Performing musical silence: markers, gestures, and embodiments

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Chapter 5. Case Study: Visual Markers for Silences (Beethoven's opus 111)

My dissertation examines how performers engage with the multiple dimensions of musical silence. This chapter will focus on visual embodiments of silence in the concert hall. One particular example will be used as a case study, in which performers embody silence in a precisely notated classical composition.

What does performed silence *look* like onstage? Can the visual presentation of performed silence be stronger than the auditory? Comparisons in this chapter will illustrate a highly heterogeneous and heretofore undocumented vocabulary for performing silences visually.

The value of looking at silence embodiments is that performers can use multiple gestural vocabularies to enrich their interpretations, while composers may use the same vocabularies to enrich their scoring.

I have selected six well-known pianists and analyzed their performances as a way of understanding embodied silence in classical music: Sviatoslav Richter, Maurizio Pollini, Maria João Pires, Evgeny Kissin, Katie Mahan, and Daniil Trifonov. The selected composition is Beethoven's last piano sonata, opus 111.

I could have chosen another classical composer or another silence from another sonata. I state that this might have given similar results in terms of illustrating embodied silences. I have focused very narrowly on the first four bars of the sonata. But this by no means covers all the compelling silences of the piece. I could have chosen the in-

Relevant terminology employed in this chapter

Silence is perceived stillness or quietness. There is no true silence, so in in this context, silence means relative or sensed silence.

Performed Silence in music is a rest made visible or audible; the impression of silence created in a performance by the performer.

Rests are written notations that indicate silence, stillness, absence, pulsation, breathing, or non-playing.

Eloquent silence communicates from the performer to the listener; non-eloquent silence might have a functional role, but does not have rhetorical or communicative value in the performance.

Structural silences emphasize the structure of the composition.

Markers are signals used to shift attention and thus *impose* silence, *summon* silence, or *shape* the perception of silence. Markers can also include audience rituals, architectural elements, and other sensory cues which influence our experience of silence. Markers are not exclusive to silence; they can also signal sounds, traditions, behaviors, actions.

Embodiment is the overall collection of active performer movements, gestures, postures, and facial expressions, as well as performer choices such as hairstyle and costume.

Gesture is the movement and alignment of arms and legs, fingers and toes, torso, head, and facial expression, in relation to the instrument.

between silence before the second movement, which suggests a Cagean stasis, or the silence at the end of this sonata, which calls forth "a silence [...] more important than the sound that preceded it" (Brendel, 1976, p. 53). The point is not so much the particular silence chosen, but rather its affordances as a vehicle for examining diverse embodiments.

5.1 The Sonata

Opus 111 is a technically demanding work with a strong history, performance practice, and even a mythology. The pianistic challenge has inspired its own literature and legends, most notably through *Doctor Faustus*, in which Thomas Mann describes a performance of this sonata by a fictional pianist.[36]

> Boom, boom—voom, voom—throom, throom—he struck the grimly vehement opening accents of the first movement, and in a high falsetto he sang along with passages of melodic sweetness, which, like delicate glimpses of light, now and then illuminate the storm-tossed skies of the piece. (Mann, 1947, p. 58)

For Mann, the work seems to begin in grimly vehement conflict, heightening the eloquent possibilities of the rests around the fanfares. This striking, storm-tossed realm of gestural activity will distinguish the Beethoven examples starkly from the static, non-narrative poses and attitudes of the Cage examples.

Despite the dramatic pauses that open the first movement of the Beethoven, most of the sonata is one long continuous phrase. It is a composition with very few rests, thus making the ones that exist all the more noteworthy. Those initial rests are framed by dramatically powerful notes. The first two short rests serve as gasps during the fanfares. The fanfares themselves are framed by longer rests, which offer a rich variety of interpretations.

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[36] Mann seems to have ignored the silences in opus 111, though there are a great many powerful spoken silences in his novel. He does evoke one musical silence (alas, not Beethoven's) as a "fearful collective silence at the start of a phrase" (Mann, 1947, p. 513).

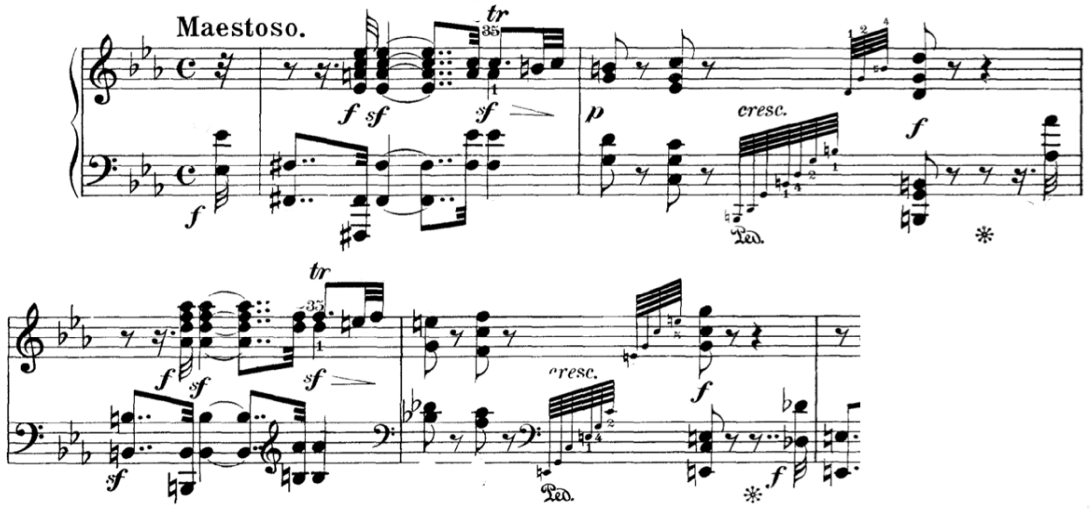

Figure 64: first four bars of Beethoven's opus 111 piano sonata, illustrating the two fanfares (Edition Peters, 1974)

Punctuated by the rests, the two first lines separate clearly into two fanfares. From a functional point of view, perhaps the short silences during each fanfare invite the listener to experience retrospective understanding, a type of backward hearing. Or they might be punctuation, miniature commas indicating breathlessness. The rests after the rising arpeggios might also indicate stopping, finality, a structural marker for the audience's understanding of the form. They could be merely a temporary interruption or an anticipative signal to restart the sonata in a different key. Depending on the assumed meaning, pianists will interpret them differently. However, as music philosopher Jerrold Levinson discusses, there is no direct and unambiguous relation between the way performers understand a piece and the way they perform it (Levinson, 1993). In other words, the same meaning can lead to different interpretations, while the same interpretation can be grounded on different analyses of a piece. And each pianist *can and will* interpret the silences in a musical work differently, also because the notation of the rests remains simple and unidimensional, as discussed in Chapter 2.

As a student, I was barely aware of this potential richness. I did not pay any attention to these rests, and I certainly did look for the eloquence of silences. I tended to rush through the rests to get to the exciting notes in the next fanfare of opus 111. As I began performing the work in concerts, and as my knowledge of the score improved, I started to hear the power of the silences, particularly after the arpeggi. I discovered that they could be used to gauge the acoustics in the hall; they offered a listening opportunity for the performer. This insight was the moment when I first began to experiment with performed silence.

Perhaps Beethoven even considered this possibility. Note the discrepancy in the score between the notation of the rests after the arpeggi and the pedal release: according to Beethoven's manuscript (see figure 65) and the published score (see figure 64), the pedal is released an eighth note later than the hands at 1F and 2F. This creates ambiguity: Beethoven's pedal-off is deliberately notated *during* a rest. Does he want the pianist to sustain the notes partially through the rest? Does he want to suggest a diminuendo of the post-arpeggio chord? In a large concert hall, this effect would occur naturally without the pedal: the acoustic reverberation would gradually diminish, as Beethoven would have known. Yet, in a drier environment, the pedal might be necessary. I see this potentially as permission to explore the acoustic possibilities of the rest, an invitation to present an eloquent silence that could be either connective or dis-connective. Separative rests ("nots") offer heightened articulation for the structure of the sonata, creating interruptions and divisions. Conversely, connective rests ("knots") tie phrases or notes together, continuing the musical line and uniting disparate elements. Connective rests can also articulate the structure, but they do so more subtly.

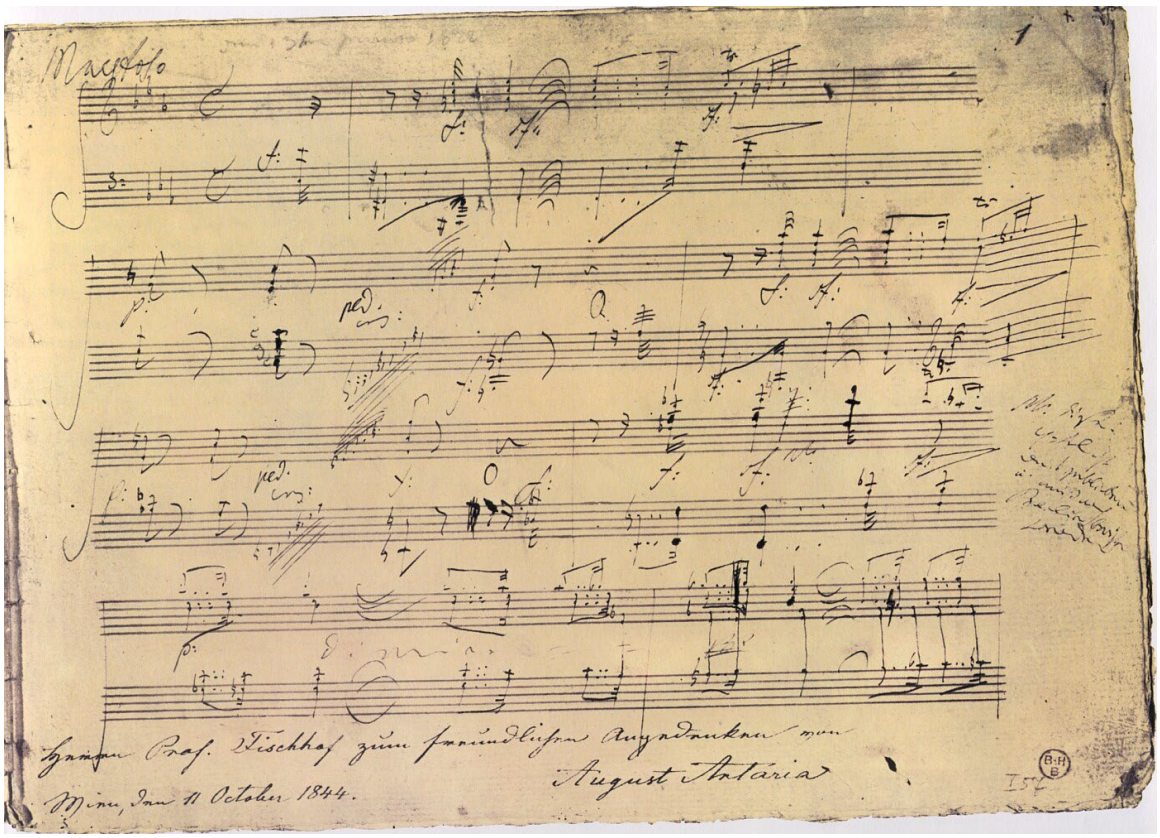

Figure 65: Beethoven's autograph manuscript from 1844, showing the opening bars of opus 111 (Beethoven-Haus Bonn)

My youthful exploration of the acoustic via the rests has precedents. Listening to the reflections of the architecture is indeed one motivation for performing silence, one that relates to the lengthy spaces of *ma* in the pauses of some of Morton Feldman's pieces, or to compositions of John Adams or Arvo Pärt or performances of Alvin Lucier that explore physical space through sound (and often silences).

I separated the score graphically to re-understand and re-interpret the notation. The left version is *without the rests*, and the right version is *without the notes*.

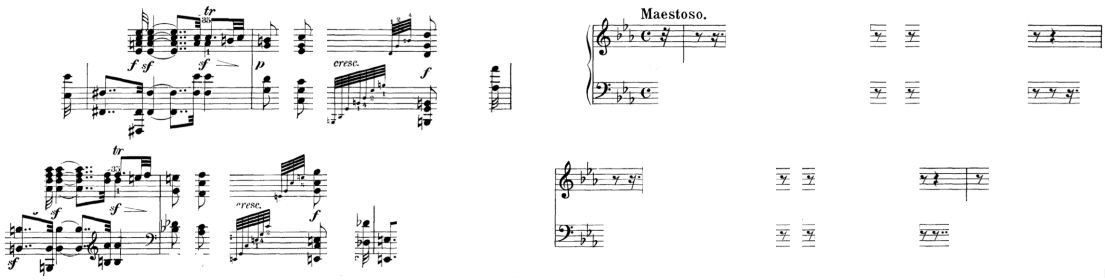

Figure 3: notes versus rests in the first four bars of opus 111

On the printed page, the rests have a clear, unambiguous performance instruction, namely to refrain from pushing any key for the specified duration. As discussed in Chapter 2, the written rests contain very little further information.

In performance, the rules change: the rests gain communicative power (Barthes, 2005, p. 26) through performed embodiments.[37] The performers whom I will analyze in more detail below all use gestural markers to create silence captions.

Indeed, the fanfares of *dramatic notes* are alternated in their performance with embodiments of even more *dramatic rests*. The constant presence of embodied markers in the performances of these six pianists suggests that context and captions are essential.[38] As the examples may show, the notated rests rarely lead to silence; they are often used as a permission to depart from the score: to leave the keyboard, to go away from the keys. The rests offer remarkable performative freedom: to perform silence, to dramatize silence, to extend the resonance, or (in some cases) to avoid silence entirely. Indeed, what the analysis of these examples may reveal is how wide the gap is between the simple rests on the page and the incredibly diverse and eloquent embodiments illustrated onstage.

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[37] The embodied silences can also give power to the notes.

[38] See my video experimentation, *Respect the Rest*, which I created by remixing rests extracted from these opus 111 videos. (https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2927804#tool-2927818)

In what follows, I intend to examine neither the intentions of the composer nor the composition itself, but rather the contemporary visual embodiments of notated silences. These will be illustrated by a group of six star pianists found on YouTube. In these videos, viewers experience Beethoven's rests through many influential markers: the acoustics, the size and type of the concert hall, the décor, the performer's clothing, the program notes or lack thereof, the audience's attentiveness, the cultural rituals surrounding the performance, and the type of piano. These markers affect the performance and the experience of silences (and notes), and all deserve (and have received) serious coverage and discussion in my work and elsewhere.[39] But I will mostly exclude them from the present chapter so as to focus on visible embodied markers.

Like any instrument, the piano extends the performer's body. But a grand piano is a heavy machine enclosed in a massive wooden box.[40] Unlike a violin or flute, the external body of the instrument offers no moving extension of the performer's body. As Cobussen mentions, it can also provide resistance: "This struggle, this resistance, this strife, is mainly of a physical nature, deriving from the instrument's materiality and its interaction with the musician's flesh" (Cobussen, 2017, p. 122). Many of the archive examples that were composed for me engage the question of resistance metaphorically.[41]

Moreover, classical conventions impose gestural limitations. No classical pianist would attack the keys with their feet or butt, even though rock 'n roll pianist Jerry Lee Lewis became famous for just such embodiments.

So, the pianist's behavior and embodiment of silence are limited by the socio-cultural rituals of the concert hall, instrumental resistance, and the need to keep both hands on the keyboard most of the time.

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[39] See (Livingston, forthcoming 2025) on audience silence; see (Smithuijsen, 2001) on audience ritual; see (Livingston, 2024) on room tone and concert halls.

[40] The modern piano was not yet invented in Beethoven's time. He most probably composed opus 111 on a Broadwood piano that was donated by the British manufacturer to him in 1817. It was a big instrument and state-of-the-art for the era. But it did not have the stability, cast-iron frame, escapement mechanism, or power of a modern Steinway.

[41] Some do so quite literally, notably by using the wooden case in Kourliandski's *Surface* or the fallboard in Nicoli's *No Entry/No Exit* to create impossible dialogues between performer and instrument. Other works such as Hinton's *Piece of Cake* add external elements (handcuffs) to create artificial or symbolic resistances.

Pianists perform silence via embodiments, which can be gestures of hands, arms, legs, backs, and necks; facial movements, grimaces, frowns, closed eyes; shakes of the head or hair tossing; and many other gestures, small and large.

To better understand the repeated gestures of the pianists I have analyzed, I wanted to *re-repeat* them in a process of reflective imitation. I attempted to duplicate the most remarkable embodiments, playing the same phrasing, copying the same gestures, and filming myself again and again in an exercise of learning through reflective imitation. Each of the examples will end with a video in which I learn at the piano from the pianist's style, embodiments, and physicality.

This method contains both benefits and conflicts. The major conflict is one of bias. In order to effectively imitate a conservatory-trained concert pianist, one must have undergone similar training oneself over many years (Lüneburg, 2023; Lüneburg & Ciciliani, 2021). A dispassionate outside perspective is thus almost impossible to achieve. A second flaw is discipline. A dancer or actor will be well-schooled in imitation, especially gestural imitation, whereas concert pianists are discouraged from imitation starting at the earliest age. I have had no training in imitation as a bodily method, a gap that will be abundantly clear to those who watch my videos.

Yet the benefits of the method are also clear and do justify the inclusion of my exploratory videos. Aside from documenting my working process, one which evolves directly from and through my practice, these videos offer discoveries. Speaking of a similarly personal process of understanding through (re-)interpretation, pianist and scholar Anna Scott writes:

> This understanding is a rich one however, in that performance elements are perceived, deciphered, translated, and become linked to one another, through one's own mind and body as a performer. What is at first only sensed becomes clumsily enacted: an experience that begets enhanced understanding, more focused movements, and so on. (Scott, 2014, p. 183)

The personal learning involved in re-repeating (Schechner, 2013), re-enactment (Lüneburg, 2023), or reflective imitation does not enable me to become Richter, but with each enactment, however clumsy, I learn, sense, and understand slightly more from Richter through a tactile and audible embodiment.

Watching myself working through these videos as if I were another body and another pianist taught me a great deal. This embodiment of performers who were already themselves embodying something (whether the "lonely prince," Beethoven, their stage persona, or their emotional idea of the music) created an overlay of fictionalizations,

sometimes highlighting the quirks or eccentricities of the performers and other times illuminating new ideas about performing. By "re-repeating" these performed silences, I began to notice that the visual seemed to have weight, sometimes even outweighing the audible. I also understood better how some pianists made the silences separative, and others used them to knot together the two fanfares that open the sonata.

> [...] the communicative rest almost always has more than one potential function, which the performer is at liberty to reveal or create. (Potter, 2017, p. 168)

The rests offer a creative and performative scope to the performers that can be interpreted as a permission from the composer, a permission that is not easily granted when performing the notes: the pianists whom I have studied in detail are at liberty to make the silences visible. Their silence gestures form a tacit vocabulary that becomes part of the music communicated to the audience. These performers have adopted a range of stylized and often wild gestures to mark the opening silences. Yet their embodiments mostly remain undocumented in studies of this composition: transgressive, messy, fleshy, and bodily gestures are hiding in plain sight.

5.2 Examples: Picturing Silence Through Embodiments

As with *Ballet mécanique* and *4'33"*, I have a strong affinity with opus 111. I first learned it as a university student and have performed it dozens of times since: onstage, in living rooms, in practice rooms, in churches, in auditions, and in concert halls. I am intimately familiar with every note and every rest. I understand (and will try to show) how the complexities of the notes influence the performance of the silences (and vice versa).

By applying the embodied analysis techniques described above, I realize I am creating the potential for historical inaccuracies. However, this is a study of modern interpretations of a specific piece of music and what they can tell us about performed silence at the present moment in time. As within the Cage chapter, the analysis is not about what the music was, nor what it should be, but about what the music has become and can become.[42]

The six performers are chosen for the variety of silences they embody. The YouTube videos of their performances are all recorded in concert halls, mostly for an audience, in full concert attire, with theatrical lighting, traditional architecture, and a frontal, audience-view camera. The audience is generally not visible, and the hall is reduced to a decorative

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[42] In Chapter 4 I took a similar approach to Cage's *4'33"* by focusing on current performance techniques and their recent evolutions rather than a historical performance practice.

background. I have deliberately watched them all on a screen, granting them a consistent frame to facilitate comparisons.

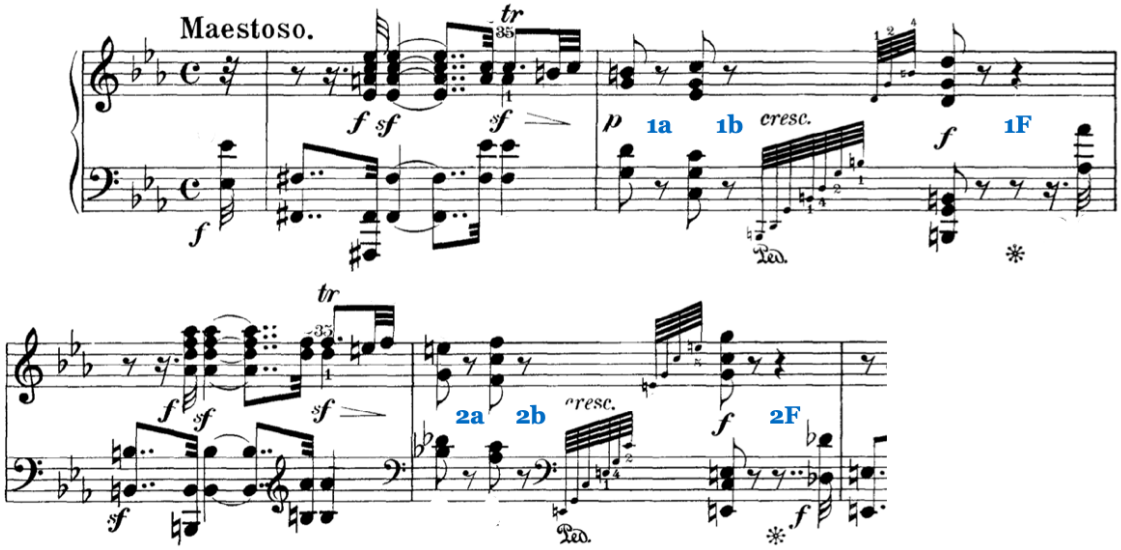


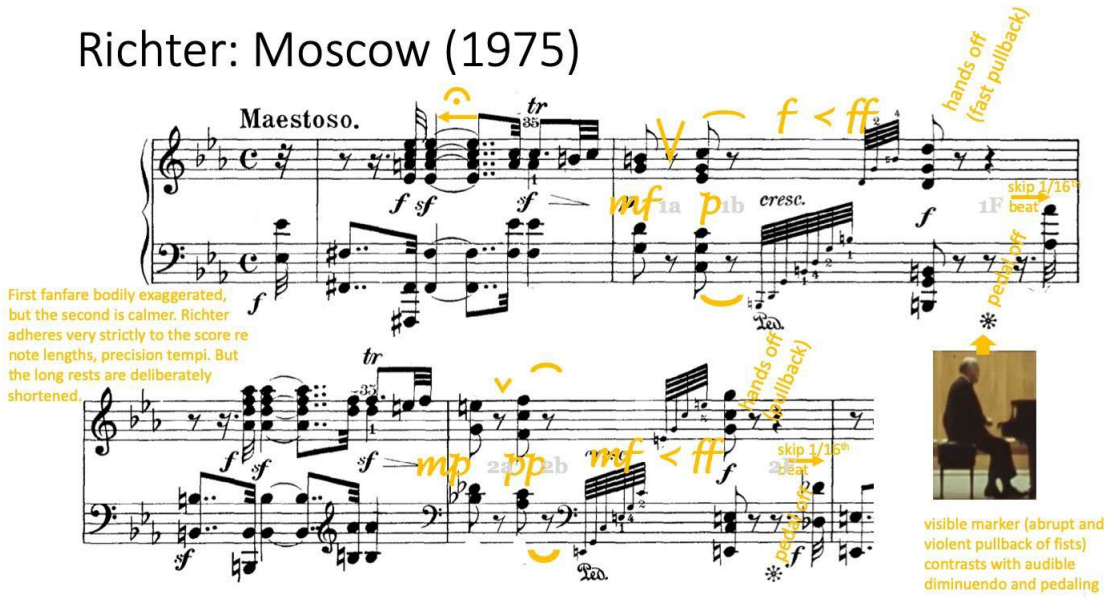
Figure 66: Designation of the rests—For clarity, the two fanfares are referred to as **1** and **2**. Within each fanfare, the short eighth-note rests are labeled **a** and **b**, while the longer rests between the fanfares are labeled **F**. Hence, the six rests in order are: **1a, 1b, 1F; 2a, 2b, 2F**.

Example 1: Sviatoslav Richter

MARKERS: visible and gestural: reverse boxer gesture, left-hand conducting, upright posture (imposing silence); contextual markers: Mann texts; ritual markers: highly stylized performance

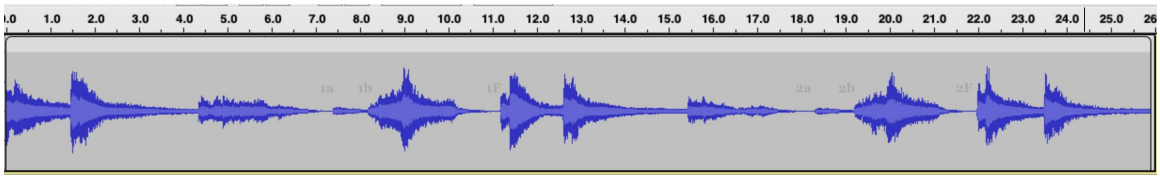
RESTS: precise (but also precisely shortened), interruptive, structural

The first performance I analyzed and re-repeated was Sviatoslav Richter's 1975 performance in Moscow. Richter imposes silences that act as interruptive and structural elements, illustrated as precise and aggressive pauses. They are interruptive in the sense that they arrive suddenly, dramatically, and surprisingly. They are structural in that they clearly delineate the form of Beethoven's composition. Richter's interpretation is unsettling, with his left hand conducting and thereby creating visual markers for both the notes and the silences. After the fanfares, he rips his hands off the piano, imposing silence precisely with the score (1F and 2F), and curls his fingers up during the rests like a reverse-action boxer.



► RICHTER PERFORMANCE: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937208

Richter is strict about following the score. Yet the exceptions are the most interesting part. After the first fanfare, he cannot withdraw his hands fast enough: in an abrupt and violent gesture, the curled fingers turn into fists in a gesture of surprise, as if he has been caught off guard by the violence of the music, or as if the keys were hot, on fire. But—and this is what makes it rich and ambiguous—he still has the pedal down at F1, just as Beethoven wrote it. This pedaling fits with Richter's famous devotion to the text. Yet the contrast between what we see (a violent withdrawal) and what we hear (a soft diminuendo) is bizarre and not what Beethoven notated. Further contrast between what can be seen and heard is provided by his curtailing of the rests by exactly a sixteenth beat. We hear the rests loudly and clearly, but they are cut off *in medias res* as if he had deliberately misread the score. Is he afraid of the rests between the phrases? Why does he trim them so precisely?



Reviews of Richter's performances on other occasions offer varied perspectives. Geffen (1975) praises Richter for his tremendous energy and drive, suggesting that his willingness to discard caution results in a brilliant and exciting rendition. Moore (2013) commends Richter for his fierce intensity and whirlwind tempo, particularly highlighting the clarity and firmness of his touch. A review from *Gramophone* magazine (1998) expresses

disappointment, noting that the performance started uneasily with "clipped rests" and slight imperfections in sonority. These clipped rests are silences that, in my analysis, contain a "not," a very visible withdrawal away from the piano, away from playing. This embodiment of distancing—a withdrawal from the instrument—also serves to make clear the structure of the piece.

Distler (1998), writing for *Classics Today*, lauds Richter's "sizzling" approach to the opening movement in a re-release of this exact concert (Moscow, 1975), noting his tempestuous tempo and his bold engagement. Perhaps this tempestuous approach is Richter's attempted embodiment of Beethoven.

> He [Beethoven] was the lonely prince over a ghostly realm, from which came emanations evoking only a strange shudder in even the most well-disposed of his contemporaries, terrifying messages to which they could have reconciled themselves only at rare, exceptional moments. (Mann, 1947, p. 57)

Richter, whose conception of opus 111 was inseparable from Mann's text,[43] employs a rigid gestural vocabulary to embody the lonely prince in the ghostly realm, attempting to make the audience shudder with him. His tensely embodied discrepancies create a "ghostly" non-correspondence between what is visible and what is audible.

Here is what I learned from embodying Richter's gestures:

► LEARNING FROM RICHTER: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937229

Example 2: Maurizio Pollini

MARKERS: visible: reserved, magisterial posture, but barely any markers for silence; audible: rushing
RESTS: rushed or accentuated (but hardly any silences)

I analyzed two performances of the sonata by Maurizio Pollini, one from the mid-1990s and another from 1998. Pollini approaches the sonata with a reserved attitude and a magisterial posture—his silences, though few, are accentuated. Pollini's interpretation appears to bypass Beethoven's notated rests, rushing the narration of the notes forward without giving the listener time to process the accelerating fanfares, and thus challenging the notation of the rests even more so than Richter does. Pollini's magnetic attraction to the keys muddies notational fidelity in favor of artistic expression. He is still playing the

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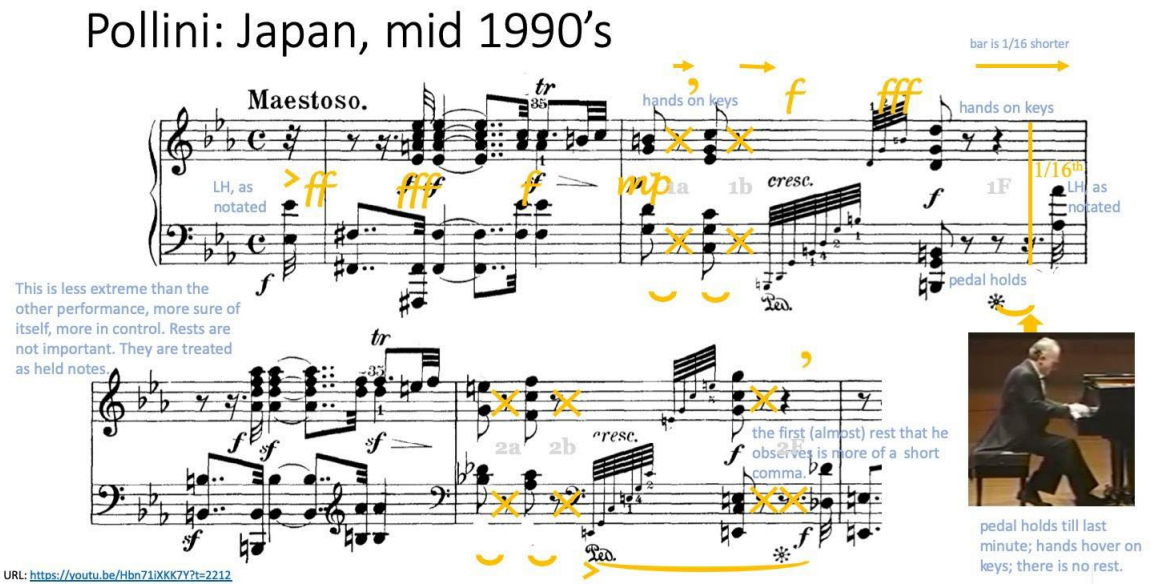
[43] Like his teacher, the legendary Ukrainian pianist Heinrich Neuhaus, Richter was obsessed with the writings of Thomas Mann, and particularly his evocations of opus 111. "Marked out on the piano, were his daily instructions: 'Brush teeth thoroughly every day, read some Proust and Thomas Mann every day [...]' " (Phillips, 1999).

notes during the rests, and overtly so. He does not want to interrupt the notes or imply any space between them. The fanfares are thus interconnected by his (missing) silences, becoming one knotted multiple fanfare.

Pollini's interpretation overrides Beethoven's notation so that there are no traces of the rests except for a gasp at 2F; he pushes forward.[44] Meanwhile, he keeps his foot firmly on the pedal and his hands on the keys. The lack of embodied silences does not mean that his playing is not eloquent. But it is emphatically a situation in which the playing, not the rest, is eloquent. He does not perform the silences, and he does not indicate that silence is happening. The tiny gasps (at the end of 2F in the first performance and at the end of 1F in the second example) seem annoyed and perfunctory. There are no visual markers for silence. However, the gasps could be considered audible markers of silence.

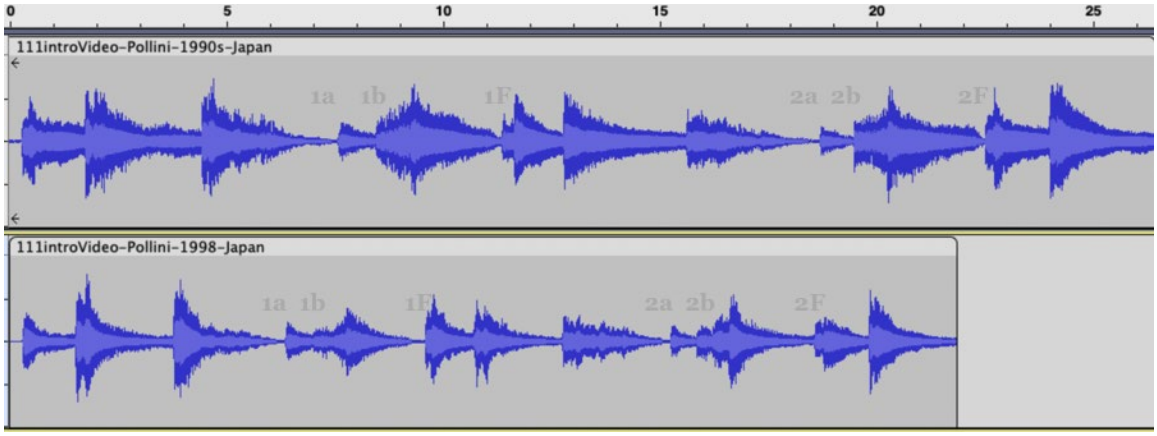


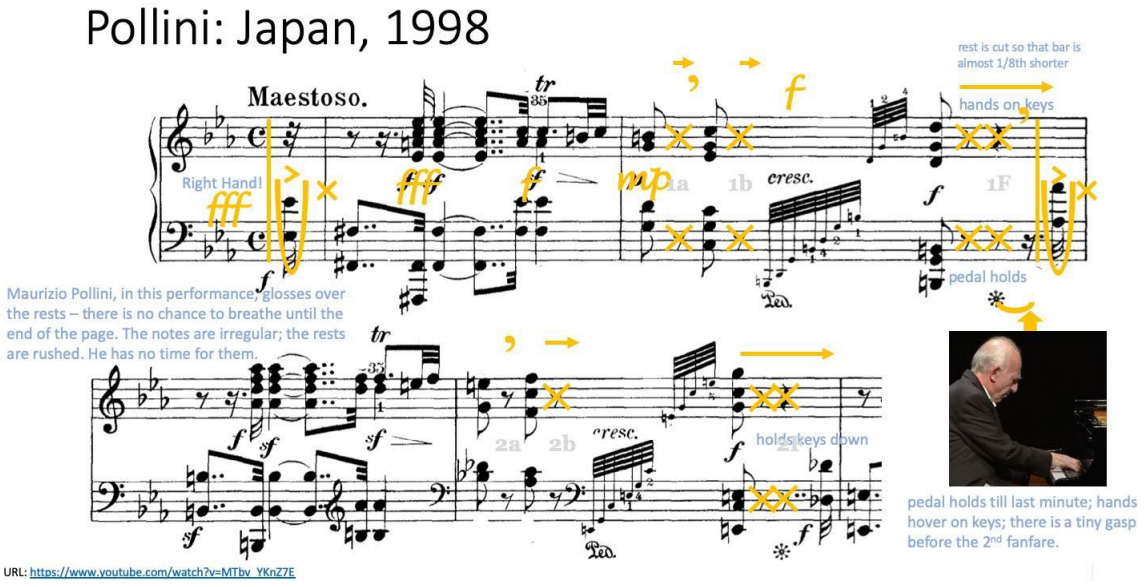
► POLLINI PERFORMANCE: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937235

This first performance is not as rushed as the recent version, but he still curtails the 1F rest after the arpeggio from three eighths to two eighths. The pedal stays down, and his hands stay on the keys. The second fanfare brings in a little air (a manner of building tension) at 2b, and then he takes the pedal off, like a grace note of silence, at 2F just before the third fanfare begins. Gesturally, the movements seem minimized, reduced to their simplest form. His hands rise briefly from the keyboard at the end of the rest in the last sixteenth note, but only as a gesture to attack the following chords. Again, there is barely a hint of

[44] The second performance (Japan, 1998) is even faster than the first, pushing relentlessly forward and omitting the silences entirely. It is twice as fast as Mahan's version.

silence, a miniature accentuation. As a consequence, the music does not breathe, which creates a high degree of tension.





► POLLINI 1998: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937231

According to a review in *Musicweb* (Greenbank, 2020), Pollini "throws caution to the wind with an opening movement of tremendous energy and drive." Each rest length is curtailed by about one-third, making for a very "restless" introduction. Pollini has created a unique situation (amongst these examples at least) in which the rests are played as sound, as notes, as a sustaining. His silences are not embodied by gesture; they are marked by sound. While the visual is important to him, the rests are not. As a performer, he has chosen for a knot so densely and thickly intertwined that silence is barely present. It is difficult to perceive his rests as silences.

In Chapter 1, I tried to refute the idea that silence is *nothing*. For me, silence is *something*. But what if Pollini has a different viewpoint? Is silence a *nothing* for him to avoid? This raises questions about the role of silence for classical pianists: Is it seen as expendable? Does it detract from the more appealing notes, or is it feared because it might lead to audience disengagement? This idea of avoiding silence—akin to a musical horror vacui—suggests that performers like Pollini deliberately choose to focus on the notes and to gloss over the silences. Silence could potentially represent the failures of memory loss or missed notes. But it is also possible that Pollini is avoiding the rests to increase the sense of risk and excitement.

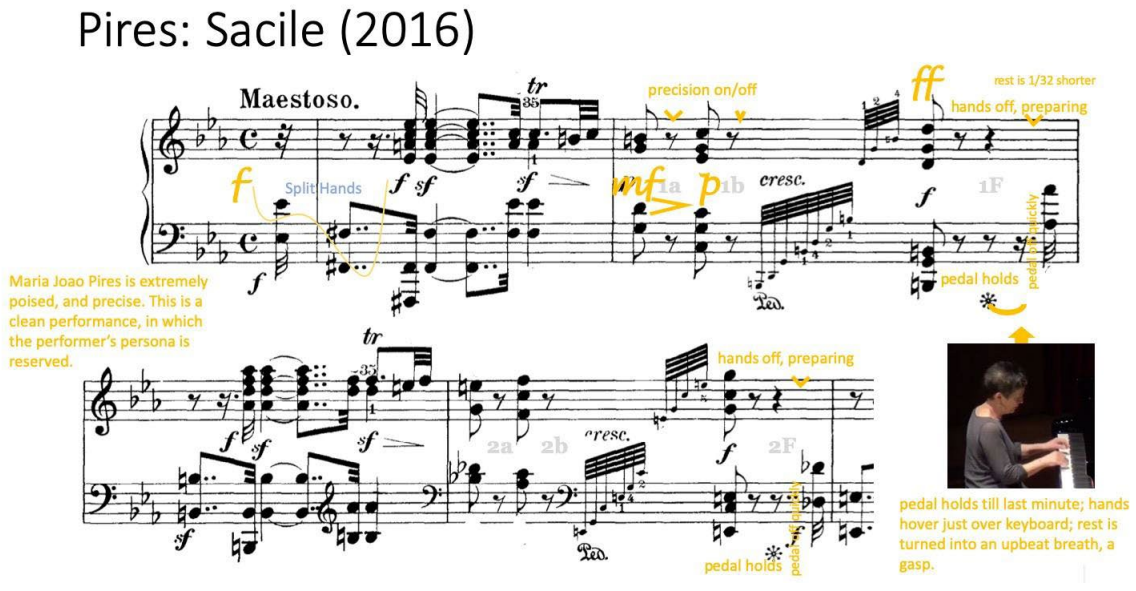
► LEARNING FROM POLLINI: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937232

Example 3: Maria João Pires

MARKERS: visible and audible: poise, but minimal markers summon silence

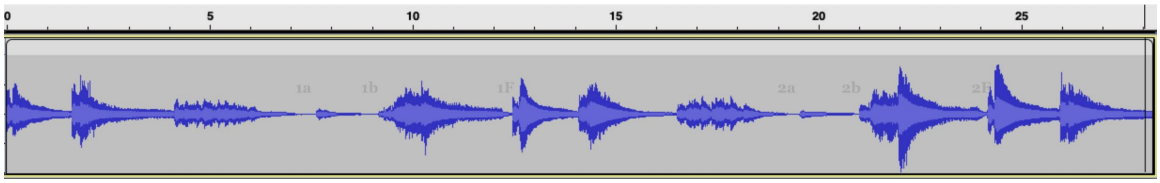
RESTS: connective and separative

Maria João Pires's performance is poised and contains minimal visual markers, treating silences as connective elements within a highly rigorous performance. The direct correlation between visible actions and audible sounds underscores a nuanced understanding of silence as an integral, though understated, component of musical expression. Her performance is very similar—in length and shortness of rests—to Pollini's, yet the effect is completely different, for she summons silence where he overrides it. This is a perfect example of performed silences which are both a tectonic division (*diaresis*) and a synthesis.



► PIRES PERFORMANCE: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937210

Pires offers a direct correlation between the visible and the audible, meaning that what her body is doing is what is sounding. Her performative body suggests that form follows function. I experience none of the overloaded romanticism that I find in some of the other performances. One reviewer wrote: "The first movement lacked a certain roughness" (Sava-Segal, 2021). Indeed, it does lack roughness because she plays the text quite seriously. Her smooth fanfares are about the precise notes, not the drama, downplaying the tension between the phrases. She understates the silences between the fanfares, which are reduced (hands on keys, then pedal down) to sixteenth rests, really just gasping breaths before the next phrase, which itself arrives one sixteenth beat too soon, shortening the rest even further, much as Pollini does.



The silences in her performance have more impact than in Pollini's, yet they are barely longer. Where Pollini rushes through both the notes and the rests, Pires keeps strict time during the notes. Hence, her arrival at each rest is more measured and clearer, even if she keeps her hands on the keys. Her use of a measured pulse in the notes informs the audience's perception of the silences, lending them apparent clarity, although they are hardly audible as silences.

► LEARNING FROM PIRES: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937209

Example 4: Evgeny Kissin

MARKERS: highly visible: extravagant appearance, aggressive gestures, expressive, descriptive, enacting exceptionality
RESTS: interruptive; but both separative and connective

Evgeny Kissin enacts wildly extravagant and aggressive markers, producing silences that are both interruptive and expressive. His performance is marked by a romantic exaggeration of gesture and pedaling, transforming rests into moments of theatrical suspense and anticipation. Kissin offers an interpretation heavy on rubato, pedal, and oversized gesture. The wildness of his gestures seems to make the silences less abstract and more narrative than those of the preceding pianists.

At the Verbier Festival (first example), Kissin places two mini rests at 1a and 1b and then holds the arpeggiated chord with the pedal through to the next note. So there is no 1F silence at all. Just after the arpeggiated fanfare, Kissin curls his arms up during 1F in an elaborate spiral as if winding up a spring. It is fascinating to watch and a little disturbing.

I have named this highly distinctive gesture "the dentist," as Kissin seems to be extracting a rather painful tooth. The sound continues during the rests due to the pedaling, but he is indicating something different than during the chords or arpeggio. Kissin implements a violent gestural storytelling of the rests, describing silence and creating embodiments which contrasts starkly with the way he plays the notes.

> How many other pianists give those grand, annunciatory chords that open the two-movement piece the finely judged weight he brought to them? (von Rhein, 2013)

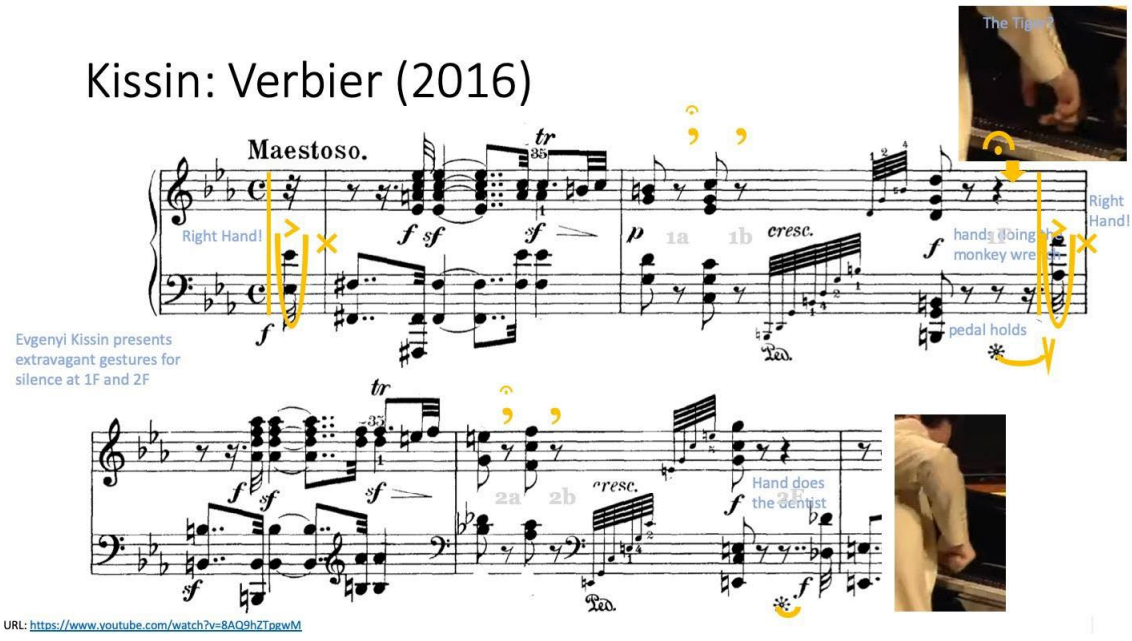
But other reviews are troubled by his lack of silence:

> [...] the larger intellectual explorations of Beethoven's writing eluded him [...] The opening movement rushed too many fences, allowed too few moments of silence. (Kettle, 2012)

And Distler feels that the gesturing is overwrought:

> Some of his expressive pointing, to be sure, comes close to loosening the music's cumulative grip, in contrast to Pollini's taut reserve. (Distler, 2017)

Kissin's "expressive pointing," his gestures of the coiled spring or the dentist about to pull, connotate a coming onslaught of notes and create suspense, though there are very few "moments of silence" indeed. Through his gestures, Kissin is speaking to us, about energy, tension, about what is to come in his version of the sonata. These silences are not audible but visible.

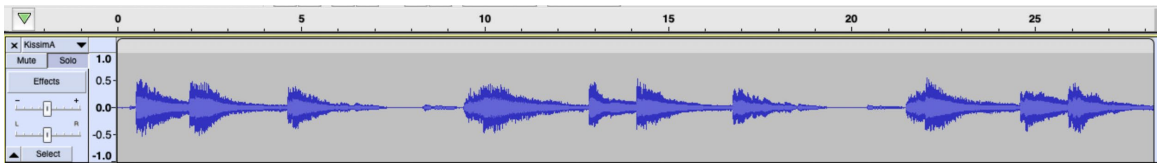


► KISSIN VERBIER: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937212

However, four years previously, at a concert in Armenia, his interpretation had been very different. In this earlier video, he performs the introduction with one little rest, one longer rest (if 1a is a surprise, then 2a is a question), and a pedal hold for the top of the arpeggio; it seems less stressed, with more of a driving forward motion. There are many audio markers at his performance: the hall is swirling with small sounds, such as the rustle of the audience, whispering, the ventilation system, and the creak of the stage, which themselves provide a counterpoint to the pianist's own loud breathing. The main audible silence is his first gasp at 1a. The long rest after the arpeggio is not silent at all; it is very quick, as if he wanted to connect the two fanfares together (somewhat like Pollini).

► KISSIN PERFORMANCE YEREVAN: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937213

For comparison, I also listened to his 2017 recording for Deutsche Grammophon: the first rest (1a) gains even more prominence, and there are unexpected accents on upbeats—as if the other silences are squeezed out. Kissin seems to be using the rests to amplify the tonality of the piece. His extremely stretched rest at 1a is an amplification of the dominant tension. In this recording, the audience cannot see Kissin's wild gesturing, which offers an important test of my visual analysis, because it may challenge some of the functions of visible communication of the rests (especially when they are interpreted with temporal freedom). Yet it seems to me that I do *hear* his gestures, even without seeing them. The accented upbeats on the CD seem to result from a misunderstanding of the silences that precede them, suggesting that Kissin's gestures may be hiding a lack of rigor or understanding. But perhaps the strange accentuations are not the point; it is possible that Kissin's *gestures* are the point: Kissin's performance is then far more about Kissin than about Beethoven.



▶ KISSIN AUDIO RECORDING: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2939247

For classical conservatory students, rests are often not substance, content, or emotion. They are absence, problem, even defect—as if the composer forgot to write something there. Unlike singers, young pianists do not look forward to the rests. Kissin might also have a fear of stillness, but he expresses it very differently than Pollini. He uses excessively baroque gestures to fill every rest, indicating a possible discomfort with the absence that silence could present in a performance. But his use of descriptive gestures creates powerful markers that do instill an impression of silence in the audience. Pollini has the audience focus on the sound, not the separations, while Kissin gives the listener a narrated, embodied experience of silence.

Example 5: Katie Mahan

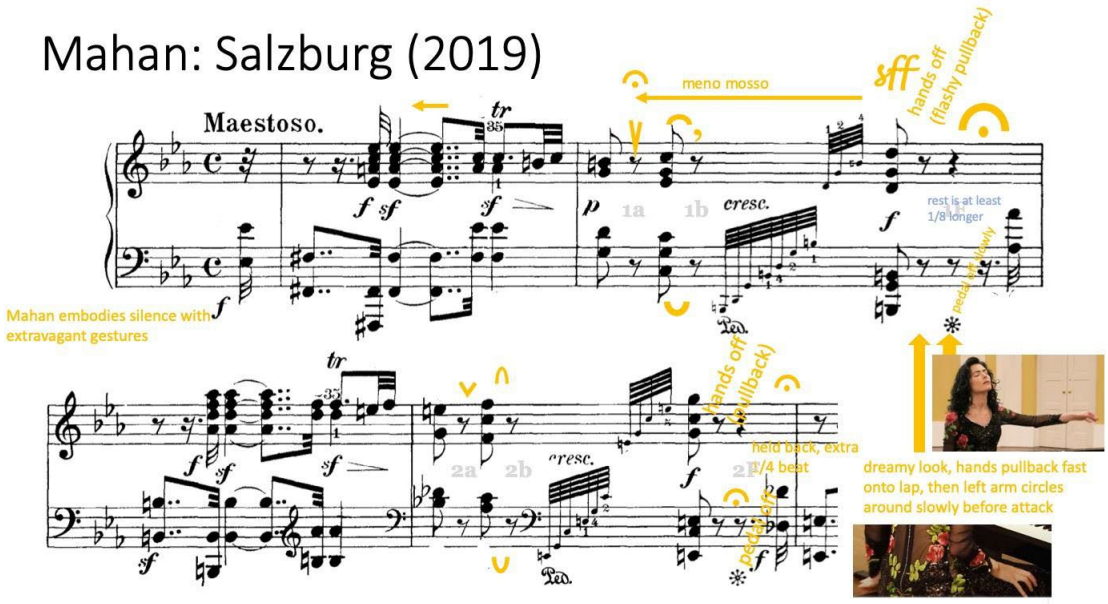
MARKERS: visible: large, swooping, balletic, expressive gestures (summoning silence); audible: long rests

RESTS: separative, stretched

Katie Mahan utilizes large, swooping, balletic gestures with silences that are both separative and expressive. Her deliberate extension of rests beyond their notated length invites a reconsideration of silence as a space for interpretative freedom and personal expression.

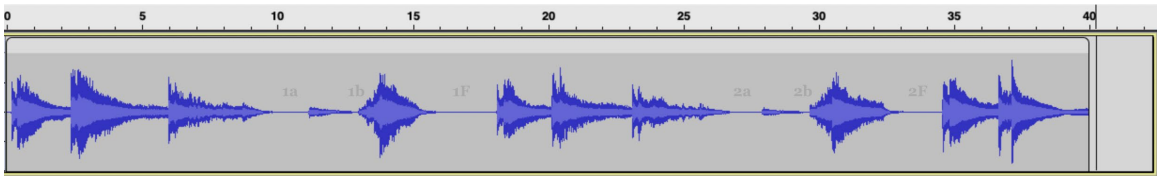
The silences are considered but un-timed or even out of time. Her silence after the first fanfare is a full quarter note longer than notated. She is the only pianist in this study who lengthens rather than shortens this silence. She delves deeply into the silences and conducts them with slow-motion bravado.

Comparing Richter and Mahan, their different use of dynamics and timing gives another quality to the silences. So here audible markers are important in communicating eloquence. Richter follows Beethoven's dynamics rather precisely, while Mahan gives a startling accent to the top of the arpeggio. It is jarring, attention-grabbing, and surely intended, for it launches the longest silence in this case study: at 1F, between the two fanfares, Mahan's silence is a stunning 2.005 seconds, three times as long as Richter's breath, and twenty times as long as Pires's brief articulation. She imposes silence, summons it, and describes it, all at once, in a seemingly endless gesticulation.



► MAHAN PERFORMANCE: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937218

Her silences are wild, while her notes are careful and discreet. This interpretation contrasts with Pollini's performance, in which the notes are wild (and occasionally wrong), and the silences are discreetly omitted.



Mahan's performance suggests a larger affordance for silences that can be extended beyond Beethoven. The rests are an occasion for her to break out of the keyboard stance and to let her arms dance. Of all the pianists here, her performances of silence most resemble the opportunities afforded by the Cagean case studies, as she is self-consciously illustrating long silences with attitudes or poses (see Chapter 4). In terms of my own imitative fidelity, I found her grander gestures difficult to copy, as she goes far beyond the Beethoven score, exploring the silences with improvisatory bodily gestures and (sometimes) bodily stillness.

The audience has extra time to appreciate the silences and the notes in between. Through the choreography of her arms, she subverts the conventional hierarchy: here, the silences are paramount, and the notes facilitate their emergence. Her gestural ballet of silence becomes a communicative channel for moments of understanding and comprehension.

► LEARNING FROM MAHAN: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937216

Example 6: Daniil Trifonov

MARKERS: visible: head thrown back, contorted face, theatrical, expressive; audible: breathing (summoned silences)
RESTS: separative, structural

Daniil Trifonov's embodiments may be contorted, actually excessively so, but his performance is of the utmost clarity and precision, respecting Beethoven's dynamics and giving the silences a separative "not," an expressive and structural character. His performance is distinguished by the quietness of his silences, ending sometimes with loud breaths that herald the fanfares and emphasize the musical structure while enhancing the eloquence of the silences. Rests 1a and 2a are interpreted as short breaths (contrasting with Richter's legato version), articulated by a unique, subtle staccato release only in the left hand. Trifonov hunches completely over during these moments. Then, straightening his back during the arpeggio, he snaps his head up at the top chord, preparing the silence, as if summoning it from the depths of his soul.

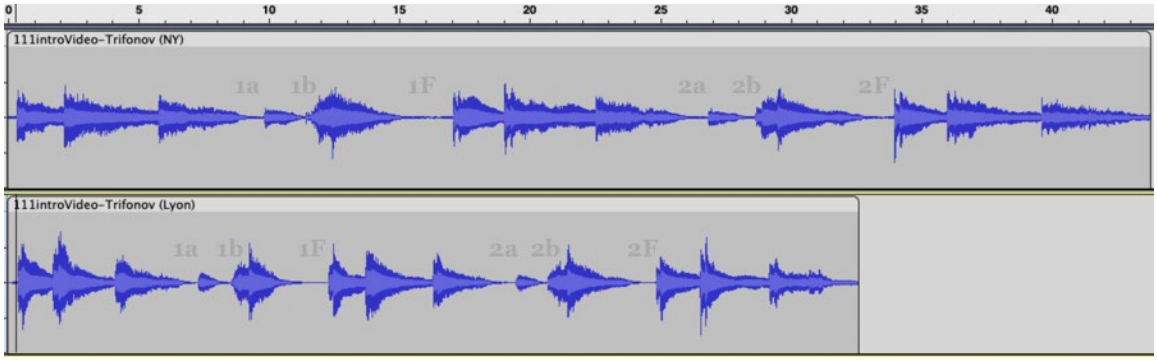
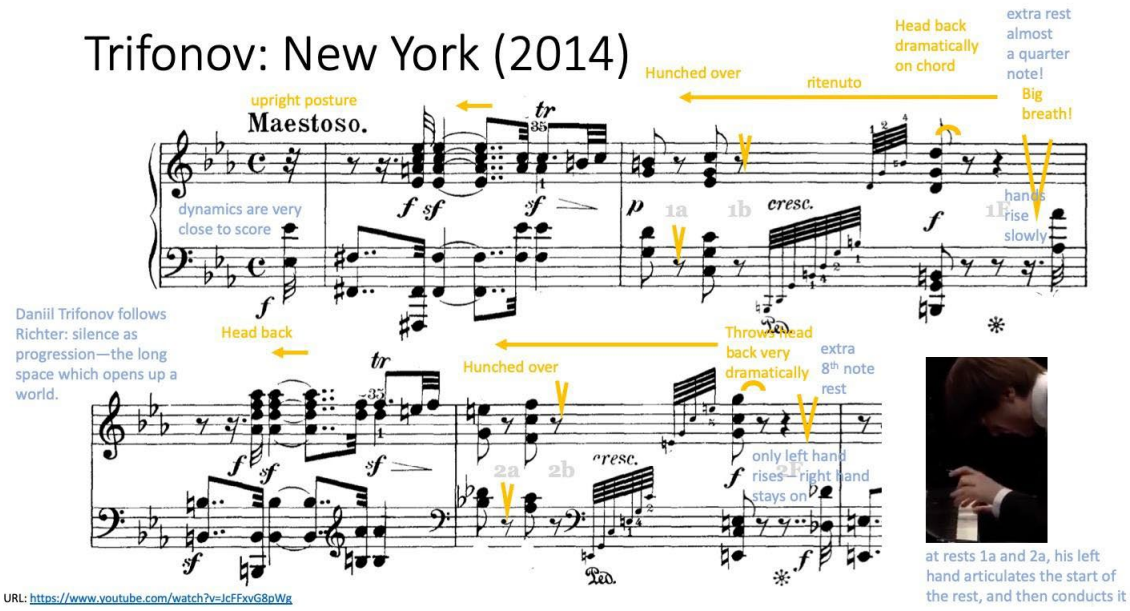
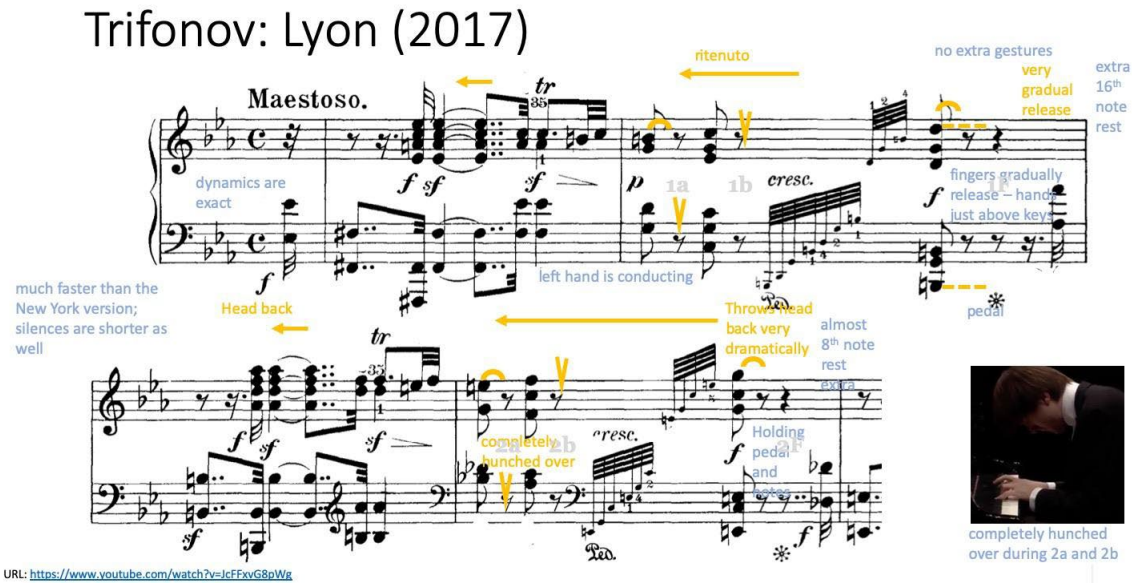


Figure 67: comparison of Trifonov waveforms

It is a performance that is wonderful to listen to and difficult to watch. The pauses are apparent agony—his contorted face is theatrically Shakespearean, dramatically ugly. Particularly unique to this interpretation is his use of breathing in F1 as a marker for the descending 7th chords of the next fanfare. His sharp intake of breath (especially in the New York concert) creates an audible upbeat. But Beethoven has already written the upbeat as notes. So the breath at the end of bar 2 is *an upbeat to an upbeat*. This double upbeat seems unique to Trifonov and recalls the double prelude performed by Dead Territory in their cover of *4'33"*: the band prepares to play the piece (in silence), then they count off a drum roll (in noise), and then they finally start the composition (in silence). This creates an ambiguous situation in which the beginning is excitingly unclear.



► TRIFONOV PERFORMANCE: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937219



► TRIFONOV SOURCE VIDEO: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936965#tool-2937123

The two performances shown are remarkably similar in dynamics, though the Lyon version is a noticeable ten seconds faster. In Lyon, he omits the big intake of breath (the double upbeat) at 1F, transitioning more smoothly between the two fanfares. The 1F and 2F rests are both closer to the notated durations and not as drawn out as in New York. Possibly, he is responding to different acoustics and a different architecture. The Lyon concert hall is considerably drier, which probably explains the faster tempo: he does not have to wait as much for the reverberation as he does in New York.

5.3 Embodiments of Eloquent Silence

In Chapter 1, I posited that, in some situations, the visual elements of silence are more important for the receiver than the auditory elements. The examples above may support my theory of the visual as a valuable marker in perceiving silence. I chose the opening section of Beethoven's last sonata because it seemed emblematic of his masterful use of silence. Yet, when I began studying performances of the fanfares, I realized how few of the pianists employed any silence at all. Instead, they were creating elaborate bodily gestures during the rests to communicate "silence." Eloquent silence became more about embodiment than about silence itself. The public had to paradoxically attend to the visual rather than the audible to understand the rests.

► COMPARATIVE VIDEO OF ALL RESTS: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936968#tool-2937183

Marking can be done in many ways, as these examples illustrate. Speed or pulse can be shown with the hands; color or affect might be suggested with facial expressions; shoulders could communicate peace or intensity; power or force might be shown by throwing the head back. While visual markers may not be necessary to hear silence, they contribute to how an audience understands silence in live performances.

Each pianist—through their unique interaction with silence and mediated by a complex interplay of embodiments, facial expressions, and gestures—opens a dialogue with Beethoven and with the audience, inviting an exploration of the spaces between the notes. Far from rendering silence as just non-playing, these performances elevate it to a visible gestural narrative.

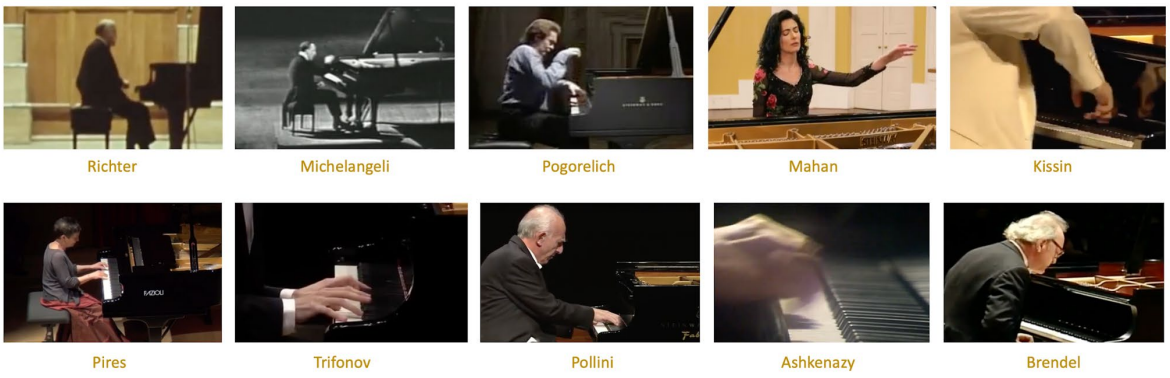


Figure 69: ten different embodiments of the rest at 1F

These ten pictures show a remarkable variety of gestures in the same instant. The embodiments of silence inform us of otherwise inexpressible struggles.[45] The pictures demonstrate how rests offer a unique opportunity for storytelling. During a rest, the performer has full rein to "conduct" the phrasing, to "show" the line or to "mold" the audience's experience visually. In my opinion, embodiments during rests can offer a resistance to the homogenization of pedagogy, conservatories, performance practice, and even Mann's texts: performers can express themselves more bodily in Beethoven's rests than they can in the notes. The rests afford a less scripted and potentially less rehearsed (re-repeated) creative outlet for the pianists. The rests offer the chance for a freer, non-traditional vocabulary which can also allow the pianists a means to align with the music, "to go with," to emotionally engage with the sounds through gesture. These embodiments are not disciplined by pedagogy or standard practice, so they provide a zone of freedom for individuality in classical music performance.

Figure 70: screenshots showing facial expressions in opus 111

The gestures of these pianists inhabit an ambiguous bodily world between the fictional and the real, a dichotomy that is sometimes mentioned in the world of theater. Derived from the ideas of enlightenment philosopher Johann Jakob Engel, this contrasts the "real

[45] It is also possible to perform all of the Beethoven sonatas with a neutral facial expression and only the gestures needed to transition from note to note. A pianist who does so might be accused of giving a robotic, emotionless performance. However, it could also be a concentrated performance: a more neutral posture may also help to visibly convey concentration and a focus on sounds.

body" with the "fictional body" (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 85). The real body is supposed to be one's physical, actual body, containing the gestures of our daily life. The fictional body at its most extreme is the dancer in *Swan Lake,* who is radiant and smiling onstage despite the agonizing pain in her bloody feet. The fictional body is a performative one created to entertain the audience. But it can also be a kind of armor, a defense.

Where can we situate the bodily gestures of the concert pianist? Speaking from my own experience, a concert is a performative situation in which I have chosen to place myself. My gestures are considered, thought out, and practiced. Over years of performing, I have created an internal code of accepted gestures for myself. These have been studied and repeated. To borrow another theatrical term, I am *in character*. But I am not trained *per se*: I am not an actor. Like most classical pianists, I have not studied movement. My body is more controlled than fictionalized. Many gestures are motivated, but I also make non-intentional gestures and inadvertent facial expressions out of nervousness or tension, engagement or excitement. Hence not every gesture is re-rehearsed. But all are part of my performing persona.

The motivated gestures might correspond to the training and approach of concert pianists, whose artistic practice is a repetition, a choreography of the performable. In the classic conservatory-trained model of an interpreter, the transmission of the pianist's emotions is made *audible* via the notes and the silences, and made *visible* via the gestures and embodiments. And in the here-ness and now-ness of a performance, the pianist is simultaneously inhabiting multiple characters, some more fictional than others. The gestural freedom afforded by rests helps make the depiction of these characters possible.

Theater scholar Richard Schechner suggests that all performance comes from repeated embodied behavior: "Performances—of art, rituals, or ordinary life—are restored bits of behaviors, *twice behaved behaviors*, in other words—repeated behaviors that we learned, trained for, rehearsed, etc." (Schechner, 2013, p. 60). Pianists are constantly training and constantly practicing. Pianists *repeat* gestures for a living.

The repetition involved in presenting these gestures to the public, the degree of virtuosity needed to perform the gestures between the notes, and the scale of the gestures (very large,

compared to the note gestures) all seem to indicate a strong degree of motivation on the part of the performers.[46]

What might those motivations be? Kissin's approach to the silences suggests an emotional wrestling with the piano, a sort of clash of titans (Kissin versus the Steinway), while Richter is stoic, as the lonely prince. Both pianists' gestures seem as motivated and emotional as their notes: strongly argued and powerfully illustrated. The markers for silence (even when there is no actual silence) that these pianists so dramatically embody may be, in some cases, illustrations, a mimesis of the silence or the decaying notes, a picturing of the reverberation of the hall (such as Mahan's flowing arm movements). Gestures for something that isn't there (the rests that are obscured by the pedal) give the impression of eloquent silence. Some of these pianists are pretending to perform silence, thus fictionalizing silence (Kissin especially) while others are obscuring the rests (Pollini) without a gesture of eloquent silence. The markers that Kissin and Pollini provide do not correspond with audible silence—they are markers for silences that are not really there.

Another motivator for silence is reflection, as in a means of thinking through, and understanding.

> We tend to identify the delivery of a piece of music with its notes, and it is perhaps in part because of this that our attention increases when there is an absence of notes. The reflective element is primarily for the benefit of the listener: it has the capacity to enable him or her to make sense of what has gone before, to enter into the creative process of reconstructing the performer's meaning [...]. (Potter, 2017, p. 156)

The audience needs time to process a piece of music, not only after but also during the performance itself. In Anton Webern's *Variations*, there are very frequent and very notable rests that offset the short phrases. These rests fulfill a structural function, separating out essential material so that the audience can digest Webern's new musical language and understand something of the complex form. This does not mean that the silences are subordinated to the sounds. In fact it is the opposite: without the silences, the sounds would not make sense. The silences are essential for Webern's audience to

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[46] This does not preclude unconscious intentionalities or unintended communications. Choosing the wrong dress or getting the wrong haircut may luckily be dismissed as a non-communicating by-product of musical engagement or may unluckily communicate substantial, perhaps negative, information to the audience. The audience has its own (framing) conventions and expectations (see Chapter 3 for my experience in Magdeburg with a silent audience).

understand his new language. Opus 111 also seemed modern to audiences of Beethoven's time, and thus structural clarity could have been a motivation for silences.[47] The best example might be Pires. Even though she shortens the silences, they are presented as counterweights to the notes in a structuring, reflective manner. The silences have a retrospective quality that helps the audience digest the notes that have recently sounded.

Performed silences may arise through providing the audience time or space for reflection. But the pianists themselves might also use silence embodiment for reflection or understanding. When learning a new piece of music, I often find myself practicing with one hand while conducting with the other. At some point, as the learning advances closer to a performance, both hands are working at the piano, and much of that conducting is tucked away into my mental and bodily memory, no longer visible to the audience. However, some vestiges remain and are incorporated into the performance. The process of rehearsing and re-rehearsing has inadvertently created new gestures that are visible when the hands are not playing notes; the rests can be a glimpse into the performer's rehearsal technique, their private practice.

Other variations are also possible. Pianists may conduct themselves during rehearsal or performance. This self-conducting can be quite visible, especially with the left hand in Richter's or Trifonov's performances. Gestures can be a tool to engage and immerse oneself in the music. In these cases, gesturing can be a way of opening. Gestures may even constitute a mode of listening. In these performed silences, facial and gestural expressions of pianists might not be pictured as deliberate communication with the audience but rather understood as a side-effect of communication with oneself as a musician.

There might be other less physical motivations for exaggerating performed silence. Many musicians relish the audience's silence during a particularly gripping performance. Onstage, I try to have an extra ear pointing out at the audience, gauging their attention—from their silence. The more perfect the audience's silence, the more engaged they are. This silence behind the music is a form of audience approbation. A rest in the score can signal a chance for the performer to test the room's temperature, to check the focus of the crowd. Listening to the audience during a gesture can thus be a motivator for eloquent silence.

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[47] See a further discussion of this in the archive video of Eidschun's *Specks*.

5.4 Coda

Silences separate the fanfares that open the sonata, and the notes of the fanfares *mark* the silences but are equally *marked* by the silences. A heterogeneous performance tradition has developed around these fanfares. Key ingredients are teaching traditions, the score, associated texts, concert hall acoustics, the rituals and socio-cultural context of the concert, and other factors, including piano, stage, and costumes.

Looking-at and *listening-to* the silences of virtuoso pianists gave me a chance to pull apart the gestures, to isolate them, and to experiment with them. Far beyond mere entertainment, these gestures are themselves a musical or theatrical communication. I see them as an unwritten vocabulary for communicating silence's multidimensionality (see Chapter 2) to the audience.

► SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1712958/2936968#tool-2937184

What they communicate and how they do so depends also on the performer's persona and their apparent gestural motivations. These performers are often working from the same score, interpreting the same rests. Yet, even more so than with the notes, the silence differences are extreme. Freed of their attachment to the keyboard, pianists create strange and eccentric means of capturing the audience's attention and describing or conducting the silences.

I suggest some conclusions:

- The visual curates/narrates our perception of eloquent silence in concert; pianists consciously or unconsciously understand that, and visibly embody the silences;
- The rests afford a freedom of movement to the performer.
- The visual constantly influences our perception of music. As such, these performers embody silence vividly. They are picturing silence for us, even if they are not playing it. Few of the pianists respect the rests; the sound level is often loud. Instead, they *illustrate* eloquent silence for us.
- When pianists conduct, choreograph, and embody the rests, the audience visually understands—more cognitively than perceptually—*that* silence is happening and *how* silence is happening.