss to do the same during the masterclass as well). Moreover,
Barenboim employs the thumb to strongly emphasize the chromatic line in mm. 174-175, “flicking” his head with each emphasized tone.

Like me, Barenboim has relatively small hands with short fifth fingers (Barenboim 2002: 8). Because of this shared anatomical feature, I do not find it difficult to relate to Barenboim’s sensitivity to the expressiveness of reaching out to span wide intervals in the right-hand part in mm. 177-184, as he describes to Biss (who has larger hands). In particular, when spanning the ninth from B to C♯, Barenboim thinks that a slight amount of time is required to project the sense of effort involved in covering the great distance. (Of course, this may also be interpreted as an expressive imitation of vocal production, as I discussed in previous chapters.)

In playing the lengthy right-hand trill throughout mm. 177-186, Barenboim (2006) does not find it necessary to maintain constant speed throughout, as he thinks that this would only result in meaningless, mechanical playing. Arrau would probably agree with Barenboim on this point because Martin Krause taught him that the speed of trills is always dependent on the prevailing mood and can be varied for expressive purposes (Horowitz 38-39). This is exactly what Barenboim does in m. 187, where he slows down the trill in order to transition smoothly into the less rhythmically active texture at the return of the tranquil theme.

In describing the difference between the first statement of the theme and its return to conclude the movement, Barenboim (2006) says that one has only a future, while the other has a past. Accordingly, the performer should make it clear that the return of the theme possesses the quality of recollection. In the masterclass with Biss, Barenboim provides valuable insights into how he achieves this. First of all, the return of the theme is taken at a slower tempo; a comparison of the duration of the initial statement of the theme with double the duration of its return (as repeats are now omitted) reveals that Barenboim is playing at around seventy-four percent of his original speed. The reduced speed helps to transform the sense of forward momentum of living in the present moment into the more passive wandering in the inner world of retrospection. In addition, he tries to create a veiled sound by pedalling more liberally. This veiled sound is appropriate for conveying the lessened vividness that characterizes recollection. Lastly, Barenboim thinks that it is imperative to refrain from dynamically underlining any feature in the return of the theme; after all, a recollection needs no emphasis because everything has already been experienced and is now intimately known.
For me, the most important gesture that Barenboim makes in the return of the theme actually occurs after the last chord is played; he lets his hands “float” slightly above the keys for several seconds (see Figure 5.18), before slowly “gliding” them toward his body. From my experience as a performer, keeping the hands on or slightly above the keyboard at the end of a piece is an effective way to ensure that the applause does not come too soon. In other words, Barenboim wants there to be a moment of silence after the last chord has died away. This is because he accords special significance to the relationship between sound and silence. He states that music, like life, “starts from nothing and ends in nothing, and this nothing is… silence” (2002: 190).

To summarize, Barenboim’s approach to the third movement is characterized by a diversity in sound construction as well as a convincing overall progression. Indeed, Barenboim (2006) explains to Biss that the main challenge of playing variations is to achieve a long line – to bind the variations together. While the first variation seems to stand apart to clearly demarcate the beginning of a contemplative journey, the second, third, and fourth variations are bound together through continuous playing, remarkably progressing from simple melodic “atoms” to seemingly endless contrapuntal intricacy. The fifth variation is then presented as the thrilling culmination of contrapuntal skill, but the learned air becomes somewhat caricatured in the piano restatement of the second half, as if to convey that the superficiality of pedantic severity must be renounced before the deeply transformative force of melodic elaboration (through rhythmic diminution) in the final variation can be manifested. The return of the theme is characterized by a quality of tranquil recollection, neither blissful nor regretful. With calm acceptance of inevitability, Barenboim finally returns the music to the silence from whence it came.
5.5 Conclusion

Overall, I am convinced that Barenboim understands this sonata as a romance narrative. First, he generally finds that although Beethoven’s music often juxtaposes conflicting elements, there is still “a certain belief in the overall positive nature of life” (Barenboim and Said 2002: 38). In other words, “one should not fear to enter the dark and re-emerge into the light” (Barenboim 2002: 232). This seems to be an apt metaphor for the dialectic structure of Op. 109, where the “darkness” of the second movement must be experienced before the “light” of the third-movement song can be attained.

To recapitulate, the opening movement already manages to progress from an initial tentative attempt at songful expression to a vision of lyrical fulfilment in the coda. However, Barenboim’s gesture at the start of the second movement suggests a kind of head-on collision with an opposing force. Nevertheless, I think that it is the shock of the minor mode, rather than the ruggedness of the two-part counterpoint, that motivates this gesture. Even in the development section, I do not feel that Barenboim fully takes advantage of the interaction between multiple lines to create the feeling of perplexity, as Arrau does; rather, Barenboim relies on the increasing use of the damper pedal to achieve the same effect. It is only in the third movement that he noticeably highlights the contrast between lyrical and contrapuntal tendencies, apparently conveying to the audience through his pacing of the variations that polyphonic austerity must be abandoned to pave the way for the transformative melodic elaboration of the final variation. Then, the return of the theme is delivered quite plainly, as if without any desire to call attention to itself. In this way, active listeners are gently invited to reacquaint themselves with the theme, and to reflect on all that has already transpired. In other words, Barenboim creates the setting of profound tranquility that is conducive to the distillation of experience, thus offering a richly meaningful conclusion to a spiritual quest.
Chapter 6

6.1 Overview

While there appears to be much common ground among the performances of Op. 109 by Arrau, Barenboim, and me, Gould’s rendition of this sonata stands apart and, indeed, reflects an aesthetic premise that seems to challenge the very concept of gestural narrative itself. Nevertheless, the following discussion aims to demonstrate that it is not only possible but actually quite instructive to consider Gould’s performance as a gestural narrative.

First of all, I should note that Gould’s aesthetic has been described as “idealism” (Payzant 1984: 73-88). This is because, for Gould, “a musical work was an abstract entity that could be fully comprehended in the mind in the absence of performance” (Bazzana 1997: 11). Of course, as already mentioned in Chapter 1, Schoenberg holds the same disembodied view of music (see page 6). In fact, Bazzana believes that Gould comes across as being an unconventional performer precisely because he performs with such an uncompromising “composerly mindset” (ibid., 61). Gould himself states on several occasions that when he is playing the piano, his aim is to “concentrate exclusively on realizing a conception of the music, regardless of how it [is] physically achieved” (Roberts 1999: 186). Therefore, instead of a holistic body-mind approach to piano playing advocated by both Arrau and Barenboim, Gould tries to deny any awareness of the body, which he suspiciously regards as a source of distraction from the higher aims of his art. For instance, when asked if he discovered musical ideas at the piano, Gould replies in the negative, elaborating that “the more you fiddle around, the more the fingers give you nauseating ideas of what can sound right” (ibid., 82).

Paradoxically, however, in his effort to reject the legitimacy of his own body, Gould in fact exhibits more physical activity in his performance of Op. 109 from his “Anthology of Variations” television broadcast of 1964 than any of the other pianists analyzed in this study. Although such busy body language may be a subconscious by-product of Gould’s endeavour to “stand outside” himself while simultaneously “being totally committed” to what he is doing (ibid., 333), I believe that his intense gestures nevertheless deserve closer examination because
they can give us an important insight into his musical intentions. Ultimately, I will suggest that Gould’s performance of Op. 109 can still be regarded as a romance narrative, even though it is informed by values that are strikingly different from those of the other three performers.

6.2 First Movement

In playing the primary theme, Gould does not try to create a smoothly flowing texture that results from the even interaction between the hands. Rather, the left hand has a subsidiary role, while the right hand alternates subtle emphases in its “Scotch snap” figures, which helps to call the listener’s attention to the implied descending line G♯-F♯-E-D♯-C♯-B:

Like Arrau, Gould slows down in mm. 7-8 to prepare the upcoming diminished seventh harmony. However, I do not sense an embodied crescendo from the thumb to the fifth finger in the right-hand broken diminished seventh harmony itself; rather, most of the weight of the gesture remains on the thumb. Then, the left-hand echo of the harmony seems to enter too soon, as if eager to reestablish some normative pulse. Indeed, in imitating Gould’s regularly-recurring circular clockwise motions in his upper body throughout mm. 1-11, it dawned upon me that, with the exception of mm. 7-8, he is marking an almost constant pulse with each revolution, even across the tempo change in m. 9; that is, the quarter-note pulse in the Vivace roughly becomes the eighth-note pulse in the Adagio. Bazzana (1997: 189) observes that Gould would sometimes employ this principle of proportional tempo (albeit never with truly rigid mathematical precision) to suggest rhythmic continuity between independent movements. But it is easy to see why Gould would also apply the same principle when a tempo change occurs within this particular movement from a late Beethoven sonata, as he explains:

Sometimes, because so much happens so quickly in the late Beethoven scores, the individual movements are surprisingly brief – the transitions from one point to another no longer seem structurally independent as they do in the sonatas of Mozart, but rather the whole architectural design is compressed into one indivisible factor. (Roberts 126, emphasis added)
Due to his primary concern with achieving the impression of overall rhythmic continuity, Gould refrains from strongly articulating the diminished seventh harmony in m. 9 as a significant event of interruption. Moreover, he minimizes the local dynamic contrasts in the secondary theme, playing at a fairly uniform volume throughout. Beneath the surface uniformity, however, Gould’s gestures reveal that he experiences some variability in the musical flow. For example, his repetitive circular motions are abandoned in mm. 12-13, where he instead leans his torso to the left with the descending arpeggio in the first half of each measure, and then to the right with the ascending arpeggio in the second half. The change in gestural pattern helps to highlight these arpeggios as the first instance in the movement where single harmonies are allowed to reverberate for a considerable amount of time. Gould also “floats” his left hand after playing the downbeat of m. 13, feeling the resonance of the novel D♯ major harmony here:

![Image of Gould playing the piano with music notation]

Figure 6.1. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 13: Gould

Whereas Gould actively sways his torso left and right several times in m. 14 to convey the sense of lilt created by the tortuously aspiring treble line and the syncopated chords in the left-hand part, he gradually leans to the left with the scalar descent at the beginning of m. 15 and then to the right as the scale rises. Of course, this means that Gould’s gestural trajectory in m. 15 is similar to that of mm. 12-13, perhaps underscoring the fact that pianists are naturally conditioned to associate registral descent and ascent with leftward and rightward motion, respectively. Furthermore, it may not be entirely coincidental that the expansive falling-then-rising gesture in these three measures essentially embellishes bass tones that articulate the dominant: F♯-D♯-B. In

---

any case, Gould certainly emphasizes the dominant arrival by lingering over the first two left-hand Bs in m. 15. But then, strangely, the *sfiorzando* low B is barely audible. However, this may be a good example of what Bazzana calls a “negative accent” (1997: 205), whereby Gould draws attention to something by reducing the volume.

Although the development section is supposed to be played at the original *Vivace* tempo, Gould decides to launch himself into a noticeably faster tempo. Bazzana attributes this decision to the “conspicuously sharpward harmonic motion that characterizes the development” (ibid., 176), which produces a sense of mounting tension that Gould seeks to enhance with the more hectic pacing. As the development begins, Gould’s torso still makes relatively leisurely circular motions. But as the development progresses, Gould plays even faster (especially after the *sfp* markings present themselves in mm. 33ff), and his circular motions are transformed into more direct and energetic left-and-right swaying. Here, it is perhaps instructive to note that Gould once states in an interview with Jonathan Cott that “a slow tempo just by the weight of its duration makes you want to make more curves in the music” (1984: 59). For Gould, these “curves” seem to encompass various musical parameters, such as timing, dynamics, and articulation.2 And since his gestures also become less circular (that is, less curvy) as the tempo increases, it appears that his statement may reflect an embodied understanding of music.

At the *forte* restatement of the primary theme, Gould does not struggle to project the treble part in the high register; he simply allows it to be overwhelmed by the powerful broken octaves in the left hand. Perhaps this is because he finds the now complete descending bass line from E to E more interesting to bring out. And indeed, it is worth noting that due to his early training on the organ, Gould tends to “see everything as it relates to the bass line” (Roberts 189). Moreover, being a left-handed pianist like Gould, I can certainly appreciate the feeling of sheer physical satisfaction in letting my dominant hand plunge into the keyboard to generate colossal reverberations at this transformative return of the primary theme. Then, disregarding Beethoven’s *piano* marking from the second beat of m. 52, Gould projects the tenor line quite loudly in mm. 53-56 and maintains this *forte* level when the soprano answers in mm. 55-57. Furthermore, because Gould ignores the *piano* markings in the return of the secondary theme as

---

2 At this point in the interview, Gould is explaining that it is possible to play in the most straightforward manner at any tempo, without any need to “slow down or soften down or make the phrases *legato*, as opposed to upright and non-*legato* previously” (Cott 58). But then, he concedes that this manner of playing is easier to achieve at a faster tempo.
well, there is a palpable sense of urgency in obstinately refusing to allow the music to lose any
dynamic energy.

This energy finally culminates in the extraordinary C major moment in mm. 61-62, which Gould
describes as the “dramatic heart” of the movement in the introduction to his televised
performance. His gestures definitely confirm the significance he accords to the moment; this is
the only spot in the entire movement where Gould “flicks” his head vigorously several times to
embody the punctuating power of the solid chords. Meanwhile, the arpeggios are conducted with
decisive “flicks” in his left hand whenever possible. However, by far the most noteworthy
gesture that Gould makes in this movement occurs on the last chord of m. 62, which is marked
sforzando; he “slashes” his left hand upward so quickly that it appears like a blur next to his face
in the following snapshot:

![Figure 6.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 62: Gould (1964)](image)

Indeed, in a televised performance of the first movement of Op. 109 from 1966, which Gould
gave after a lengthy interview with Humphrey Burton, he makes an even more extravagant
“slashing” gesture at this exact spot, launching his left arm high into the air:

![Figure 6.3. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 62: Gould (1966)](image)
It is as if Gould were conducting a resounding harmony played by an entire imaginary orchestra. And this may well be precisely his intention, as he explains: “Always in the back of my mind… there has been a substitute sonority such as orchestra or string quartet, to which I have tried to relate whatever I am doing” (Roberts 260). In his introduction to the 1964 performance, Gould mentions two major structural features that likely inspire such a massive “_tutti_ gesture” here. First, he points out that Beethoven, throughout the whole sonata, generally tends to explore only “the nearest relatives in the diatonic orbit” of E major (first and third movements) and E minor (second movement), which is why the abovementioned C major moment, as a rare instance of distant exploration, is so arresting. Second, he insightfully observes that the G♭-G♯-G♭ motion in the bass line in mm. 60-62 encapsulates the E major-E minor-E major trajectory across the three movements (see page 77). Therefore, Gould’s _tutti_ gesture, which confirms the reattainment of the tonic, may be read as possessing the connotation of regaining strength after a disorienting episode; indeed, this would be an apposite description for the overall progression of the sonata as well.

Having delivered the climax of the movement, Gould reestablishes his pattern of circular motions in m. 63, where he finds it appropriate to follow Beethoven’s _piano_ indication in order to convey a more relaxed mood. At the start of the coda, he brings out the exchanges between the soprano and tenor extremely clearly. One notable technique that Gould employs to achieve this remarkable textural clarity is the subtle breaking of the left-hand vertical intervals in mm. 68-69 (see Example 6.2) and mm. 72-73, which helps to separate the tenor from the bass.

![Example 6.2. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, mm. 66-69: Gould](image)

Gould’s approach to mm. 75-76 is similar to mine; he lets his right hand remain close to the keyboard throughout, while his left hand “floats” upward at the rests. Recall that I carry out the same actions to feel both the importance of the rests and the underlying harmonic continuity that
still operates across these rests. (However, it was my left hand that remains relatively still, while my right hand “floats” upward.) Gould’s rendition of the chorale-like passage (mm. 78-85), despite being well phrased, comes across as being rather straightforward. For example, the soprano line is not voiced out, and, in contrast to the other three performances discussed in this study, I cannot sense any expressive reaching effort in m. 84 in Gould’s performance. (Nevertheless, he does appear to be using the soft pedal at this point, and this may reflect a desire to impart a special colour to the peak of the phrase.)

I think that Gould is highly sensitive to the poignancy of the C as the only non-diatonic presence in mm. 86-89 and m. 91; he imparts an unsettled quality to these measures largely by exaggerating the strong-weak metric organization within each measure. In contrast, when C finally yields to C in mm. 92ff, Gould plays more evenly to create a gently undulating character as the music rises to the stratospheric G-B figure, which he releases with a delicate “flick” (see Figure 6.4). As Gould holds the last chord, he “floats” his left hand and makes a counterclockwise circular motion with it, apparently conducting himself in order to feel the sustain of the chord throughout its prolonged duration.

![Figure 6.4. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, I, m. 97: Gould](image)

To summarize, Gould’s interpretive choices lend the first movement a sharply-defined global profile whereby the music builds toward a climax before concluding in a more tranquil state. In particular, by minimizing local contrasts (even when Beethoven indicates them in the score), Gould is able to avoid details that may distract the audience from grasping his conception of the
entire movement as a single trajectory. In the exposition, circular motions of the torso are rather pervasive, and can be regarded as a normative activity that embodies his preoccupation with preserving a strong sense of pulse, despite the change of tempo to *Adagio* for the secondary theme. Thus, the exposition serves the function of presenting the main materials of the musical discourse in a largely predictable, tensionless manner. It is only in the development section that tension truly arises, as reflected in the faster tempo and the transformation of Gould’s circular motions into more energetic swaying. After having built up to *forte* at the return of the primary theme, Gould is adamantly committed to maintaining this dynamic level, before eventually growing further to *fortissimo* at the climactic C major moment, where he makes noteworthy articulatory gestures to highlight the importance of the passage in the overall trajectory of the movement. In the coda, Gould’s circular motions become less prominent, capturing the calmer atmosphere that seems psychologically necessary after such an uncompromising buildup to the exhilarating climax. Overall then, it is evident that Gould, unlike the other three pianists, does not take advantage of the dramatic potential of the contrast between the primary and secondary themes in this movement; in fact, he downplays this contrast in order to achieve the global profile described above.

### 6.3 Second Movement

It is obvious that Gould decides to take Beethoven’s tempo indication for the second movement (*Prestissimo*) quite literally; his playing is breathtakingly fast, as if he treated the movement as a relentlessly driving toccata. In his introductory remarks to this performance of Op. 109, Gould expresses the view that although the second movement appears to be cast in sonata form, this is only a “cloak of propriety”; the music is actually “seething with an energy which has very little to do with the surface [sonata] form” primarily because of the underlying “motivic concentration”. He elaborates that “everything that happens in this movement relates very directly to one rather absurd five-note motive”: namely, the E-D-C-A-B motive presented in the bass at the outset. Given his preference for extreme tempi in general (Bazzana 1997: 164), it is not surprising that Gould would choose to convey his desire to capture the intense energy that he ascribes to the tight motivic construction of the movement through electrifyingly rapid playing.

The first part of the primary theme (mm. 1-8) is delivered with vigorous gestures, such as swiftly “flicking” the left hand upward after playing the longer-held octaves. Then, the second part of
the primary theme (mm. 9-24) is characterized by more fluid left-and-right swaying motion of
the torso, which will in fact come to pervade almost the entire movement. Therefore, the jagged
vitality of the opening eight measures could be seen as representing the forceful unbolting of the
floodgates to unleash a torrent of fluent, propulsive energy. Gould allows the pace to slacken
only slightly in m. 24 in order to acknowledge the perfect authentic cadence here, but he
immediately picks up his driving tempo in the transition, playing the repeated low Bs in mm. 26-
27 in an unyieldingly threatening manner (see pages 53-54).

Although Gould does not really make a crescendo through the first part of the secondary theme
(mm. 33-42), where the treble embarks upon an erratic ascending trajectory, he does stretch the
downbeat of m. 43 to emphasize the turning point in the musical flow (but without observing the
subito piano); the chromatically descending bass line in mm. 43-48 offers a counterbalance to
the preceding treble ascent. Of course, the soprano line in mm. 43-48 is also tracing a descending
course overall, but with notable periodic upward leaps that Gould embodies by raising his
eyebrows. This gesture becomes most pronounced at the wider leap at the end of m. 48:

Because of Gould’s exceptionally fast tempo, it becomes possible to hear the entire closing
theme (mm. 57-65) as one reverberating harmony – that is, the dominant of B minor – which is
then resolved decisively in m. 66. At the start of the development section, Gould brings out the
return of the bass motive (B-A-G-E-Fs) quite prominently, as it is about to be transferred to the
treble and treated canonically. Rather than making a diminuendo into m. 70, Gould propels
himself into this measure before immediately lowering the volume, abruptly “slashing” his head
downward and slightly “flicking” his right wrist upward as he does so. Overall, these gestural
dynamics evoke in my mind an image of a bright flame suddenly being snuffed out:
Gould’s extraordinary ability to clarify contrapuntal textures is brought to the foreground in mm. 70-82, where he skilfully projects both voices of the right-hand canon as equally important participants in an engaging dialogue. Then, like Arrau, Gould does not rely on dynamic contrasts to distinguish between the different voices in mm. 83-96; as Bazzana (1997: 205) notes, Gould generally prefers to achieve this aim through a variety of nuances in articulation and phrasing. For example, he accentuates the inner-voice F♯ in m. 92 to effectively call the listener’s attention to the start of a chain of suspensions. Ignoring the fermata sign in m. 96, Gould does not take any time to prepare the upcoming retransition (mm. 97-104), which the other three pianists render as an especially delicate pianissimo moment. In a radio interview with Alan Rich in 1959, Gould mentions that “to linger unduly over anything would be to take away from a sort of overall unity of things” (Roberts 135). It is probably for this reason that he preserves fairly tight rhythmic discipline throughout the retransition and then launches himself into the recapitulation without any pause.

In the recapitulation, Gould notably allows minor departures from his strict tempo in playing the significantly-recomposed transition (mm. 120-131). First, he takes a slight amount of time to prepare the piano arrival of this material, which is remarkable for being initially presented in an optimistic C major guise in mm. 120-123. However, the music soon plunges into the low register (m. 124), and, as if infected by the darker quality of this register, becomes harmonically distorted as it gradually rises in a stretto-like fashion, now inexorably inclining toward the tonic E minor.
In light of this new development, Gould plays progressively more slowly, perhaps to express a reluctance to accept the unfortunate turn of events, especially after the soothing promise of C major. In the coda, he conveys a similar reluctance in mm. 168-169, which offer a poignant harmonized echo of the forceful octaves in mm. 166-167 (see page 131). By playing somewhat under tempo here, Gould, like Arrau, seems to be highlighting a brief moment of clinging hesitation before finally being swept off by a powerful current. He finishes the movement by swiftly “flicking” both hands from the keyboard:

![Figure 6.7. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, II, m. 177: Gould](image)

To summarize, Gould maintains a consistent breakneck pace almost throughout the second movement. With regard to this fact, it may be relevant to note that, according to Gould, “when we’re feeling belligerent and persuaded of the inevitability of our course, there is but one truth and consistency is its due” (Roberts 111). Indeed, his gestures seem to reflect such a belligerent consistency. In particular, by imitating the frequent swaying motion of his torso, I came to appreciate how much energy is actually expended in carrying out this seemingly extraneous activity, and I could better understand the sense of assertive urgency that is likely motivating it. In spite of the pervasive high energy, however, I believe that Gould’s interpretation can still be understood as capturing the “psychological invertible counterpoint” that operates across the movement (see page 60); the energy of the exposition and recapitulation seems bright, like a fierce flame, but the same energy manifests itself differently in the development section, for it becomes darkened by the unforgiving bass tremolos. (Recall Gould’s gestures in heading toward m. 70.) Such a reading may not be mere speculation on my part, as Gould remarks to Humphrey
Burton in the 1966 interview that in playing Beethoven, he generally prefers to convey the “spinefulness” of the music through a consistency of tempo, which in turn necessitates the use of inflections of colour to create contrasts. On the other hand, he also believes that unexpected harmonic moments may warrant departures from strict tempo, as evidenced, for instance, by his pacing of the transitional material in the recapitulation.

6.4 Third Movement

In a CBC television broadcast from 1961 titled *The Greatness of Beethoven*, Gould remarks that Beethoven’s late works “often possess that special simplicity which is extracted from a moment of deepest contemplation” (Roberts 127). This probably explains why, in contrast to the weighty singing quality that the other three pianists seem to strive for in playing the third-movement variation theme, Gould presents an apparently more casual approach to the same material. In fact, Gould’s rendition of the theme from his 1956 Columbia recording of Beethoven’s last three piano sonatas has been criticized for being neither “*cantabile*” nor “with the innermost feeling” (Stegemann 1994: 5). I believe that such criticism may stem from the fact that Gould typically prefers to produce a detached articulation, and even his *legato* playing seldom involves anything much more than the slight linking of tones (Bazzana 1997: 216). Nevertheless, in the 1964 video performance that is the focus of this chapter, I feel that the variation theme does come across as being more sung out (albeit not through a velvety *legato* by any means), especially in comparison with how Gould has been playing up to this point. Furthermore, the theme is well phrased, and he appears to indulge in more *rubato* here than in any other passage in the preceding two movements (though this is still quite conservative when compared to the other three pianists). As Gould himself puts it, his general aim is “to be as expressive as possible within a very controlled framework of sound” (Roberts 193).

Gould does not fully take advantage of the operatic conception of the first variation. For instance, I cannot sense any reaching effort in his right hand that would reflect the vocal difficulty of attaining the high B in mm. 17, 19, and 21. Moreover, the ornamentation on the third beat of m. 19 is played precisely in time, which makes it sound far too compressed to suggest anything that a human voice would be capable of producing. However, Gould definitely seems interested in pointing out the heterophony in mm. 25-26 by voicing the top note of the
left-hand chords on the second and third beats of these measures in order to bring out a hidden linear dimension that is elaborated upon by the chromaticism in the soprano:


At the melodic peak in m. 29, Gould stretches the beat to highlight the stratospheric A, but at the same time minimizes the dynamic impact of the *sforzando* marking. These nuances combine to lend a kind of nonchalant grace, rather than a forthright expressiveness, to the moment.

In the second variation, Gould creates a wonderful sense of forward momentum in the beginning of each half (mm. 33-40, mm. 49-56) by bringing out the left-hand part more prominently; since he is holding the bass sixteenth note at the start of each beat beyond its notated value (through the use of both damper pedal and “finger pedal”), he is essentially producing a resonant, driving dotted rhythm. (This feature becomes much more noticeable in mm. 49-56, where I sense the left hand almost pushing to get ahead of the right hand.) Gould’s attention then shifts to the treble in mm. 41-48 and mm. 57-60. Nevertheless, he does not appear to be overly concerned about clarifying the intertwining upper lines in mm. 41-44, opting instead to project the underlying motion by ascending thirds that also informs mm. 45-48. In a similar way, I feel that the motive of three descending quarter notes in mm. 58-59 is not as easily audible as it is in Barenboim’s performance, and the treble line becomes slightly overshadowed by the left-hand chords in the final four measures of the variation. Overall then, even though Gould may not be paying close attention to the momentary polyphonic interplays, one notices in the way he shifts his attention from the bass in one section to the treble in another that he is in fact imposing his own vision of the entire variation as an unfolding dialogue between horizontal lines.

Up to this point in the third movement, Gould has been engaging in constant leisurely circular motions with his torso, which likely help him to embody the continuity of some fundamental
pulse across the theme and the first two variations. However, the third variation represents a radical departure; the circular motions stop abruptly as Gould launches into a tumultuous new tempo. Moreover, the gesture that Gould makes as he is about to begin the variation – namely, “floating” the left hand to a height before dropping it quickly onto the initial G♯ – effectively conveys a sudden burst of energy, perhaps not unlike the crack of the starter’s pistol in a race:

Figure 6.8. Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 109, III, m. 65: Gould

Despite the presence of various dynamic indications in the score, Gould’s playing comes across as being uniformly loud almost throughout the variation, such that I feel overwhelmed by an unrelenting density of sound. In addition, his remarkable agility of fingerwork may strike one as being “merely” mechanical. Yet, as Gould once perceptively points out, even “the most apparently mechanical manipulations... have a more profound level” (Roberts 278). Such a statement could be regarded as articulating the very premise that underlies Uhde’s ability to glimpse “a singing multitude” in the busy two-part texture of this variation (see page 66). In the last four measures, Gould reduces his tempo and volume substantially in order to ease into the next variation, subtly resuming his circular motions as he does so.

To me, Gould plays the fourth variation so exceptionally rapidly in his 1956 audio recording that it seems as if the tape has been accidentally fast-forwarded. However, his tempo in the 1964 video recording is more moderate, allowing the intricate contrapuntal texture of the variation to unfold more intelligibly. Moreover, Gould actually pays careful attention to Beethoven’s
slurring, as evidenced by the insertion of subtle articulatory gaps to delineate the beginning of a slur from the ending of the previous one. Indeed, because of his organ training, Gould possesses an unusual degree of sensitivity to the “space” between tones (Bazzana 1997: 220). In keeping with his tendency to minimize accents and sforzando markings, Gould’s buildup to fortissimo in mm. 107-108 is not characterized by any audibly protruding incisiveness. In fact, even the fortissimo arrival in m. 109 itself does not come across as a significant moment. It should not be surprising to learn that Gould’s interpretation of Beethoven’s music has been criticized for being “unconventional in accent” (Roberts 193), and the seemingly arbitrary hesitations in the second half of this variation (especially during the pulsating harmonies) are also a case in point; given Gould’s “inordinate fondness” for counterpoint (Bazzana 1997: 142), I feel that he may be attempting to generate rhythmic interest in order to make up for the lessened contrapuntal complexity of this material.

In playing the fugato fifth variation, Gould preserves a strict tempo almost throughout, and his circular motions transform into more direct sideward swaying to mark the quicker pulse. At the same time, he conveys an intense seriousness through his facial expression; indeed, the eyebrows, which are lowered and tightly drawn together, and the jaw, which is frequently thrust forward, are indicative of anger (Ekman 135-136):

Actually, I have the impression that Gould is delivering learned counterpoint with a kind of mock severity. Perhaps it would not be too farfetched to suggest that he is already providing us with a glimpse of a creative personality that is fond of inventing alter egos. Gould began experimenting with this idea in his writings from the mid-sixties (around the time this video performance was made), and the endeavour developed into the televised impersonation of
numerous fictitious characters, among which “Sir Nigel Twitt-Thornwaite” would probably embody the pedantic character that Gould imparts to the fifth variation most fittingly:

![Gould as Sir Nigel Twitt-Thornwaite, the “dean of British conductors”, 1980](image)

Figure 6.10. Gould as Sir Nigel Twitt-Thornwaite, the “dean of British conductors”, 1980

One other intriguing fact about this variation should be noted. In his interview with Jonathan Cott, Gould relates a revealing anecdote about how he practiced the challenging right-hand sixths and thirds in mm. 135-136. First, he placed several radios beside the piano and “turned them up full blast” (39), such that he could not hear the sound that he was producing on the piano, but could still be aware of the tactile sensations of playing. Then, he focused his attention on the easier left-hand part in order to allow the right hand to work out its technical difficulty without his conscious awareness of it. Although Gould is not specific about how much time he actually spent doing this, he does say that he carried out the exercise at varying tempi, so one may surmise that it must have been quite a repetitive task. Thus, despite Gould’s expressed preference for score study and rehearsal away from the instrument (Roberts 269), it cannot be denied that certain technical issues must still be resolved at the keyboard, and sometimes this even seems to entail a persistent physical effort. In fact, Gould admits that if he were not in physical contact with a piano at least once a month, he would stop sleeping properly (Cott 104). I find these details quite important because they allow me to understand that behind the facade of erudite polyphonic austerity and the perfect delivery of the sixths and thirds in mm. 135-136 in particular, there was an underlying process of highly creative preparation that reflected a necessarily – albeit begrudgingly acknowledged – embodied engagement with music.

---

Like in the third variation, Gould slows down in the last four measures of the fifth variation, notably taking time to reach for the downbeat peaks in mm. 149-151. (The effect is a kind of graceful aspiration reminiscent of his approach to m. 29 in the first variation.) There is therefore a sense of naturally unwinding into the sixth variation, where Gould resumses the circular motions with his torso. Unlike Barenboim, who sees the rhythmic diminution that governs the sixth variation as a continuous process of “becoming” and accordingly creates smooth transitions into increasingly active rhythmic values (see page 166), Gould seems to prefer presenting each stage of rhythmic subdivision as a clearly-defined step in a multi-step process. Once the bass trill starts sounding on the last beat of m. 168, he simply allows the powerful resonance of the low register to dominate the texture, producing the exhilarating effect of an elemental force that is threatening to drown out everything else at any moment. Needless to say, unlike Arrau and Barenboim, Gould does not make an obvious effort to clarify the underlying melodic frame of the right-hand figurations. After this treble suppression, however, he does offer a more distinct bell-like sound in the upper line in mm. 177ff, where, like Arrau, he tends to sustain the tones through the eighth rests. Gould decreases the tempo in mm. 184-187 in order to transition organically into the return of the theme, as the other three pianists also do. However, I suspect that his deceleration becomes so substantial by m. 187 that he perhaps loses track of the metric organization, and he actually omits the second beat of this measure (bracketed in Example 6.4). Incidentally, I do not think that Gould can be accused of reading the score carelessly, as this metric anomaly is not present in his 1956 audio recording of the sonata.
Gould’s tempo for the return of the theme is approximately thirty percent slower than his tempo for the initial statement of the theme, and this helps to lend more singing substance to each tone. Nevertheless, he does not unequivocally bring the soprano to the foreground as the most prominent lyrical line, but rather aims for a more egalitarian interaction among all the voices in the chorale-like texture. In fact, Gould seems to pay greater attention to the bass and inner voices (especially from m. 198 onward) than he did when playing the theme the first time. Unlike Barenboim, who relishes the silence that signifies the “death” of the final chord (see page 168), Gould uses his left hand to make an elaborate gesture, conducting himself to cut off the decaying sound at a definite point in time.

To summarize, although Gould’s approach to the third movement as a whole reflects a blend of lyrical and contrapuntal inclinations, the latter seems to be a more overriding concern. In addition to the skilful polyphonic playing that he demonstrates in the third, fourth, and fifth variations, Gould also tends to emphasize a polyphonic dimension even when the texture is not obviously polyphonic. For instance, in playing the theme itself, Gould’s tone is certainly singing, but not richly so; he refrains from presenting a clear-cut melody-and-accompaniment conception, opting instead to attend to the lower voices as valuable participants in a complex texture and to bring them out quite distinctly in the return of the theme. The second variation provides a more extreme example; here, Gould seeks to create the impression that there is an unfolding dialogue between two lines by somewhat arbitrarily bringing out the bass in one section, then shifting his focus to the treble in the next. In tandem with his highlighting of contrapuntal possibilities,
Gould often suppresses the potential for lyrical expression. For example, in the operatic first variation, Gould largely avoids making an expressive reaching effort for high pitches as a gesture of vocal mimicry, and he delivers the ornamentation in m. 19 in a straightforward, unvocal manner. Moreover, in the sixth variation, the long process of melodic elaboration through rhythmic diminution is articulated in discrete stages, thus deterring the audience from grasping the cumulative effect of songful transformation.

6.5 Conclusion

Despite his unconventional interpretive choices, I believe that Gould’s performance of Op. 109 can still be considered as a romance narrative, albeit one that is radically different from what was proposed in Chapter 2. Indeed, Gould himself remarks in his 1966 interview with Humphrey Burton that he has “recomposed” this sonata. First of all, Gould believes that Beethoven’s “structural notions were based on the coalition of opposites” (Cott 58). However, due to his general conception of each movement in a late Beethoven sonata as being an indivisible whole (see page 171), Gould minimizes the thematic contrasts within the first movement of Op. 109, aiming instead for a broader perspective where the entire first movement is sharply pitted against the entire second movement. Then, the third movement becomes the site for the “coalition of opposites”, but one that privileges counterpoint, rather than song, as the path toward a vision of unity in diversity.

In the first movement, Gould does not really introduce a quest for song. The primary theme may initially come across as being an incipient song, especially with Gould’s projection of the implied descending hexachord in the treble. However, it is the complete descent from E to E in the bass that actually receives more attention at the restatement of the primary theme. In other words, Gould provides multiple perspectives on the same material, rather than aiming for a consistency of treble-dominated texture that one would expect of a song. Indeed, he seems to be most in his element when he can bring out the exchanges of fragments from the primary theme between the soprano and the tenor at the start of the coda. It thus becomes evident that what Gould is ultimately after is the enriching pluralism of counterpoint, rather than the apparently self-serving monologue of song.

Nonetheless, a diversity of viewpoints can also lead to conflict, as the ferocious counterpoint of the second movement amply illustrates. Therefore, this movement can be regarded as a gruelling
test of one’s resolve: Can one still remain firm in one’s belief in the benefits of diversity even when one is confronted with an almost relentless violence that stems precisely from difference? At the end of the day, I think that Gould answers this question in the affirmative, and he presents the third-movement variation theme not as perfected beauty or spiritual truth, but simply a refined human creation that is made possible through the collaboration of multiple voices. That is, Gould refuses to entertain the notion that Beethoven’s late works should be delivered as “calcified, impersonal constructions of a soul impervious to the desires and torments of existence” (Stegemann 6). There is no absolute triumph of the spirit here, only an affirmation of human complexity, which Gould chooses to embrace in all its imperfection.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation has been to investigate the experience of performance from the performer’s perspective. It put forward the concept of gestural narrative as a viable way of taking into account the performer’s embodied subjectivity, which has traditionally been overlooked in performance research. With Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in E Major, Op. 109 as the focal point, there were two principal questions that I sought to address:

Question 1: How can the performer’s musical experience during performance be understood as a gestural narrative?

Question 2: To what extent are different performers likely to interpret the gestural-narrative potentialities afforded by a certain piece of music in a similar way?

These questions highlighted the crucial fact that embodied musical meaning in the Western art music tradition emerges from the intimate relationship between the performer and the score. Accordingly, I began my research by examining in great detail what the score of Op. 109 afforded to the performer who embodies this piece of music (Chapter 2). In particular, I proposed that, based on the overall dynamics of the interaction between contrapuntal and lyrical tendencies, which were encapsulated in certain instrumental gestures, this sonata could be understood as a romance narrative. Then, Chapters 3 to 6 explored the other side of the equation: namely, how different performers chose to engage with the gestural-narrative potentialities afforded by the score in their performances of Op. 109, which reflected their individual musical values. In this concluding chapter, I discuss the key insights that can be gleaned from the fruitful dialogue between the performer and the score, progressing from the moment-to-moment gestural experience to the global narrative level of musical understanding.

7.1 Emergent Gestural Meanings

I have shown that performer’s gestures could be considered from first-person and third-person perspectives. As I mentioned at the start of Chapter 3, an embodied approach to score-based
analysis tended to privilege instrumental gestures made from the first-person perspective, whereas video-based observation tended to privilege expressive gestures as viewed from the third-person perspective. It was the act of (self-)imitation that truly helped to bridge the gap between the two perspectives, thus allowing for a more empathic understanding of the performer’s gestural experience.

Of course, pianists are generally quite aware of the tactile sensations that arise in playing the piano because this awareness is essential in helping them to maximize the efficiency of their instrumental gestures. Moreover, each pianist is necessarily conditioned to develop a particular way of engaging with the instrument based on his or her own unique anatomical features. For instance, because of his exceptionally large hands, Arrau could afford to play a strong octave by placing the third, fourth, and fifth fingers on one note and the thumb on the other (see Figure 4.16). Meanwhile, Barenboim, with his smaller hands and relatively short fifth fingers, was highly sensitive to the expressiveness of spanning a wide interval (see page 167). Nevertheless, I would suggest that pianists probably differ greatly in the degree to which they are aware of how their gestures (whether instrumental or expressive) might come across to an observer. For instance, Arrau, who would practice with a mirror and would even use film to study his own technique (Horowitz 99), emphasizes that the performer’s gestures can actually influence the audience’s perception of the music and as such deserve some conscious attention from the performer (see page 118). At the other extreme, Gould, who sought to minimize any awareness of the physicality of piano playing, paradoxically produced all kinds of idiosyncratic gestures (such as conducting with his left hand) that he actually found impossible to eliminate from his performances (Roberts 334). It is Barenboim (2006) who seems to express the most neutral position: he remarks that the pianist’s body language should simply be a natural part of his or her involvement with the music, but it should not reflect a conscious attempt to “choreograph” the music.

Notwithstanding the varying degree of interest that different pianists exhibit with regard to how their gestures might be interpreted by an observer, the present study has demonstrated that the dynamics of these gestures offered a valuable glimpse into the richly meaningful embodied experience of each pianist. Although there is always a multiplicity of possible meanings for a certain gesture, the fact that, in the context of this research, all gestures were made during the performance of the same pre-composed piece of music helped to narrow down the possibilities
for gestural interpretation. For example, it would be highly counterintuitive to suggest that a huge “slashing” gesture made after releasing a fortissimo chord conveyed timidity. Furthermore, when more than one performer made the same gesture in exactly the same place in the music, this provided some evidence that the musical moment in question was more likely to have a particular embodied meaning rather than another. Of course, it was through the combination of kinesthetic imitation, introspection, the awareness of harmonic-structural context, and the consultation of various documents about and by the different performers that I could better understand what this embodied meaning might be. Based on this experience, I suggest that the following plausible generalizations can be made about the performers’ gestural dynamics in playing Op. 109, as categorized according to Laban’s eight effort actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFORT ACTION</th>
<th>MEANINGS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| punching      | a) strong, solid attack  
               | b) marcato sound        | a) Barenboim: I, downbeat chord of m. 61  
                                  |                       | b) Arrau: II, closing theme |
| pressing      | a) legato or projected singing sound  
               | b) sustained, weighty emphasis | a) Chongvattanakij: III, theme  
                                  |                       | b) Barenboim: I, sfp markings in mm. 33-41 |
| slashing      | a) reaction to strong attack  
               | b) forceful release       | a) Barenboim: I, downbeat chord of m. 61  
                                  |                       | b) Gould: I, s’chord in m. 62 |
| wringing      | a) embodies turn figures  
               | b) conveys suffering or urgency  
               | c) impression of Behung | a) Chongvattanakij: I, last beat of m. 11  
                                  |                       | b) Arrau: I, last chord of m. 60  
                                  |                       | c) Barenboim: III, tied notes in mm. 31-32 |
| dabbing       | a) non-legato, twinkling sound  
               | b) conveys playfulness       | a) Arrau: I, mm. 63-64  
                                  |                       | b) Chongvattanakij: III, lighter texture in Var. 2 |
| gliding       | a) embodies chromatic slides  
               | b) fine control of key descent  
               | c) sustaining with intensity | a) Arrau: I, end of m. 13  
                                  |                       | b) Chongvattanakij: III, last chord of movement  
                                  |                       | c) Arrau: I, m. 42, anticipating strong recapitulation |
| flicking      | a) sharp, sudden emphasis  
               | b) feeling the “space” of rests | a) Gould: I, head “flicks” with chords in mm. 61-62  
                                  |                       | b) Chongvattanakij: III, RH rests in mm. 61-64 |
| floating      | a) weightless, buoyant sound  
               | b) sustained, expansive resonance  
               | c) “breathing” to demarcate an important event | a) Chongvattanakij: I, head “floats” right in m. 0  
                                  |                       | b) Barenboim: I, resonance of chords in mm. 75-76  
                                  |                       | c) Arrau: III, RH “floats” upward before plunging into downbeat chord of m. 169 |

Table 7.1. Gestural meanings of Laban’s effort actions in performances of Op. 109

Given that piano playing is a sedentary activity, each pianist’s movements tended to be fairly localized, and I found Laban’s effort actions to be especially useful in describing actions that were confined to specific parts of the body. However, I discovered that “zooming out” and observing the overall posture could also prove to be instructive. In general, there were two key postures that pianists displayed: sitting with a straight back or leaning toward the keyboard.
Sitting upright can make one feel taller and more solidly supported from the core, thus conveying power and authority (for example, see Barenboim’s postural change in Figure 5.6). On the other hand, leaning closer to the keyboard makes one feel smaller, which can signify a lighter approach (as, for example, in how Arrau played the sudden drop to piano in the concluding eight measures of the fifth variation in the third movement) or greater warmth – either in a tenderly, intimate sense (such as what Arrau demonstrated in the third-movement variation theme) or a passionately intense one (as in how Gould approached m. 70 in the second movement).

On the other hand, “zooming in” to observe each performer’s facial expressions also gave me a tremendous amount of information that helped to qualify or amplify the impression that I gathered from other moving body parts. (In fact, in my early video observation sessions, I constantly found myself drawn to the performer’s face first, and I would automatically look for clues into what he might be experiencing there.) In analyzing facial expressions, I was informed by Ekman’s extensive research in this particular area as well as by Laban’s concept of drives. For example, consider the facial expression that I exhibited just before launching into the minor-mode second movement (see Figure 3.12). Based on specific features such as glaring eyes and tightly pressed lips, Ekman would suggest that this is an expression of anger. And by taking a more holistic, intuitive view of the same facial expression, one could discern an incomplete effort where the missing motion factor is space; Laban would call this the “passion drive” (see Table 1.4). Both approaches to analyzing facial expressions provided important insights into the emotional state of a performer at a particular moment in the performance. But once the emotional significance of the moment is registered, it actually comes to have an influence beyond its immediate context, as will be presently discussed.

### 7.2 Gestural-Narrative Dialectic

While it is essential to consider the meaning of individual gestures, a performance should not and, in fact, cannot be experienced as a haphazard series of discrete gestures. As Barenboim discerningly opines:

The significance of a musical statement lies not only in what it expresses but also in its temporary function within the structure. A phrase is the result of what went before, and the precursor of what is to follow. Therefore it cannot be expressed as something isolated: it must be put in relation to the whole. If one phrase represented the totality of a composition, it would not require the compromise which is the basis of any relationship. How often, when you experience a moment of extreme happiness, or extreme clarity of vision, do you wish you could preserve that moment – yet
There are two key ideas that Barenboim seems to be getting at here. First, he is calling attention to the inherent interconnectivity among momentary experiences. As Berger explains, “We live in the *thickness* of a living present in which the as-yet-unfulfilled expectations of the near future and the just-past-certainties of the recent past form an undivided whole” (1997: 469, original emphasis). This means that there can be no isolated musical gestures; in the fluidity of the performer’s lived experience, each gesture has a tendency to be understood as arising from preceding gestures and evolving into succeeding ones. This is why the emotional meaning of a gesture is not temporally fixed to the unfolding of that gesture; the meaning still lurks in the performer’s mind, just as, for example, the meaning of this sentence would still lurk in the reader’s mind and inform how he or she understands the preceding sentence and engages with the next one. And even when the same gestural pattern is repeated, it would not be experienced as being static or disconnected. For instance, when there are multiple circular motions of progressively shorter durations and smaller sizes, such as what Barenboim traced with his torso at the start of the first movement, the overall sensation is not a series of disparate circles, but rather an overarching powerful spiral toward the centre of a vortex (which, in this case, was the diminished seventh harmony on the downbeat of m. 9). Thus, each gesture is experienced as “reaching out” toward other gestures, striving for narrative-like progression through time.

Nevertheless, this is certainly not all that a performer experiences, as cogent performances must be informed by a broad vision as well. In other words, the tactical approach of moment-to-moment gestural evolution described above must be complemented by a strategic approach that is based on the awareness of how various gestures fit together in the larger scheme of things. This is the second key idea that Barenboim mentions in the quotation above; recall his statement that a phrase “must be put in relation to the whole [structure]”. To translate this into the terms used in this dissertation, a gesture must be understood in relation to the whole narrative.

It is relevant to note that Arrau, Barenboim, and Gould all express some preoccupation with a larger governing framework in their performances. For Arrau and Barenboim, the consideration of narrative is specifically mentioned as being important for their understanding of a piece of music. For example, in his conversation with Joseph Horowitz, Arrau describes in detail how he applies the Faust legend to Liszt’s B-Minor Sonata (137-142) and the Greek myth of Leander
and Hero to the composer’s Second Ballade (142-146). In a discussion with audience members after his masterclass with Lang Lang, Barenboim (2006) explicitly states that, ultimately, music does tell a story, and the performer serves as the storyteller. And even though I did not come across any specific references to narrative in the documents about or by Gould that I consulted, it is evident that he is quite concerned with clarifying the overall architecture of a work, and he actually does not consider this endeavour to be a purely rational one. In an interview with Alan Rich, Gould remarks that he always strives for “emotional unity” (Roberts 135) in his playing.1 Furthermore, this emotional unity is achieved through a purposeful goal-oriented evolution, rather than through stasis or absolutely rigid consistency. According to Bazzana, Gould’s view of musical form was essentially dynamic and discursive, rather than mechanical.2 Thus, it may be reasonable to suggest that Gould understands emotional unity as having a narrative quality.

It should become clear that what emerges from the foregoing discussion is the significance of emotions as the “common currency” in the gestural-narrative dialectic. We have seen that the emotional meaning of a particular gesture tends to radiate beyond the duration of the gesture itself due to the inherent thickness of the performer’s lived experience. This is the bottom-up process that is complemented by the top-down process whereby a narrative provides a means of organizing the emotional trajectory across a piece of music. I suggest that having a narrative in mind allows the performer to evaluate the relative emotional significance of each gesture within the entire musical discourse, so as to avoid the kind of shortsighted “rage over a lost penny” phenomenon that can arise from a purely tactical attitude to performance.

I should also mention that even if such gestural-narrative dialectic could be discerned in all performances, performers would probably vary widely in how they choose to balance gestural and narrative thinking. For example, compare my approach to the first half of the fourth variation in the third movement with Arrau’s. When I played this passage, the constant left-and-right “floating” of my head reflected a preoccupation with the unfolding of each swirling figure (see page 105). Although Arrau’s head engaged in the same “floating” gesture in playing this passage, the gesture was made much less frequently, thus reflecting his concentration on the

---

1 I think that Barenboim would be able to relate to this remark very well, as Nadia Boulanger taught him that musical structure can not only be perceived rationally, but also emotionally (Barenboim 2002: 32).

2 Bazzana relates how Gould justifies his decision to omit certain repeats in his recording of Bach’s Goldberg Variations by saying that “you can’t possibly fight the battle twice” (1997: 96).
interweaving of longer lines (see page 137). Arguably, it can be interpreted that I was more concerned with the local gestural progression, whereas Arrau possessed a broader view that aspired toward greater narrative-like flow. And as an extreme case of narrative emphasis, consider how Gould tried to render the whole first movement as one indivisible trajectory (see page 176). Here, individual gestures still had important functions, but these functions were quite clearly defined and tightly regulated by Gould’s conception of an overarching trajectory, which could be described as a gestural-narrative curve in the following way: constant circular motion to establish the musical flow, energetic swaying to build up tension, “flicks” and a massive “slash” to articulate the climactic moment, and finally resuming circular motion at the resolution.3

Overall then, I propose that gestural-narrative dialectic can be understood as a continuum: while some performers are more inclined to attend to the bottom-up process of gestural evolution (see Figure 7.1a), others are more predisposed to concentrate on the top-down process of narrative organization (Figure 7.1b). This continuum already gives us a glimpse of how individual values can contribute to the shaping of the performer’s gestural-narrative experience.

![Figure 7.1. Gestural-narrative dialectic as a continuum](image)

### 7.3 Gestural Narrative and Individual Values

Arrau, Barenboim, and Gould would all agree on one crucial point: the necessity for the performer to be strongly independent. For example, Arrau stresses that “it’s dangerous to yield to the taste of a group of people” (Horowitz 17, original emphasis); Barenboim writes that “an

---

3 Moreover, Gould’s tendency to emphasize the slower-moving lower voices, rather than the melody, helped to call attention to long-span modulatory and cadential processes (Bazzana 1997: 146), thus reflecting his preference for projecting large supra-gestural units.
artist who is willing to compromise on artistic issues automatically slows down his own possibilities for development” (2002: 167); and Gould thinks that “for the mature artist, the notion that there is a consensus which must be adhered to, more or less at all costs… [is] ridiculous” (Roberts 272). In practice, however, the analysis of the video performances of Op. 109 revealed that these affirmations of individuality did not result in interpretations that were radically different at the most fundamental level. This was because independence is ultimately a question of degree. As Barenboim perceptively puts it, “Different performances are not just different interpretations but often different aspects of the same interpretation” (2002: 210, emphasis added).

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that these performers appeared to demonstrate a remarkable degree of consensus for certain basic principles operative at both the gestural and narrative levels. As already summarized in Table 7.1, some generalizations can be put forward with regard to the embodied musical meaning of a particular gesture. For instance, for all performers, a “flicking” gesture would not be associated with a sustained sound, just as a “floating” gesture would not be associated with a sudden, sharp emphasis. I would contend that such observations seemed to point toward the presence of a shared vocabulary of embodied musical understanding. Nevertheless, even if a shared gestural vocabulary among performers truly existed, it would not be correct to equate this with a shared style of gestural expression. Indeed, performers could differ greatly with regard to such matters as: where in the music they would place a certain gesture, which parts of the body would be involved in making the gesture, and how intense that gesture would be. But these individual variations tended to reflect individual understanding of the musical ebb and flow at a local level, and I found it more significant to observe that performers would still generally agree on what the key moments in the piece were. For example, in the first movement, each performer made his most noteworthy gesture around mm. 61-62: Arrau actually made a “wringing” gesture with his arms on the chord that immediately precedes m. 61, conveying palpable expectant urgency; Barenboim “punched” into the downbeat chord of m. 61 and immediately straightened his back in a strong reaction to it; I made a robust “flicking” action with my entire upper body on the downbeat of m. 62; and Gould made an immense “slashing” gesture with his left hand after playing the sforzando chord in m. 62. Despite the use of various gestures at slightly different points in the music, all four performers appeared to share
the same understanding of this extraordinary excursion into C major as the climactic moment of the movement.

Of course, agreement among performers in projecting certain moments in Op. 109 as being more important implied that all of them were probably applying a similar structuring framework on a large scale. I already proposed that this large-scale structuring framework is the narrative, and specifically, I found that all four performances of Op. 109 could be understood as a romance narrative. Indeed, I believe that, to a great extent, the musical information conveyed through the score of Op. 109 already made it quite likely that the piece as a whole would receive such a narrative interpretation (see Chapter 2). Moreover, recall that the romance is essentially based on the trajectory of overcoming some form of adversity in order to fulfil a quest. Intriguingly, I discovered that performers are inclined to describe Beethoven’s music according to this very trajectory, from Arrau’s “endless struggle toward victory” (see page 145) and Barenboim’s “emergence from darkness into the light” (see page 169) to Gould’s “coalition of opposites” (see page 188), which is highly reminiscent of how Frye himself conceives of the romance (see page 77). As with any other narrative, the trajectory of the romance narrative is undeniably tied up to considerations of value and is thus inevitably bound to evoke strong emotional reactions. For example, encountering adversity (which, after all, is something that hinders one’s pursuit of what one values) can cause frustration, confusion, or depression, whereas conquering adversity (and thereby achieving what one values) can result in joy, amusement, or even transcendent bliss. Despite these varying shades of emotions, it is essential to note that the prevailing valence and emotional arousal displayed during large sections of Op. 109 tended to be quite consistent among performers, thus pointing to a shared narrative. For instance, whether exhibiting noble displeasure, forthright anger, or a kind of insistent belligerence bordering on rage, no performer portrayed the exposition and recapitulation of the second movement as a positive or low-arousal situation.

I suggested that the romance narrative by Arrau, Barenboim, and me was based on the quest for song, whereas Gould’s romance narrative was based on the quest for counterpoint. Here, it may be fruitful to briefly compare the performances by Arrau and Gould in particular because I think that they represented the manifestation of highly contrasting individual values. Arrau expresses a deep concern for lyrical expression (see page 145), and this concern seemed to permeate all aspects of his performance of Op. 109, from his almost constant projection of a resonant singing
tone (that often threatened the existence of notated rests) to his tendency to connect different sections together to achieve a larger flow. Musicians who were acquainted with Arrau, such as Barenboim and Ohlsson, described him as a man of firm musical convictions, and the remarkable quality of lyrical consistency in Arrau’s performance struck me as being a fine reflection of his resolute character; he seemed to be single-mindedly focused on attaining the fulfilling lyricism of the third-movement variation theme. On the other hand, Gould tells Humphrey Burton in a 1966 interview that he is essentially an undogmatic person, and his tendency to disregard the primacy of the melody as well as his fondness for bringing out (or even arbitrarily imposing) contrapuntal textures in his performance of Op. 109 contributed to an overall impression of a strangely liberating open-endedness. In Gould’s performance, the goal was not to strive for absolute truth with an inflexible determination, but rather to experiment constantly in order to work out the right conditions for an enriching dialogue. In light of this, I was not surprised to come across Gould’s remark that “a performance is not a contest but a love affair” (Roberts 187).

7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

In taking into account the richness and complexity of the performer’s embodied experience in the moment of performance, this dissertation demonstrated that the concept of gestural narrative could potentially be a useful tool for performance research. However, due to the exploratory nature of the present study, much more work would need to be undertaken in order to flesh out the ideas that have been proposed. For instance, considering that only performances of Beethoven’s Op. 109 were analyzed here, I can foresee two possible areas of immediate interest for further research: How do different performers approach another work by Beethoven or a work by another composer? And how does a single performer approach works by different composers? Clearly, issues of gestural-narrative styles and strategies would be brought to the foreground when carrying out research in these areas. But underlying these issues is a more fundamental question regarding how the concept of gestural narrative could effectively contribute to the more in-depth examination of the powers and limitations of the performer’s

---

4 Barenboim simply states that Arrau “could be accused a little bit of being pedantic” (Horowitz 220), while Ohlsson is perhaps more frank: “Arrau feels so many things so absolutely strongly – there wasn’t any other way to hang that painting on the wall; once you got it, that was it” (ibid., 226).
agency in interacting with a piece of music (which would likely vary from performer to performer as well as from piece to piece).

Future research would also benefit from the enhanced use of technology. For example, rather than relying mostly on commercially available video recordings, a live performance could be carefully recorded; ideally, multiple motionless cameras should be placed at different spots, which would make it possible to observe the performer’s gestures from various perspectives at all times. Moreover, advanced motion analysis software could be employed to facilitate gesture analysis. Of course, the situation would become even more complicated if there were to be more than one performer on the stage. But certainly, this, too, is an intriguing avenue for further research: namely, how can the concept of gestural narrative be applied in a group setting? In particular, how do issues of group dynamics and entrainment affect the achievement of a shared gestural narrative in a chamber performance?

These are just a few of the exciting possibilities that await further exploration. Most importantly, however, one should keep in mind that the common motivation in all gestural-narrative research should be the desire to give voice to performers, whose embodied knowledge acquired through many years of practical experience can never be easily articulated, but nevertheless deserves and rewards close study.
Bibliography


Tovey, Donald Francis. *A Companion to Beethoven’s Pianoforte Sonatas*. London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1931.


