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# The Role of Empathic Identification in Virtual Musical Agency

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**Abstract**

The Role of Empathic Identification in Virtual Musical Agency

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Listeners can experience strong and often positive identification with music. Contemporary research has emphasized the importance of a listener's own identity, including their sense of self and their desires, when forming such identifications. However, acknowledgments of the listener's role in the listening experience have failed to productively engage discussions of virtual musical agency. Theorists have typically fallen into two groups: 1) those who consider agency to be a composed phenomenon existing outside of a listener's subjective response; or 2) those who consider agency to be so susceptible to subjective interpretation that one cannot theorize about it at all. In this dissertation, I present the concept of "empathic identification" as a middle ground, or a means of understanding and theorizing about the subjectivity of listeners' experiences with virtual musical agency. I use psychological literature on empathy (both within and outside of the field of music) to explain the mechanism behind listeners' identifications and to supplement previous theories of virtual musical agency—in particular Hatten (2018).

When listeners identify with music, they empathize with a virtual "other" which they perceive to be strongly similar to themselves. This "other" is traditionally referred to as a virtual musical agent. However, the listener also phenomenally merges with the music when empathic identification occurs. As a result, the listener projects themselves "into" the music, experiencing its expression as though it were their own. This experience introduces what I call the "agential listener," or a category of virtual agency which originates in the listener but is located within the music; it is the virtual presence of the listener within the music itself. This virtual agency can

interact with all hierarchical levels of virtual musical agency (as described by Hatten 2018), and explains the subjectivity of listeners' agential attributions. In effect, a listener's personal agency can be similar to or different from a musical agency, causing listeners to attribute agency and enter into the music at different agential levels. I use Hatten's (2018) analysis of Chopin's Ballade No. 4 in F Minor to demonstrate how this theory can supplement previous agential analyses. Finally, I argue that empathic identification can explain seemingly conflicting research on the enjoyment and engagement of listeners with classical music, especially in concert hall settings.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## A Theory of Empathic Identification

> While I was listening to a typical tenor saxophonist from the 1930s or 1940s—it might have been Coleman Hawkins…[I] reached a state of very strong identification with [the] music, so strong that I completely co-live with the development of events of the music and am at one with it. (Gabrielsson 2011, 7.4C) (Man, middle-aged, 1960s)

> Basia, *Time and Tide,* those were the name of the artiste and the title of the album… This was the most perfect melody together with the most perfect voice, this was me, but in the form of music. (Gabrielsson 2011, 7.4D) (Woman, young, 1980s)

> I had recorded a live broadcast from the Berwald Concert Hall—Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor…Every part of the music that reached my ears became a part of me, and the first and second movements as a whole—that was me just then…I was inside the music, and the music was inside me. It wasn't possible to distinguish one from the other. (Gabrielsson 2011, 7.4E) (Woman, middle-aged, 1980s)

Music has the remarkable capacity to present sound in a way that allows us to identify with it. A number of interviewees in Alf Gabrielsson's (2011) book *Strong Experiences with Music*, some of whom are quoted above, describe this type of experience. Their accounts portray a close unity with music that can be experienced at different ages, by all genders, and across genres. They also reveal the possibility of identification with a wide range of structural levels within music—from a single vocal line to a collection of movements within a concerto. Yet despite their experienced "oneness" with music, interviewees maintain a distinction between "self" and "other." In other words, listeners were aware that the music was not *literally* a part of their own body and mind, but rather consisted of external auditory signals.

Such identification with music can be a profound experience. What drives these identifications, and how do they affect a listener's overarching interpretation of music? In this dissertation, I seek to answer this question by synthesizing theories of empathy and virtual musical agency. I will use the former to refer to the simulation of an "other's" experience within the self, while the latter will represent the perception of intentional, consistent, and independently expressed emotion or action ascribed to musical features. Since identification with music *does* preserve a sense of "self" and "other," even as the two merge into one experience, it is empathic, and will thus be termed "empathic identification" (for more on this concept, see Chapter 2). (See also **Table 1.1** at the end of this chapter for a glossary of important terms used in this dissertation.)

Empathic identification with music requires the presence of an "other" (i.e., virtual musical agent) with which one is empathizing. Hence, empathy and agency are deeply intertwined concepts. Yet despite their interconnectedness, these fields have largely remained separate in music theoretical and cognitive research. I seek to close this gap by introducing a new, specifically empathic category of agency: "the agential listener," or a virtual *human* agency which arises when a listener empathically identifies with a virtual *musical* agent. That is to say, the agential listener is present when a listener projects their own human agency into the music, phenomenally merging with a virtual musical agency. The agential listener is then responsible for the subjectivity of agential interpretation.

As a final note, I describe empathic identification (which gives rise to the agential listener) as a "theory"—by which I mean a proposed explanation for the means by which listeners experience a phenomenal merger with music, as well as the means by which subjective agential interpretation arises. Empathic identification, I argue, can not only explain these

phenomena, but can further illuminate certain findings within music cognitive research that have been previously seen as conflicting (see Chapter 5 for more details). Finally, while it may prove difficult to isolate empathic identification as a variable for future cognitive research and thus make it more difficult to test such a "theory," the more we understand about an individual's personal human agency, the more we should be able to predict how a listener will engage with particular pieces of music (once again, see Chapter 5). I will thus use the term theory here to convey the explanatory power and (at least potentially) testable nature of what I am calling empathic identification with music.

## Phenomenology and Empathic Identification

In order to build a theory of empathic identification, we must begin with an understanding of virtual musical agency, or what is "in" the music. However, we must also recognize the listener's role in perceiving these supposed musical "entities." While a listener-focused (as opposed to music-focused) perspective is a departure from traditional music theory, it is consistent with the field's more recent developments. Scholars such as Tia DeNora (2000), Joseph Straus (2011), and Robert Hatten (2018) have all acknowledged how listeners' individual identities shape their experience of music, albeit in unique ways. Because I seek to more clearly define the subjectivity of interpretation as an effect of empathic identification, then, I will explore the experiences of individual listeners. After all, if our experiences (as invoked through empathy) affect our perception of music, then understanding the phenomenal nature of these experiences will be crucial to understanding these perceptions.

Phenomenology in its fullest sense involves a deep dive into a particular experience, probing it from the inside out. However, I will adopt a phenomenological approach only to the extent that it serves musical interpretation (and thus prefer the term "phenomenal"). I do not

attempt a full exploration of the inner workings of empathy or its effects on the body and mind of the listener. Instead, I broadly consider empathy to be an *experience* of shared space between self and other (listener and music) that in turn affects musical interpretation. In other words, my focus is on the "how" of interpretation, not the "what" of experience itself. While these are, of course, deeply intertwined considerations, an exploration that radiates from a central "how" of interpretation will lead to a particular weighting of philosophical and theoretical approaches that is different from an exploration that radiates from a central "what." In this dissertation, I use my own perceptions of similarity between virtual musical agencies and my own personal agency as the main phenomenal supplement to the "how" of interpretation. This allows me to better explain how personal and virtual musical agencies interact, though I do not present these experiences as authoritative or definitive for musical interpretation as a whole.

## Listeners and Listening Experiences

None of the abstract "listeners" referred to in this dissertation are presented as authoritative or definitive, either. Thus, I will often use the indefinite article *a* to describe these suggested listeners and their experiences rather than the definite article *the.* However, when speaking of a *particular* (imagined) listener or listening experience, I may use the definite article *the* for textual clarity. Any time I do so, *the* is not referring to an interpretation that *should* be or *is* always. It is simply the truth of an experience in that moment, even if a hypothetical one. Different levels of stylistic knowledge, attentional care or ability, and personal experiences will all affect empathic identification in a way that leads to different musical interpretations.

As such, my conception of "a/the listener" includes, but is not limited to, the stylistically and strategically competent listener of Robert Hatten's (2018) theory of virtual musical agency—a theory around which I position my work. Hatten himself notes the pervasiveness of

hearing musical agency and expression. Essentially all Western-enculturated[1] listeners have the ability, and even tendency, to hear musical expression as though it were emerging from a virtual source of some kind (see Hatten's book for a thorough discussion). When I refer to "a/the listener," then, I acknowledge listeners who are both stylistically aware and unaware, while recognizing that different "competencies" may result in more or less nuanced agential ascriptions. The term "competency," however, endows the uninitiated listener with an unnecessarily negative connotation; even though a listener may not be *stylistically* competent, most listeners are *empathically* competent, with an ability to draw on their personal experiences in order to connect with the music.[2] As a result, I will henceforth avoid this term.

"A/the listener" may or may not be particularly familiar with the style at hand, then. For example, the listener might range from an older individual who predominantly listened to popular music while growing up, to a music theorist who has made Bach or Schoenberg their life's work. The category of virtual musical agency which I call the "agential listener" is available for *all* of these listeners (and others). It presents the result of empathic processing in all listening experiences in which identification takes place, regardless of the listener's and music's specific agential identity. To further explain this idea, consider **Figure 1.1**: when a human agency X is perceived to be strongly similar to a virtual musical agency Y, empathic identification can result (represented by the double-headed arrow). Many factors can also shape the perception of Y, such as stylistic knowledge. However, it is the *relational* experience of the arrow, or the

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[1] I refrain from using the more common term "Western listener" to avoid ambiguity. The concept of Western-enculturated listeners does not include those who are currently living in the West but are otherwise enculturated, but *does* include those living outside of the West who are highly familiar with its culture.

[2] Individuals on the autistic spectrum may not be as "empathically competent," but this is not to say they are not or cannot be musically competent at all. See Straus (2011) for a fascinating and important discussion on the topic.

perception of similarity and even *identicality* between X and Y, with which I am concerned in this dissertation.

**Figure 1.1: A Diagram of Empathic Identification:** in which X and Y represent agencies in two different domains (humanity and music) that are perceived to be strongly similar.


Because it involves a relational experience, the agential listener can hypothetically arise for any listener in any culture listening to any music, as long as they *relate* to it as though it were identical to themselves. However, I choose to focus on Western-enculturated listeners here, since this enables me to draw on my own experience.

"A/the listening experience" similarly refers to the real-world experience of a listener. In other words, I am interested in what a listener *actually* experiences instead of what *can* be heard, what *may* be heard, or what *should* be heard. I additionally acknowledge both real-time and retrospective empathic identifications with virtual musical agents, while emphasizing the real-time component. Traditional musical analysis typically presents relatively retrospective interpretations of music; the analyst is often positioned above the work with infinite time to hear, process, understand, and interpret musical material as some imaginary listener is hearing it. This imaginary listener is often the analyst projecting their own view, or a projected listener that does not correspond to any real-world individual at all. Music is treated as an objective "work" in which one can spend as much time as they like in any moment, as though studying one corner of a painting for hours, rather than the dynamic, in-time experience of fallible and distracted human beings. I reject this idealized form of analysis.

Instead, a listening experience may not involve a listener's full, undivided attention to the music. According to Nielsen's (2014) report, it is extremely common for individuals to listen to music while engaged in some other activity, such as exercising, working, or driving. I do not presume to idealize listeners as those who hear every note of the music, but instead recognize that some will truly *hear* more notes or different parts of the music than others. This is not to say that these listeners are less focused or less serious. Even in the relatively focused setting of a concert hall the mind will naturally wander. Rather, it is important to recognize that the more diverse the individual listener's attention, the starker the moments of change needed to become a part of that listener's conscious experience of the music (see Eric Clarke's 2005 ecological theory of music perception and Chapter 2 and 3's discussion of markedness).

## Compositional Intent

Empathic identification is a process that might occur when listening to different musical genres. However, Western Art Music will serve as a case study to better engage with the current music theoretical and cognitive literature on virtual musical agency. I define Western Art Music as classical music from medieval times to the present that is based on Western European compositional practices. This includes any composer working broadly within a Western milieu.

Especially post-18th century, Western Art Music typically stems from a single composer who largely determines which notes are performed and in which style. Music theory often attempts to project into the mind of the composer, seeking to understand what they intended. Yet skepticism has grown about how well we can truly understand compositional intent. For example, Edward Cone's famous (1982) article on Schubert's "promissory note" begs the question, did Schubert *actually* represent his struggle with syphilis in the music or not? While fascinating, I do not engage with these questions here. My focus is instead more similar to the

work of Tia DeNora (2000) and others who engage with interpretations of music by real-world listeners. In essence, I consider empathic identification to be affected, but not controlled by, compositional structure and intent.

## Nature of Examples

The examples in Chapters 2-4, especially, draw on music from the 18th-20th centuries. Such a focus on the classical canon was chosen in order to make my theory more readily accessible to readers by discussing familiar works, and also to draw on music with which I am personally most familiar (since I will be drawing on my own experiences of the agential listener). However, this canon largely consists of music written by Caucasian cis-men, raising the concern of exclusion. By discussing only a certain sub-group of the population, music theory has historically contributed to racist, homophobic, and other exclusionary biases. Such disregard for the voices of so many underrepresented people in our country and world is simply not acceptable. Empathic identification, however, provides one way forward for helping to diminish these biases by celebrating the diversity of different voices. Rather than defining what should and should not be heard in any given work, empathic identification lauds the individuality of the listener and the importance of the personal experience they bring to the music. Thus, I hope to increase the effort toward diversity (however slightly) by providing the groundwork for accepting and analyzing different compositional and listening perspectives.

At the same time, because I draw on my own experiences, many of my examples will present similar interpretations. This similarity reflects how I tend to use and engage with Western Art Music as a genre. However, I attempt to counteract this similarity by including examples of my empathic identifications in different moods, i.e. when different agencies are prominent within me. I also draw on a variety of historical periods to help offset these similarities. While I

recognize that I have particular emotional dispositions that I tend to seek out within music, I will always strive for maximum clarity about the limitations of my own perspective.

Musical interpretation is, of course, not only affected by the listener and composer, but by the performer, as well. The same piano piece will be performed very differently by Glenn Gould, Vladimir Horowitz, and Evgeny Kissin, and will thus provide different opportunities for empathic identification. When providing general examples of my theory in Chapter 3, I will not provide specific performance citations (especially since I offer a variety of possible interpretations), but I *will* provide the identity of the performance and performer for Chapter 4's in-depth discussion of Chopin's Ballade No. 4. In this chapter, I shift away from using individual pieces to explicate my theory and towards *using* this theory to better understand a given piece, which makes the interpretive choices of the performer crucial.

Finally, I also draw on examples from film, television shows, novels, and other media in order to illustrate the complexities of empathic identification. In principle, a theory of empathic identification can be extended to these media because of its relational focus; as long as an individual's human agency is perceived to be similar to *some other agency* (virtual or otherwise, existing in music, novels, television shows, or other media), empathic identification can occur. However, each type of media must be addressed in its own right with care given to its own singularities (for a discussion of the differences between musical and literary narratives in particular, see Almén 2003). As a result, I will not explore identification with these other media in detail, but present them as a way to better illustrate how empathic identifications operate in more concrete and colloquial settings with well-defined characters.

**The Controversy of Empathy**

I will not engage with the effects of empathy on an individual listener or communities of listeners in this dissertation, beyond empathy's direct effects on listeners' musical interpretations. However, certain views of empathy among both scholars and society at large may automatically trigger suspicion for the premise of my work. Hence, I will briefly describe the two main views in order to set them aside. On one end of the spectrum reside those like former American president Barack Obama, who has lamented Americans' "empathy deficit." During his presidency, he radically argued that a lack of empathy was even more concerning than the country's *financial* deficit (Honigsbaum Jan 4 2013, Barack Obama and the 'Empathy Deficit'). Empirical research has done much to support this elevated view of empathy, revealing how it can drive us to care for those in need (for a review of empathy's prosocial benefits, see Weisz and Zaki 2017).

Yet empathy is not encouraged by all. Yale psychologist Paul Bloom suggests in his (2016) book *Against Empathy* that instead of adopting others' emotions and experiences into our *own* bodies and minds, we should think rationally and detachedly about others. Otherwise, he argues, we can become overwhelmed with negative emotions and experience severe ethical consequences (for an interview with Bloom, see Illing Jan 16 2019, The Case Against Empathy). This is not a new idea; Davis (1983) famously divided empathy into four main components or types, one of which he labels "personal distress." When an individual experiences this kind of empathy, they become consumed with themselves, addressing their *own* negative emotions and needs rather than those of the *other* whose negative emotions they have absorbed. This prevents social bonding. However, my work does not engage with such controversy and instead focuses on the effect of empathy on listeners' *interpretations of music*, rather than their social

interactions in the "real world." I will not consider whether these interpretations are positively or negatively valenced and what effect they may have on empathy *between* listeners, although these are important considerations for future research. Instead, I will focus on how empathy as a process influences when and how virtual musical agencies are heard by individual listeners.

## Dissertation Outline

Having now laid out the premises and terminology used in this dissertation, Chapter 2 begins with a literature review on both virtual musical agency and empathy. I reveal how a concept of virtual musical agency requires a concept of empathy (more specifically, empathic identification), systematically exploring the connection between these two fields in a way that previous theories have only suggested. In Chapter 3, I seek to remedy the cursory nature of this connection by introducing a new category of virtual musical agency which I call the "agential listener." The agential listener resides as a sort of hologram, a virtual presence within the music, distinct from "a/the listener" (i.e., the real-world human being whose empathic identifications introduce this virtual agency). Understanding the agential listener in turn allows for a fuller understanding and theorization of the subjectivity of agential interpretation, due to differences in what I call "empathic markedness" (or the degree of difference perceived between musical elements that arises from a perception of similarity to, or difference from, the listener's personal human agency). Next, Chapter 4 applies this theory to Hatten's (2018) analysis of Chopin's Ballade No. 4, offering an in-depth exploration of how empathic identification and the agential listener can expand and complement his analysis, engaging with the subjectivity of interpretation more directly.

Music theory is not the only field which benefits from an understanding of empathic identification. In Chapter 5, I explore how arts organizations have, in fact, already unknowingly

activated this type of identification to better engage with their audiences; the presence or absence of empathic identification can better explain these organizations' successes and failures, respectively. I proceed by hypothesizing additional effective strategies based on the current social psychological literature on empathic manipulations. Just as humans' empathy with one another can be activated by the use of certain "interventions," humans' empathy with virtual musical agents might similarly be activated if these interventions can be translated into human-to-music settings. In fact, I argue that an empathic-interpretive theory is crucial for explaining previous research on the efficacy of program notes, synchronization, interactive performances, and other classical music concert hall experiences. I conclude in Chapter 6 with a summary of what the agential listener is and what it accomplishes via empathic identification, as well as suggestions for future research and the empathic interventions this theory may enable.

**Table 1.1 - Glossary and Examples of Terms**

| **Term** | **Definition** | **Example** |
|---|---|---|
| A/the listener | Western-enculturated listeners who are either stylistically aware or unaware | An individual who grew up in the U.S. listening to Western music, but who now lives in the Middle East |
| A/the listening experience | The real-world experience of a listener, including in-time and retrospective interpretations and attention that may or may not be fully on the music | Hearing a theme as a virtual human agent before hearing it as part of an overarching narrative with other characters; having one's attention drawn back to the music from a sudden increase in dynamics |
| Empathy | Simulating another's experiences in your own body/mind in order to understand the other | Imagining what it would feel like to have lost your job in order to better understand a friend's fear and frustration |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Empathic identification | A subcategory of empathy which occurs as a result of strong similarity between the subject and target, retaining a self-other distinction but with a stronger sense of self-other merging | Feeling as though you and some aspect of the music are "one" (see Gabrielsson examples at the beginning of this chapter) |
| Empathic markedness | A valued alteration stemming from a difference between a listener's human agency (whether current or desired) and the music; the reason for states and changes of empathic identification, and thus what drives subjective agential interpretation | Experiencing a calmer, more positive secondary theme of a sonata-form movement as importantly different to or similar to yourself in a way that differs to the difference/similarity you have experienced thus far in the piece |
| Virtual musical agency | Intentional, consistent, and independently expressed emotion or action ascribed to the music itself | Hearing a melody as expressing emotion |
| Human agency (i.e., real world agency) | Intentionally expressed emotion or action of a human being, unmediated by musical expression | Experiencing a *desire* to win the lottery; choosing to *buy* a lottery ticket |
| Actancy | Unintentional action or thought | Falling off a cliff when you did not intend to fall; having anxious thoughts that feel uncontrollable |
| The agential listener | A category of virtual human agency stemming directly from the listener and located within the music, which arises when a listener empathically identifies with a virtual musical agent | The listener's virtual presence *as* a melody with which they are identifying |
| Western Art Music | Classical music from medieval times to the present that is based on Western European compositional practices | Music by Gesualdo, Bach, Mozart, Liszt, Schnittke |

## Chapter 2: Agency, Empathy, and Their Intersections

Shortly after Polina Osetinskaya (2005) begins to play the melody of Shostakovich's 24 Preludes, Op. 34: No. 1 in C Major, I find myself identifying with it. Its playful, even tongue-in-cheek movement feels human-like, intentional, and similar to my own playful personality. As such, even as I recognize it to be an "other" (I do not literally think the music *is me*), its expression becomes my own expression. But how do such subjective identifications occur, and how does a listener's personal agency interact with compositionally-defined agencies within the music? In other words, how can we understand the role of the listener when engaging with music as *both* an "other" *and* as a representation of the "self"?

To answer this question, I present empathy as the means by which a listener identifies with music, producing a unique category of virtual agency (instead of actual, or "real-world"[3] agency such as that of the performer; see Hatten 2018) which I will call the agential listener, and which in turn directly affects how agency is ascribed to music. While a listener may also experience real-world agency when they experience music as though it were their own expression or action, the agential listener emphasizes the listener's *virtual* presence within the music itself. This distinction will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Overall, both agency and empathy are crucial for understanding human beings' interactions in the "real world," as well as how we understand music; thus, they serve as a bridge which connects human listeners to music. In this chapter, I review definitions and uses of both concepts in order to elucidate their connections and implications for a theory of empathic identification.

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[3] I will prefer the term "real-world" to "actual" since virtual agency is no less actual or directly experienced by a listener. Rather, the *locus* of the agency is different. More on this below.

## Agency

> [We as human beings] always expect that there *must* be something beyond [our] direct observations, something inside the actors' heads, something *motivational,* something about desire, want, goal, and value. We assume that actors want something within and beyond their social performance. We assume that human beings are motivated, goal-directed *agents* (McAdams 2015 142).

Social psychologist Dan P. McAdams emphasizes the deep significance of human agency[4] in his (2015) book, *The Art and Science of Personality Development*. Not only do we experience ourselves as motivated agents, we also routinely infer and project agency onto the people around us. In its "full sense," agency involves "self-conscious striving, will, choice, deliberative planning, and purpose" (McAdams 2015, 145).[5] As such, it can be broken down into two main components. An agent has both, 1) desires and goals; and 2) the (at least perceived) ability to *achieve* those desires and goals.[6] In this review, I will focus specifically on how such agency can be attributed within purely instrumental Western Art Music.

### *Definitions from Music Theory*

In music theory, definitions of agency have been very similar to McAdams' definition at times, while straining against it at others. Furthermore, some definitions emphasize certain aspects of his definition at the *expense* of others, occasionally even to the point of becoming unrecognizable as definitions of the same concept. Some definitions attribute agency to hearing

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[4] I will use the term "agency" to broadly refer to both an agent and an agent's expression.

[5] Different definitions of "agency" can be found in social psychology, as well. However, for the purposes of this chapter I use McAdams' influential and recent example as a point from which to situate musical definitions.

[6] Desires can also occur without agency when an individual does not *desire* to have a desire. For example, an individual might desire to say something unkind to someone else when they are angry, but simultaneously experience an *additional* desire to be a more loving person who would never even think of saying such a thing. Henceforth, when I speak of desire I will be referring to the first, simpler, and more agential meaning.

physical actions, while others attribute agency to hearing emotions. Some focus on the role of individual instruments as agents, while others discuss combinations of musical attributes. What is consistent across these definitions, however, is the requirement for a perceived *intentionality* and *anthropomorphization* of music in order for agency to arise. Rather than limiting a definition of agency to *only* physical action or emotion, or *only* a single instrument, then, I will allow for multiple ways of arriving at agential ascription in music, as long as these two conditions are met. (For a table presenting the varied definitions of musical agency, see **Table 2.1** at the end of this chapter).

The benefit of an inclusive definition of agency is that it reflects the multifaceted reality of human existence. In "real life," human beings may express and experience agency in any number of ways, including the experience of internal mental states, external physical action, the physical individuality of the person, or a collection of feelings or experiences that contribute to this overarching ascription. The variety of definitions that have arisen in music theory are not, then, contradictory, but rather reveal the beautiful complexity within which agency in music can (and does) arise.

*The Intentionality of Agency*

Perceiving an "intentionality" or "will" is arguably the most pervasive and important requirement for attributing agency within music. Matthew BaileyShea (2012) contrasts these "active" forces of agency with the "passive" forces of gravity, magnetism, and inertia in tonal music, as described by Steve Larson (2011). Tonality as a system creates a certain set of expectations which mimic environmental expectations in the "real world."[7] For example, musical

[7] While Larson only ascribes his forces to tonal music, Hatten (2018) offers an extension that embraces post-tonality. For example, suspension-like figures are made possible even if the "ground" from which the suspension takes place

*gravity* arises from descending melodic lines, while ascending lines are heard to work against this force; the second and seventh scale degrees are *magnetically* attracted to the tonic pitch; melodic lines that move in a particular direction are expected to continue moving in that direction with a similar intervallic pattern due to *inertia*. BaileyShea points out that we understand motions which mimic environmental forces to be passive, acting without a will of their own. For example, gravity does not act out of an *intent* to cause a child to fall down, even though a falling action takes place. The introduction of Chopin's Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52 offers a particularly musical example: it features a repetition and descent in the left hand's inner line that—due to its adherence to gravity and repetition—is not agential (Hatten 2018; see arrows in **Figure 2.1**).

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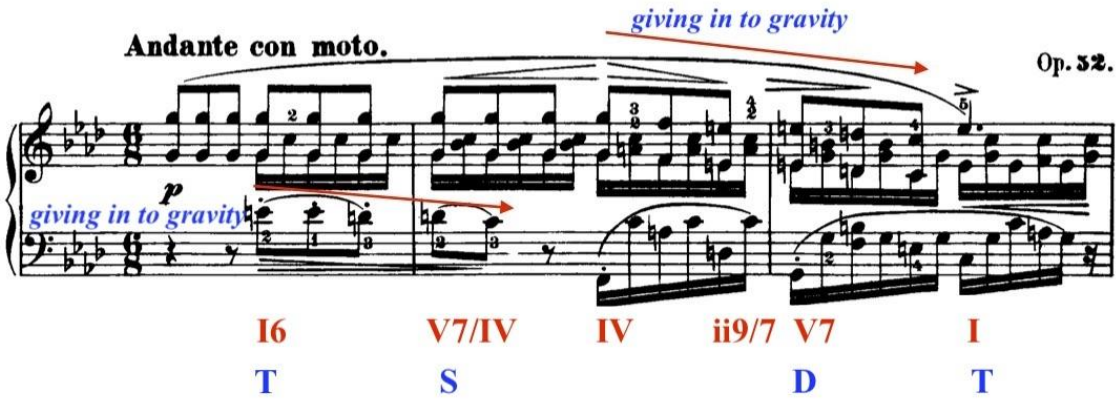
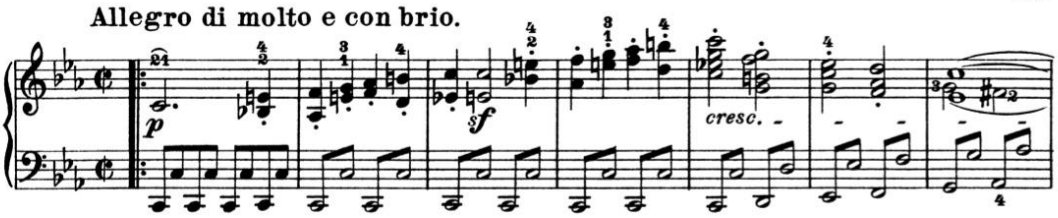
is not built through a conventional tonal center, but rather through methods like pure assertion and strong metric placement. In addition, "virtual gravitational fields are roughly approximated through contoured movement (up and down) and rhythm (qualities of accentuation and articulation miming anacruses and downbeats)" (261).
Agency as intentional action, then, can still be heard in post-tonal music, though it may be more effortful for a listener to do so or broader in scale, as in the case of Rupprecht's imaginative placement of agency in Lucier's minimalist piece, *Crossings.* According to his (2013) analysis, "we may imagine our protagonist in bed being awakened slowly by the rays of the sun through the venetian blinds on the morning of his execution, his last experience of a sunrise, after having made some inconvenient choices in the past. Or, more optimistically, it is the morning of an Olympic figure-skating competition or chess championship match. While listening to Lucier's Crossings, we imagine our protagonist gradually waking, then lying in bed, anticipating the events of the big day, the decisions to be confronted, the crucial choices to be made; this imagined context occurs while we experience the musical processes signaling, through the inevitable elapsing of a natural process, the ever approaching events—all of which is rich with narrative potential because the possibility of choice, the exercise of volition, carries such narrative resonance" (139).

**Figure 2.1: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52: m. 1-3**




By contrast, "active" forces are those which move *against* the attributed environmental forces. The first movement of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata, for example, employs a gravity-defying, upward-trending primary theme in the first five measures of the right hand (see **Figure 2.2**). Just as a person must exert energy to climb upwards against gravity, so too can a listener attribute this theme with an active energy, or an active *agency* which intentionally and willfully resists passive environmental forces. A seventh scale degree that moves away from the tonic or a sudden change in contour can also result in the perception of virtual musical agency.

**Figure 2.2: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Pathétique* Sonata: beginning of primary theme (m. 11-17)**




BaileyShea also describes a third category of musical forces (made up of elements of the first two) for relatively *unpredictable* environmental forces, like the wind. He writes that "these

elemental metaphors are complicated…in that they are almost always correlated with emotions such as longing, yearning, and desire, which is to say that a non-sentient element (such as an ocean wave) inevitably becomes linked with a sentient agent (the subject who yearns)." Similarly, Robert Hatten in his (2018) book *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music* points out that intentional and passive actions do not always act in opposition to one another.[8] Rather, if there is a crescendo from the leading tone into the tonic, there is *simultaneously* a passive action (giving in to the magnetic pull) and an intentional action (as a result of the crescendo) (56-57). This is an example of a passive force being offset and overpowered by an active, agential force working against (even while within) its environment. Hatten also introduces an additional and specifically *agential* force to Larson's collection: *momentum*, or an intentional expulsion of energy that must continue in order to overcome the passive force of friction. Only after it does so will it turn into Larson's passive form of "inertia," suggesting the existence of a continuum between agential and non-agential music.

However, both BaileyShea and Hatten stop short of exploring the possibility of agential mixture[9] in which agential and non-agential ascriptions combine to create a unique expression. BaileyShea ultimately settles on a non-agential categorization for his third, ambiguous category. Hatten similarly erases the tension between non-agential and agential components by declaring the "strongest" component to be the "winner." Yet in doing so, agency is unnecessarily flattened and our phenomenally complex experiences of virtual musical agency are made two-dimensional. While a peanut butter and chocolate cake may taste more strongly of chocolate than it does of peanut butter (or vice versa), to ignore the presence of one ingredient in favor of

[8] Henceforth, references to Hatten's work will refer to his 2018 book unless otherwise specified.

[9] Or as Hatten (1994) might call it, agential troping.

the other is to overly simplify the nuanced experience brought to us by our taste buds. Furthermore, this tension between non-agential and agential qualities in music will be crucial for our understanding of the agential listener, in which a listener bestows their own agency onto the music through their virtual presence *within* the music.

*Determined Agency vs. Subjective Perception*

Whether agential, non-agential, or a combination thereof, the locus of such musical forces must be considered carefully. Agency has been understood to derive from ecologically-driven interactions between the listener and music as a social stimulus (e.g., Clarke 2005; Palfy 2015; Palfy 2021). However, each piece of music also creates its own compositionally-determined environment. Hatten notes that particular musical conventions predispose agential hearings, including certain textures (e.g. melody and accompaniment), topics (e.g. sigh figures), and the lyric, dramatic, narrative, and epic modes of composition in their respective styles and genres (e.g., concerto form as dramatic, Romantic works suggesting revelation of a protagonist's character). Ultimately, he believes that "a composer stages virtual agency, wittingly or unwittingly" (9). Yet Hatten also recognizes the subjectivity of agential ascription:

> whereas one listener may experience emotional expression before inferring virtual agency, another may initially interpret an unfolding emotional experience through a presupposed virtual agency. In any case, the path to musical understanding need not be the same for every listener (183).

These differences stem from individual listening styles and expectations. While a composer *does* shape and encourage listeners to hear particular types of agency, a piece does not mandate how a listener engages with it—a fact which necessarily opens the door for exploring the role of these individual idiosyncrasies in the form of the agential listener.

Performers can also shape how agency is attributed to music. For example, Hatten interprets Lang Lang's strong emotional projections as an encouragement for the listener to engage with a larger-level, outside-the-music agency. Individual interpretations of a piece additionally have the ability to bring out certain elements over others (e.g., thematic development can encourage a sense of agential continuity). However, Hatten ultimately notes that a listener can reject the performer's rendition and hear the music on their own terms—though I would note that this may only be possible in certain cases, and for stylistically-competent listeners. Thus, there is always a balance between compositionally- or performance-determined agency and subjective perceptions of agency.

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In summary, musical agency is rooted in human beings' environmentally-driven understanding of movement in our literal environment, as well as the "environment" created by the composer; but only the ascription of *intentionality* to musical movement will lead to an attribution of agency. We will see that this ascription of intentionality provides an opportunity to identify with a virtual musical agent, giving rise to the listener's virtual presence within music, or the agential listener.

*Anthropomorphization: The Persona*

As we have seen in McAdams' work, intentionality is directly tied up with what it means to be human. In addition, Edward T. Cone introduced the concept of a human or "persona" in music in his highly influential (1974) book, "The Composer's Voice." Cone's persona is a subjective, overarching human mind behind a musical work that is understood to control all of its

aspects; it is virtually synonymous with the idea of a "fictional composer."[10] This overarching persona is understood primarily through an ascription of mental states, and has been commonly employed in more recent music theoretical work, as well (e.g., Spitzer 2013, BaileyShea 2012, Cumming 2000, Abbate 1991, Karl 1991).

Cone also allows for the possibility of one or more personas *within* the music, extrapolated from attributions of both mental states and actions. Levinson (2006b) continues this idea, arguing that such a hearing is in fact *necessary* in order to hear music as expressive; expression must, after all, be expressed by *someone*. Klorman and McCreless engage this idea more explicitly, coining the phrase "multiple agency" for the interplay of virtual personas in Mozart's chamber music (2016; Klorman 2018). Hearing one or more personas in music in this way, however, continues to require an attribution of *human* agency—rather than the agency of an animal, alien, or other entity. However, non-human entities (real or imagined) can also be experienced as having desires and purposefully acting on those desires. We observe our dog digging in their heels and refusing to go on a walk, or our cat waiting for us to leave the room in order to jump on the table, for example. As a result, music theorists in recent years have pushed back against the term "persona," emphasizing instead that musical agency is human-*like*—and not specifically *human*.[11]

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[10] From Monahan (2013), the "fictional composer" is the listener's concept of the composer's conscious intention in a piece of music, which may or may not be accurate.

[11] Allowing multiple personas in the music to be human-*like* rather than specifically *human* also makes sense from a listener's perspective. If the flexibility of Monahan's hierarchy of musical agency can be extended to apply to the listening experience (see below), the fact that one can hear music at different levels of agency essentially at will suggests that ascribing a persona to each possible agent at each different level would result in a very crowded room, so to speak (see also Guck 1994).

Stephen Davies (2003a) provides one of the most extreme versions of the "human-*like*" argument contra the persona in his discussion of "appearance emotionalism." Appearance emotionalism (as opposed to "hypothetical emotionalism," or the "persona" perspective) can be compared to the sad expression on the face of a Basset hound (see Robinson 2005; Kivy 1980). While the dog's facial features make it *appear* to be sad, this is not (always) consistent with how the animal is actually feeling. A more current example of the phenomenon is "resting bitch face," which has been used in modern youth culture to describe the appearance of someone who naturally looks as though they were angry, irritated, or otherwise unhappy, despite not actually feeling those emotions. Appearance emotionalism, then, suggests that music is human-*like* but not explicitly *human* due to a lack of intentionality or mind behind the expression. However, Davies only asserts that hearing *basic* emotions does not require an attribution of a persona, while complex emotions (such as pride or hope) *do* require a stronger human ascription—and that even for basic emotions it is still *possible* to attribute a persona (due to a listener's presumed knowledge of the music's authorship by a human composer). His problem with the persona, then, is not that it fails to be useful, but that it is not *necessary* for an understanding of basic musical emotion.[12]

A lack of necessity is one question, but the nature of human beings' tendencies to anthropomorphize is quite another. Do we truly fail to project a mind behind the sadness of a Basset hound's face? Perhaps over time and with experience we learn that the dog is not actually

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[12] This lack of necessity of the persona is also expressed by Davies' rejection of Jenefer Robinson's (2005) notion that music can make us *personally* feel its emotions, tensions, etc., so that we project an "other" persona who is expressing these things. Yet the listener does not always *personally* experience tension when the music is tense, Davies argues, suggesting that the persona view is not always necessary for musical understanding. Maus's (1988) discussion of the indeterminacy of musical agents also points to this lack of necessity. If one might hear any number of agents at any point in a piece, how could such a cacophony of possibilities result in musical coherence?

sad, leading to a manufactured disconnection between appearance and mind, but our first and most natural reaction does seem to be an attribution of a human-like mind since researchers have worked to explain why the appearance of emotion does *not* present a mind rather than why it *does*. What Davies seems to be arguing about, then, is whether the experience of a mind behind an observed expression is *fictional* or *actual—virtual* or *real*. If it is understood to be virtual (as in instrumental Western Art Music), expression might indeed be conceptualized by the listener as "mere appearance," effortfully bypassing the instinct to attribute a persona or mind (albeit with the capacity to bring about the agential listener, morphing the expression into that of a persona as a result of virtually bestowing the listener's agency onto the music).

I will make no argument against the possibility of appearance emotionalism in this dissertation. However, while it may be *possible* as a mode of listening, it would seem to be a less likely manner of engaging with musical emotion due to humans' robust tendencies to anthropomorphize (see Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2007). In any case, the possibility of projecting a persona behind the experience of even human-*like* emotions in music allows a listener to enter into the music, so that Davies' concerns do not raise any major problems for the concept of the agential listener.

Furthermore, the fact that music does not literally have a mind of its own like an animal does not pose a problem for human and human-like ascriptions, either. After all, we commonly personify non-human entities, attributing them with intentionality. For example, when we cannot find our keys, we might feel as though they are intentionally hiding from us. Along the lines of BaileyShea's third category of forces, we might feel that a destructive storm is *intending* to destroy everything in its path, even giving it a name like *Katrina* or *Harvey*. However, our keys have not intentionally run away from us, and the wind and rain are not willfully destroying our

homes and possessions. Yet to the extent that we experience a non-human entity as similar to a human being, we become more likely to anthropomorphize a non-human entity (Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 2007). Thus, even if music is only human-*like,* listeners can identify with it, and whichever part of the music is being experienced via identification becomes more explicitly *human*—and even a *persona*—once a human listener imaginatively projects themselves into the music.

As a final note, Hatten has recently substituted the term "persona" in favor of the less-controversial term, "subjectivity."[13] This exchange illuminates a distinction between the *embodiment* of a "persona," or (fictionalized) human being, and what Hatten calls "*enmindment,"* which does not require the concept of a literal body but is more consistent with anthropomorphization. In other words, while Cone and Hatten both focus on the psychological states of the agent, Hatten wishes to bypass the more direct human-as-body categorization that the persona implies. Due to the often transient nature of agential ascriptions, which may or may not be consistent over time, I will likewise avoid the term "persona" and follow Hatten in requiring a human-like agency that does not require a specific, concrete (though fictional) "human" that is projected beyond the music. Instead, a mind can be heard more fleetingly and can take different shapes as the music progresses. However, when the listener places themselves within the music, giving rise to a new source of virtual agency, they are engaging with the music as though it contained a more specific and complete persona (i.e., themselves).

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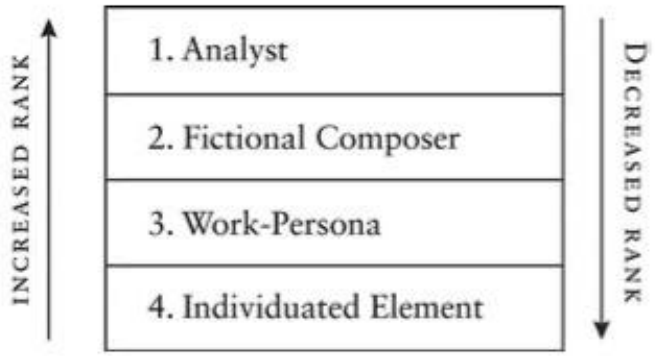
[13] While Hatten recognizes that an agent can be occasionally categorized as "subhuman" or "inhuman," such as in Taruskin's (1997) analyses of Stravinsky and Shostakovich, respectively, he asserts that even when these gestures are unfamiliar and alien they are human *enough* to suggest an (albeit warped) agency.

*Hierarchical levels of agential music listening*

Intentionality and human-like characteristics can be ascribed at a number of levels in music, from the entire piece (such as an overarching *persona*) to individual elements (such as a single instrument or melody). Music theorists have, as a result, used hierarchies to elucidate agential structure. Seth Monahan's (2013) award-winning article, "Action and Agency Revisited," has provided what has become an influential framework for such hierarchies. He describes four levels of musical agency that can be gleaned from reading theoretical writings: the analyst, the fictional composer, the work-persona, and the individuated element, in order of most to least comprehensive (see **Figure 2.3**). This nested hierarchy explains how an analyst whose discussion vacillates between different levels of musical structure can still be coherent to the reader, as long as each level is consistently understood as acting on, or implying, the lower levels of agency.

**Figure 2.3: Hierarchical ordering of agent classes. Reproduced from Monahan (2013, 334).**

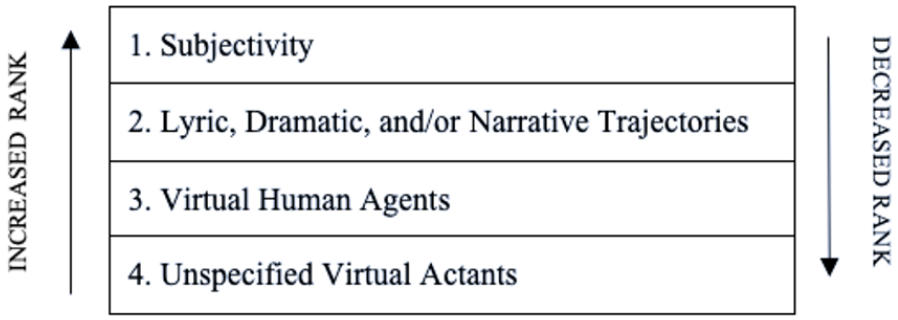



For example, the statement "the music absent-mindedly moves to recapitulate the main theme without taking care to resolve the hypostatized dominant harmony" communicates a work persona ("the music") which acts to bring about an individuated element, in this case the main

theme (334). However, such a moment could be equally well described as the analyst acting on the individuated element (discussing his or her personal experience of the recapitulatory moment), the fictional composer acting on the same element (*Beethoven* recapitulating the main theme), or even in terms of the individuated element without any lower-level action being implied (e.g., "impatiently, the horn melody announces the return of tonic four bars early") (334-35).

Here, Monahan does not address how a listener might actually *hear* musical agency, but how music theorists have *written* about music in the past. To what degree, then, do the conventions of music theoretical writing correspond to actual experiences of agency on the part of a listener? Hatten has approached this question with his own Monahan-inspired hierarchical model of virtual musical agency—or agency that is ascribed to some aspect of the music itself **(**see **Figure 2.4)**.

**Figure 2.4: Hierarchical levels of virtual agency in music, as described by Hatten (2018)**




The "mind" behind an entire piece of music is its "subjectivity," which can be inferred when the music pauses, offering the listener a moment to reflect on everything that has been heard so far. This "subjectivity" might be heard to enact a "lyric, drama, or narrative trajectory,"

in which *fictional actors* act in opposition to one another. This in turn implies a certain number of virtual human agents (the *fictional actors*) who virtually embody actions and emotions at a core, lower level, which Hatten terms "unspecified virtual actants." These are less-than-human actions that correspond to Larson's passive forces. As a result, while a virtual human agent might be expressed *by* a narrative, this agent is simultaneously the express*er* of an actant, as in Monahan's hierarchy. Also like Monahan, Hatten notes that listeners may identify an agent at any level in the music and seamlessly switch between levels as they listen. A listener may also hear *any* agent as expressing *any* lower-level agency. For example, a listener might hear a subjectivity at the overarching level expressing a virtual human agency, bypassing any dramatic or narrative trajectory altogether.

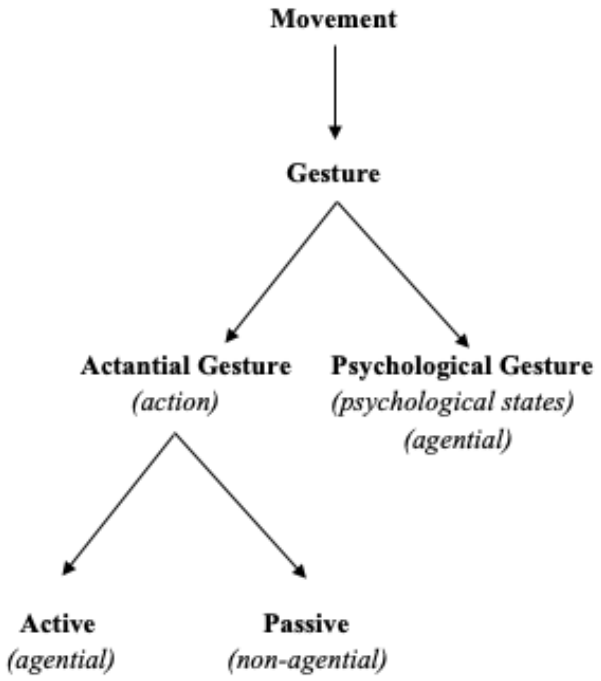
Because Hatten's focus is exclusively on virtual musical agency, he does not include the analyst or fictional composer categories described by Monahan. Monahan's "work-persona," however, is closely related to Hatten's concept of "subjectivity," though the latter term emphasizes a musical *mind* rather than a specific *body,* as previously discussed. Monahan's concept of the "individuated element" is also further split into the virtual human agent and unspecified virtual actant in Hatten's work. The difference between the two consists of the degree of humanity (via intentionality) ascribed to an individuated element, and thus provides a more intricate understanding of this level of agency. In the following chapter, I will further expand the hierarchy of virtual agency to include the agential listener, a higher-level and superseding category that can engage with and enter into the hierarchy at any level.

*Attributing Agency: Actions vs. Psychological States*

In order to understand how a listener can identify *with* any one of these virtual musical agencies, we must consider in more detail how listeners come to *identify* virtual musical agencies

in the first place. As seen in the variety of definitions of agency (**Table 2.1**), a perception of intentionality and humanity in music can arise from 1) the perception of music's *intentional action* or 2) the perception of a *psychological state*[14] via musical gesture (most common in the "persona" view of agency), both of which arise from musical movement. While the concept of gesture is similar to movement, it is a specifically *grouped* movement, consisting of a number of individual movements that are heard as a single "object" (see e.g., Hatten 2004; see also **Figure 2.5**).

**Figure 2.5: A hierarchy of musical movement, in decreasing magnitude of generality**




[14] Emotions are the most commonly discussed psychological states in music, but are not the only ones possible (for more on musical induction of emotion, see Juslin and Västfjäll 2008; Juslin and Laukka 2004). Emotional states can also influence other psychological states (Maus 1988). However, theorists have tended to focus on the emotional landscape over and above other psychological states in music, and I will likewise tend to follow in their footsteps.

*The Interdependency of Intentionality, Humanity, Action, and Psychological States*

**Figure 2.5** neatly separates action and emotion into two distinct categories, which is the way in which music theorists have tended to theorize and discuss them. Fred Maus (1988) is one of the strongest proponents for music as *action*, writing that "an abrupt outburst…is always an action, and so is a reasoned response" (66). Karl (1991), however, chalks this up to an unnecessary bias on the part of Maus. Instead, he argues that Maus's description of musical actions as verbal speech could just as easily be conceptualized as *psychological* actions or speech. He believes that while music can communicate a type of "allegorical" drama through the use of thematic transformations that span an entire work, these transformations are inherently psychological.

Who is correct? Is musical agency the result of attributing psychological states, or attributing real-world actions? In fact, the answer is both. The very nature of the hierarchy of virtual musical agency allows for musical material to function as both *action* and *psychological identity* at the same time, since an action at one level of the hierarchy can be understood as an object at another. For example, while a theme is the action of "the music" at the work-persona-level, in which "the music" is the *object* which represents some kind of "mind," the work-persona is simultaneously an *action* at the fictional-composer-level. If a listener hears musical movement as an emotional gesture or other psychological state, then, such a state implies a capacity for action and intentionality that humans are generally understood to possess. Hence, the listener may *infer* agency without hearing the agency explicitly confirmed through an action.

In fact, psychological states themselves are inherently agential, as noted by Hatten: "a virtual subjectivity may be able to feel and think freely, even when unable to act freely" (139).

Attributing a psychological state to music, then, may immediately result in an attribution of agency. However, if a listener hears musical movement as action, psychological states which preceded the action can also be ascribed to the agent/actant. Ultimately, psychological states and agential action are two sides of the same coin: where there is one, there is necessarily the other, and the listener can approach the music from either side. Maus (1988) is worth quoting at length, here:

> The scheme works by identifying certain *events* as *actions* and offering a distinctive kind of *explanation* for those events. The explanations ascribe sets of psychological states to an agent, states that make the action appear reasonable to the agent and that cause the action. The explanatory psychological states can be divided roughly into epistemic states (beliefs and the like) and motivational states (desires and the like). Ascriptions of psychological states are constrained by the need for the agent to shape up as an intelligible person: fairly coherent, consistent, rational, and so on. Besides beliefs and desires, one important class of explanatory states includes character traits, moods, and emotions. These function in a variety of ways: they can affect epistemic and motivational states, and they sometimes help to explain failures of consistency or rationality" (66, emphasis in original).[15]

We see that on one side of the coin there is an interpretation of the music as a series of actions, and on the other a complex set of inferences about various psychological states, including agential motivation, that contribute to the ascription of agency by conceptualizing the agent as a human-like entity.

Maus requires agential ascriptions to begin with action before attributing psychological states. Hatten, however, believes that the actantial and psychological sides of agency must be

[15] While it may be odd to think of musical agents as having beliefs, for Maus a belief can be as simple as "there was something vague about the harmony of the opening," which when paired with a desire ("I want to replace the sound of the opening with something clearer") reveals the mental state that led to the action (67).

activated at the same time from the same source. For him, agency is achieved through an ascription of intentionality, gestural character (affect), agential identity (musical qualities that uniquely characterize the agent), and hearing continuity in the material over time (20-21). Without these attributions, the music remains an "actant," or an entity acting at a more basic level without an ascription of intentionality and humanity. As such, while gesture is *always* heard as a type of movement, without the co-occurrence of affect/emotion Hatten argues that it *cannot* be heard as agential.

I would suggest that this is too strong of an argument. I will assume, instead, that agency can be enacted *either* from an intentional action *or* a psychological state. While I agree with Hatten that both must co-occur and mutually implicate each other, both need not be noticed by a listener at the same time. After all, some music *does* present itself as relatively actantial rather than psychological, and vice versa. For example, a listener might hear the crash in m. 201-202 of Mahler's Symphony No. 9/i as more of an *action* **(Figure 2.6)** instead of the *emotional* striving occurring several measures later at "*Leidenschaftlich*" **(Figure 2.7)**. While both of these moments, of course, contain both actantial and emotional properties, one may be more or less salient at any given moment due to compositional technique.

**Figure 2.6: Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 9/i: m. 201-202**

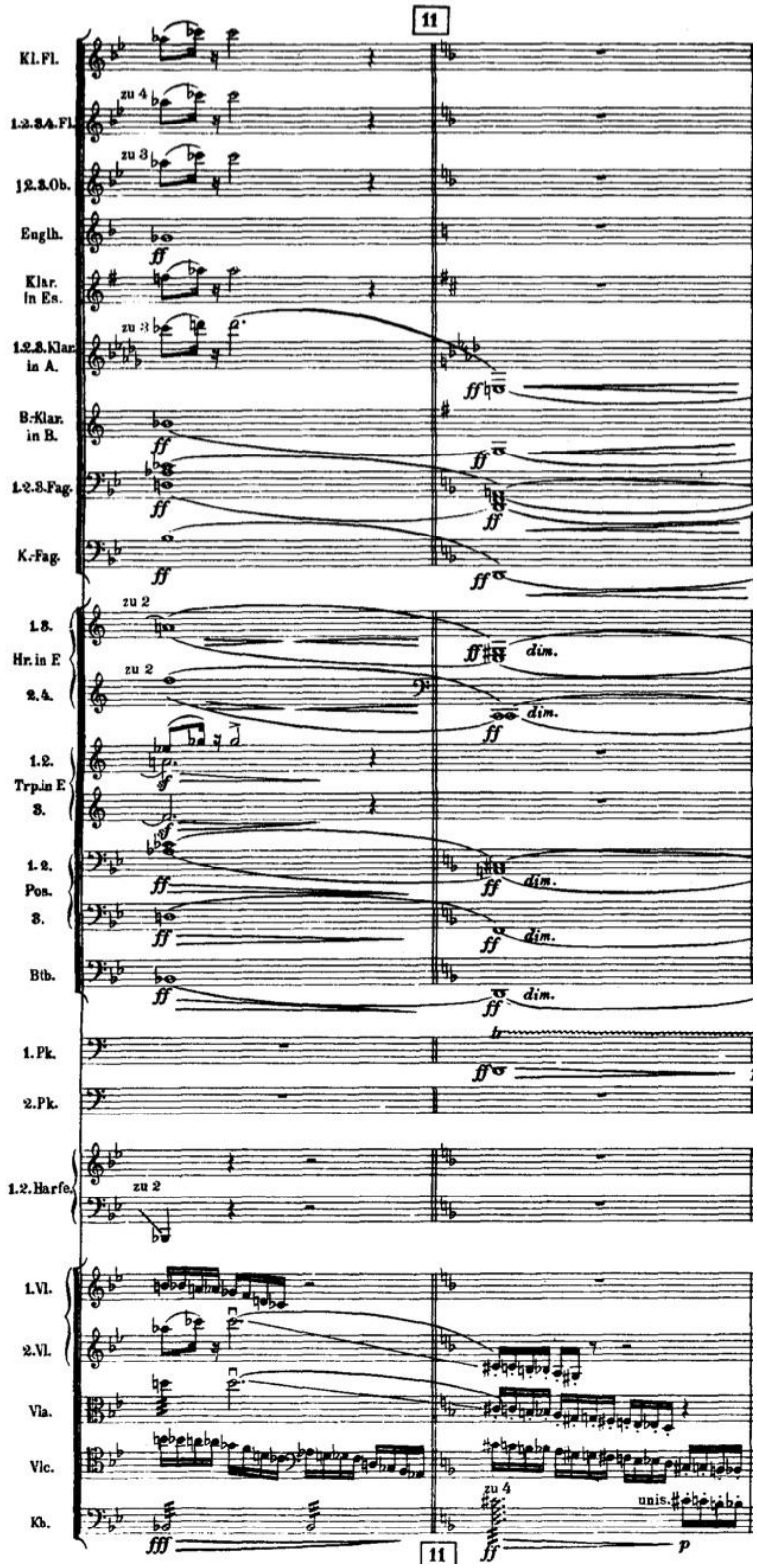
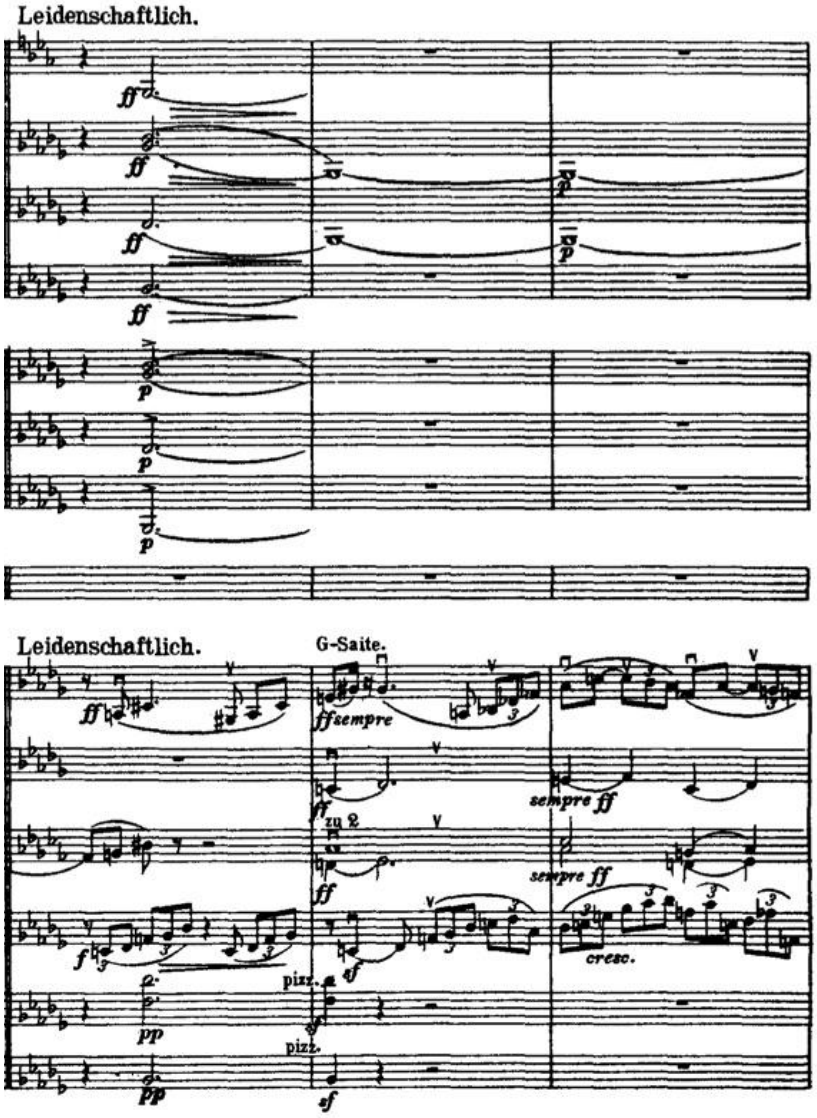


**Figure 2.7: Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 9/i: m. 211-213**




*Stylistic and Strategic Markedness: Diachronic and Synchronic Attributions*

We have considered what agency *is*—but how does it arise? The answer is found in Hatten's concept of musical "markedness," which refers to "the valuation given to difference" (1994, 34). Simply put, a marked change is one that is experienced as significant or meaningful. Markedness can be stylistic (e.g., an asymmetrical opening phrase in the Classical style) or

strategic (compositionally unique to the given piece, e.g., the unexpectedness of a major chord in a repeated progression that has moved to a minor chord every other time). Markedness can also take place within any musical parameter, including dynamics, harmony, texture, and meter, though some theorists have chosen to focus on one parameter over another. For example, Klorman (2016) focuses on how metrical changes communicate agency, describing how the meter can be individually supported, resisted, or overcome by the work's "multiple agents" resulting in a "decentered" concept of meter (205). Cora Palfy takes a similar yet more explicitly social psychological perspective in her (2015) dissertation and (2021) book.

Hatten distinguishes between passages that are agentially marked and unmarked as a way of indicating that while all musical gestures are *potentially* agential, some are more likely to be *experienced* agentially. This is not to say that there is no agency in these sections, but rather that there are different probabilities of agential ascription for different levels of changing expression, in terms of human emotion or action. Where a marked change occurs, then, whether stylistic or strategic, a listener will be more likely to begin or cease to identify with the music at that point.

Furthermore, marked changes must be "extreme" in order to be experienced as agential, achieved through what Hatten (2004) terms a "rhetorical gesture" or disruption. Yet what is heard as "extreme" will at some level be unique to a particular "community" of listeners with a particular listening style or degree of background knowledge, and even the individual listener. For example, a listener who is aware that many 18$^{th}$ century works end with a Picardy third is not likely to hear a Picardy third as a marked change. Rather, in the stylistic context of the piece, such a change from the prevailing modality may be heard as an unmarked change.

Not all listeners are stylistically competent, of course, and not all listen with complete attention. One benefit of a theory of empathic identification is that it allows for an understanding

of both: 1) listeners for whom music is their primary focus; and 2) listeners for whom music is in the background of another task. Just as we do not notice everything in our environment when we are focused on something in particular, a background listener[16] will realistically hear fewer marked changes than one who is paying close attention.When a listener is not in possession of stylistically specific knowledge, it is also quite likely that their experience will adhere more to Eric Clarke's (2005) ecological theory of listening, in that a sudden and extreme increase in volume, stark change in pitch height, etc. will be heard as marked, bringing the listener's awareness back to the music. Overall, however, the *more* extreme the change from one moment to the next (diachronically speaking), the more likely it is to be heard as marked (and hence agential) by a listener.

Extreme, diachronic change across time can be contrasted with a synchronic means of agential attribution in which part of the music is perceived to hold human-like characteristics which may differ from a consistent musical style or background. In Klorman's theory of "multiple agency," this effect is often achieved through the separation of instruments. He considers how each instrument can act of its own accord with interchangeable and malleable roles that function within a web of surrounding agencies. For example, a particular instrument might exhibit agency by evading a cadence if the other instruments complete the cadence at the same time. Rupprecht (2013) enumerates similar categories of the "instrument-agent" and "player-agent" (in which the latter requires a visual performance, such as the onstage movements of *Verses for Ensembles* by Harrison Birtwistle given in Rupprecht's own example). He writes that the instrument-agent can emerge through the instrument's consistent employment of elements such as rhythm and gesture. Overall, these examples reveal the potential for agency to

[16] In fact, this is a significantly common mode of listening in the United States according to Nielsen's (2014) report.

arise from the perception of intentional, human-like characteristics in *part* of the music, which is in marked opposition to *simultaneously*-sounding *other* parts. Departures from stylistic norms, even when not juxtaposed with the norms themselves, can also result in agential attribution, such as opening with an asymmetrical Classical phrase in the example described above.

One can also attribute agency through the perception of intentional, human-like characteristics in the absence of a consistent backdrop. A solo instrument that begins a piece with an emotional melody, or which strives upwards against an implied tonal gravity without any supporting instruments, may still trigger agency due to emotional or action-oriented cues. In other words, the features of the music themselves have the ability to communicate intentionality and humanity, and hence agency, without a direct comparison with other musical material (whether stylistic or strategic). In the case of intentionality, the contrast is implicitly present between the agential entity and a passive environmental force. In the case of action, musical features like quickly-moving notes gain this ascription through analogical similarity to "real-world" actions like running; their features encourage the attribution without requiring a passive musical backdrop from which to form a comparison.

Thus, a caution should be issued against assuming that diachronic agency will always correspond with an actantial gesture (due to its temporal dimensions), while synchronic agency will always correspond with a psychological gesture (due to its simultaneity), whether presented through stylistic or strategic means. The environmental, "real-world" background we bring to each listening experience can offer a point of comparison for the sounds we hear, regardless of the musical environment. Furthermore, the diachronic shift from transition to secondary theme in a sonata form movement may encourage a specifically psychological agency due to the entrance of newly melodic material (though *stylistically* unmarked through *strategic* markedness), while

Klorman's example of one instrument avoiding a cadence while the others comply might easily be heard as a difference in action instead of thought. The difference between diachronic and synchronic agency, then, is one of mechanism rather than result.

***

I will not attempt to preserve a clear distinction between the two means of agential attribution here, and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore *how* a listener hears emotion and action in music, more directly. Rather, I will begin with the assumption that emotion and intentional action are regularly heard in music and that either of these may trigger agential ascription. My focus will be on how the personal experiences that are brought to a listening experience affect listeners' engagement and recognition of these diachronically or synchronically determined agencies, without attempting to pick apart the "how" of agency any further.

*The Ubiquity of Agency*

Finally, the ubiquity of agential ascription is important for a theory of empathic identification. Hatten argues that hearing such agency is extremely common in composed music in a Western style, even in post-tonal works in which musical forces are warped virtually beyond function. A historical analysis reveals that (at least Western-enculturated) humans have always been able to hear expression in music spanning from medieval music to contemporary post-tonal works, and may even be predisposed to hear virtual agency from the very beginning of a listening experience:

> Listeners who have been entrained to hear purely instrumental music in terms of subjectivity—from Bach to Brahms and beyond—may…experience virtual subjectivity as a listening stance from the start and then progressively fill it in with the kinds of humanly expressive and dramatically actorial interactions that I have detailed in my analysis (183).

Cox (2012) similarly proposes that the perception of human-like agency is a natural outcome when listening to (at least certain types of) music:

> anthropomorphization is a logical result of quasi-first-person engagement combined with second-person subjectivity: imagining 'doing' what the music does while (more or less) simultaneously remaining aware that we have not actually produced the sounds, and then implicitly reasoning in a rudimentary way that we have just perceived something 'in the music' (30).

Hence, attributions of virtual musical agency are extremely prominent and allow us to proceed with a theory of empathic identification without having to consider whether virtual musical agency is present in each individual piece discussed.

***

Now that we have considered what agency *is* (an intentional and human-like entity), how agency is *structured* (hierarchically), how agency is *attributed* (via the attribution of action or psychological state; both diachronically through marked change and synchronically through human-like features), and the ubiquity of agential ascriptions for Western-enculturated listeners, let us consider the psychological process by which such ascriptions occur.

## Empathy

### *Definitions*

Just as we can empathize with fictional characters in a novel or movie, music serves as a social stimulus with which listeners can interact (e.g., Clarke 2005; Palfy 2015; Wallmark et al. 2018; Palfy 2021). Emerging cognitive research has demonstrated the importance of empathy for recognizing and responding to musical emotion (Vuoskoski and Eerola 2017; Egermann and McAdams 2013; Miu and Balteș 2012; Juslin and Västfjäll 2008) and experiencing musical

enjoyment (Carraturo et al. 2022, Ladinig and Schellenberg 2012). Empathy also plays an indispensable role in the introduction of the agential listener.

Like agency, the term "empathy" has taken on a number of related, yet conceptually distinct meanings over the years, which Felicity Laurence (2017) summarizes as 1) "'standing in another's shoes' in order to take the other's role or perspective;" 2) "the sharing of another's feeling (…subsuming the notion also of directly 'feeling the other's feeling');" and 3) "a concomitant, inherent caring, prosocial or altruistic response to both" (13). Laurence points out that these understandings are "not the same conceptually, may have quite different neurological bases, and may or may not be correlated with, or lead to, another" (ibid.). When discussing the role of empathy in identifying with virtual musical agencies, then, it must be considered what *kind* of empathy is meant. In this section, I begin by exploring Laurence's three broad conceptualizations of empathy before arriving at a working definition for empathic identification and the agential listener. (See **Table 2.2** at the end of this chapter for more details on the different definitions and components of empathy used in music.)

In all cases, what follows will be a discussion of empathy as phenomenal rather than neurological—as a listener's *experience* rather than exact neural mechanisms. While a listener may falsely assume that they are experiencing "true" empathy (while in fact misunderstanding the person or entity with which they are seeking to empathize, e.g., by engaging with a stereotype), I will not be concerned here with the social repercussions that arise from inaccuracy. This is not to say that such repercussions are unimportant. However, they will remain outside of this dissertation's focus: how the *experience* of empathy affects subjective attributions of virtual musical agency.

*1) Cognitive Empathy*

Laurence's first definition is perhaps the most well-known. It refers to what has been called "cognitive empathy," or perspective-taking (PT)—a conscious process of putting yourself in an "other's" shoes, asking what it would be like to do or experience what the other is doing or experiencing. Edith Stein (1964), a student of Edmund Husserl, further impactfully required empathy to retain a sense of both "self" *and* "other," rather than boasting a completely new identity of oneness, and this conceptualization has largely been retained in considerations of this type of empathy (and will likewise be retained here). In order to take the perspective of a virtual musical agent, a listener must be aware that they *are* taking on an other's perspective, rather than simply experiencing their own.

PT is often assumed to involve the imagination, either by imagining what it would be like for a "subject" to be in an "other's" or "target's" shoes, or imagining what it would be like for the other/target to be in their *own* shoes. Coplan (2011) refers to these options as self-oriented and other-oriented PT, respectively (henceforth abbreviated SOPT and OOPT). Coplan herself insists that we *must* engage in OOPT. However, Goldie (2011) emphatically disagrees, arguing that by attempting to consider the target's personality during perspective-shifting, the subject is forced to engage with the target's personality directly instead of having intuitive access to it through the cognitive background available to the target. As a result, Goldie maintains, the subject will "produce a distorted model of [the target's] thinking" (309). Goldie further objects that OOPT is problematic due to non-rational influences on thinking, the target's own potential confusion about his or her feelings, and "conflict" (when the decision made is deeply personal, such as choosing a career or which university to attend). Goldie concludes that the correct form of empathy is not "ambitious," but instead engages a more modest form of SOPT, such as "I

might give my seat up [for an elderly passenger on public transportation], but [the target's] ankle is broken and in plaster so I wouldn't if I were in his shoes." (311)

Art philosopher Kendall Walton (2015) argues the more extreme view that we do not need to imagine *at all* when we empathize; rather, we use our own mental states as a sample for understanding what the target may be feeling. We may, perhaps, use our imagination to bring to mind a previous situation from our lives that is similar to the current situation of the target—hence attributing our own emotions and states to them—but we may also make use of our current mental state if it is similar to that of our target. In effect, we share the target's emotions and states *not* because we imagine ourselves in *their* position, but because we draw on a position we have already faced or are currently facing. Since projection of the self *into* the other is not involved here, one might consider such sampling to be distinct from SOPT. However, this concept still involves a projection of our own experiences *onto* an other as a second step, which is what produces the experience of empathy rather than the self (since empathy requires the attribution of our experiences to an other). In effect, sampling is a more purely self-located form of conscious PT (taking one's *own* perspective), which presents the locus of the experience in the self as opposed to in the other, before attributing this PT *to* the other.

There is, however, evidence that OOPT may be a more realistic model of empathy. In Davis et al. (2004)'s research, those who did not receive instructions before watching a personal and distressing interview experienced more thoughts about the target than the self, which was consistent with results from explicitly instructing participants to imagine the target's feelings. Individuals with high levels of self-thought and self-reflection have also been shown to have more trouble empathizing, suggesting a need for empathic engagement to move outside the self

(Joireman 2004).[17] Of course, distinguishing between SOPT and OOPT may simply reflect how we *conceptualize* empathy, rather than describe a physically distinct reality (see Batson 1997). Rather than posing a problem, this emphasizes an important phenomenal aspect of empathy in which there is an *experience* of an other, while simultaneously recognizing the presence and similarity of the other's perspective.

In the case of music, SOPT corresponds to a listener's notion of what *they* would experience in the virtual musical agent's shoes (whether through imaginative projection or Walton's sampling), while OOPT corresponds to the imaginative consideration fo what the virtual musical agent is experiencing in *their own* shoes, without any involvement of the listener's self. Yet when a listener *identifies* with a virtual musical agent via empathy (for more on the uniqueness of identification, see below), both SOPT and OOPT result in the same experience, since the perspectives of self and other are understood to be deeply similar. For the sake of simplification, then, I will focus on SOPT alone.

*2) Affective Empathy, Simulation, and Emotional Contagion*

Laurence's second definition of empathy has been referred to variously by scholars as emotional contagion, affective empathy, and simulation. While some conflate these terms, others regard them as distinct phenomena. In general, emotional contagion refers to the transfer of a target's emotions to the subject *without* the subject recognizing that these emotions are being experienced by the target. A person who starts to feel anxious while spending time with an anxious friend, without recognizing that their anxiety is coming *from* their friend, is a common

[17] However, such OOPT may have been found in this study due to the distressing nature of the event, encouraging subjects to distance themselves; in other circumstances, SOPT may in fact be more common when attributing motives to an agent (see Reeder and Trafimow 2005).

example. Affective empathy and simulation also refer to the experience of shared emotions between subject and target, but whether or not such sharing is understood to be conscious depends on the scholar.

It has been debated whether or not emotional contagion is, in fact, *empathy,* due to a lack of conscious self-other distinction (see Preston and de Waal 2001). However, emotional contagion *has* been considered to be a vital underlying scaffold for achieving PT and empathy in general (e.g., Preston and de Waal 2001, Goldman 2011, Iacoboni 2011). Schubert (2017) explicitly presents emotional contagion as a preliminary mechanism which leads to, but is not synonymous with, empathy (see **Figure 2.8**). Beginning with the subject's perception, his model moves through "mimicry" (i.e. internal simulation that is not conscious), emotional contagion (defined by Schubert as the emotional response to simulation that is not conscious), PT, and finally prosocial behavior (which is what he calls "empathy").[18] He notes, however, that not all mimicry leads to emotional contagion, since stretching your mouth in an imitation of someone else's yawn may or may not lead to the experience of a true yawn.

While it is arguable whether or not a yawn is analogous to an emotion, Schubert's model importantly illustrates how moving from emotional contagion to PT requires "the empathizer…[to] realize that the emotion registered by the affective empathy system [mimicry

[18] Schubert's model indicates that perceived emotion (cued by inner simulation) is necessary before one can arrive at felt emotion—and that it, in fact, influences felt emotion. This speaks to an interest in music cognition of distinguishing between "felt" and "perceived" emotions, which are generally considered to be distinct (e.g., Meyer 1956). However, Egermann and McAdams (2013) suggest that empathy is itself a moderator between the two, since those who reported experiencing more empathy with the performers experienced a closer match between perceived and felt emotions. However, their findings appear to be more directly related to emotional contagion over and above PT or a fuller sense of empathy. This provides further support for the relevance of associating emotional contagion with empathy, however, in that participants associated shared emotion (whether conscious or not) with such "empathy."

and emotional contagion] is actually a simulation of the emotion that another individual is experiencing" (Schubert 2017, 323). As such, if one only experiences emotion in the self, the experience stops at contagion. If emotion is only perceived in the other and fails to transfer consciously to the self via PT, the experience stops at perception. While emotional contagion may contribute to, and even be a necessary condition of empathy, then, it is not sufficient.

**Figure 2.8: Schubert's (2017) precursors of empathy**

Perception → Mimicry → Emotional contagion ⟶

→ Perspective-taking → Prosocial behavior

While Schubert calls his model one of the "precursors" to empathy, rescinding any right for emotional contagion and PT to be in and of themselves empathic, he also remarks that empathy only occurs when all cylinders are firing. In this sense, emotional contagion has also been considered to be a bottom-up process (via a mirroring route) and PT the top-down process (via a reconstructive route) which together present two co-routes to empathy (e.g., see Lamm, Meltzoff and Decety 2010; Goldman 2011; Gallese 2003; Walton 2015; Livingstone and Thompson 2009).

In any case, the insufficiency of emotional contagion to constitute empathy in and of itself exposes a hole in certain music theoretical and cognitive literature, in which it has often been touted as the primary mechanism by which listeners connect with music. For example, Arnie Cox's mimetic hypothesis (2001; 2016) states that listeners ask themselves what it would be like to *be* the music and to *do* what the music is doing through often nonconscious and involuntary internal simulation via the mirror neuron system (MNS), which may or may not

include an outward, visible component. Music psychologists Molnar-Szakacs and Overy (2006) also use the MNS in their Shared Affective Motion Experience (SAME) model, suggesting that this is what allows listeners to experience musical agency and action without being conscious of it, ultimately resulting in musical meaning.[19] However, we have seen that if emotional contagion were the only mechanism for empathy with music, listeners could not be conscious of identifying with virtual musical agencies. As a result, there must be a conscious component beyond emotional contagion that accounts for listeners' empathic identifications with music.

Some theorists have solved this problem by associating emotional contagion with a first-person agential perspective (a merging of music and self as a singular agency residing in the body/mind of the listener) and PT with a second-person agential perspective (agency is *in* the music at some level). For example, Arnie Cox (2012) writes that the first-person perspective of the performer, the second-person perspective of the listener, and the third-person perspective of reflection combine to create a tripartite subjectivity. The first-person component represents Cox's mimetic hypothesis (2001; 2016), in which listeners ask themselves what it would be like to *be* the music and to *do* what the music is doing, as achieved through (often nonconscious and involuntary) simulation that may or may not have an outward, visible component. The second-person perspective is a conscious participation in the music through listening, in which a listener chooses to submit to the music's agency, while the third-person perspective comes about primarily through theoretically-minded education about music. Since different aspects of this subjectivity can be enhanced or attenuated based on the piece and context, a listener-as-agent perspective can be achieved, Cox argues, through a primarily first-person-focused listening

[19] The exact role and scope of the mirror neuron system in the human body, however, is not yet fully understood (e.g., see Hickok 2009).

experience during which the body literally feels as though the music were its own movements, feelings, and actions.

Similarly, Peters (2015) considers first-person identification to be synonymous with what he calls "musical empathy," which occurs "if one loses oneself in the music, 'becoming the music' (with 'music' being an umbrella term for the varying agencies)" (10). However, he suggests that our sense of musical agency is already made up of *both* the self as agent *and* the other as agent; a stronger second-person perspective may be attributed consciously only *after* the initial intermingling of self- and other-identification for strategic reasons (such as if the music is sad and the listener does not want to "own" that emotion). As a result, I will recognize that while emotional contagion is likely to be *stronger* in experiences of identifying with a virtual musical agent á la Cox, close empathic identification with music cannot occur without some amount of self-projection.

Now we come to the second term, "affective empathy," which refers to an experience that retains the distinction between self and other and refers to the sharing of emotions, broadly speaking. However, the distinction between cognitive empathy as a conscious mental *projection* into an *other's* body, and affective empathy as a conscious physical *sharing* of emotions *within one's own* body, might appear to conflate cognitive empathy with the mind and "other" while affective empathy is relegated to the body and "self." This would be a mistake.[20] For instance, Edith Stein (1964) distinguishes between "primordial consciousness" (one's own physical experience) and "non-primordial consciousness" (imaginatively taking on someone else's physical experience). Non-primordial consciousness still involves the physical body, even as it

[20] See Cusick (1994) for more on the "mind/body problem." See Foster (2011) for a detailed history of the physicality of empathy.

involves mental projection, since mental projection results in a newly present, internal yet still physical, experience of a target's experience.

This brings us to the final and most useful term for a theory of empathic identification: "simulation." While simulation has generally been used to categorize the conscious or nonconscious uses of internal[21] experiences in order to understand the experiences of an other, Waytz and Mitchell (2011) use it more broadly to refer to "[the use of] one's own thoughts, feelings, and intentions as a guide to what others are thinking, feeling, or intending" (197). They further split simulation into two categories: mirroring (which may or may not be conscious) and self-projection (which is consistent with SOPT). When nonconscious, the term "mirroring" would be synonymous with emotional contagion.

As in the discussion of emotional contagion vs. PT above, Waytz and Mitchell note that mirroring can lead to self-projection in its own right, or mirroring and self-projection can be two distinct routes by which we understand the target. In the latter case, mirroring is cued by the perception of action or expression and self-projection occurs whenever such perception is absent or inapplicable to that which is being simulated.[22] When both perception *and* context (knowledge about what the target is like) are available, however, they note that the regions of the brain representing both mirroring *and* self-projection are activated, again suggesting the potential for emotional contagion or conscious mirroring to take place alongside SOPT. While more research is needed, this is similar to what Wallmark et al. found in their (2018) fMRI study on the impact of trait empathy on hearing isolated timbre. Empathy (both emotional and cognitive) predicted neural activation in regions that were consistent with attributing *both* an agency or "otherness" to

[21] While simulation can also be external (e.g., tapping or singing along) it is more commonly used to refer to internal processes, and my work will focus on the internal.

[22] Waytz and Mitchell more specifically discuss visual perception.

the music *and* bottom-up emotional contagion processing, suggesting that both are important for connecting to (at least this aspect of) music.

Overall, Waytz and Mitchell's conceptualization offers an effective critique of the separation between mind and body by including mental states (such as thoughts and intentions) and physical states (such as emotions) under the same term, since all of these are, in fact, "simulations" of an other (albeit of different types). Their model also allows for *either* the self as locus *or* the other as locus to occur, while also allowing for *both* to occur in the same setting. I adopt this definition as the most useful tool for understanding how listeners empathize with virtual musical agents.

*3) Sympathy and Compassion*

Laurence's third definition is commonly called "sympathy" or "compassion." However, while some consider it to be synonymous with empathy, Weisz and Zaki (2017) note that it is usually associated with feeling *different* feelings than those experienced by the target, and is most commonly restricted to negative emotions. The concept of empathy, by contrast, can encompass positive emotions, as well.[23] Stein further ascribes to empathy the "mechanism" of "receiving" another's inner state, while sympathy is the subsequent feeling (or affect) that may or may not result. I will likewise consider empathy and compassion/sympathy to be discrete phenomena and not engage with the latter further in this dissertation.

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[23] There is also disagreement as to whether affective empathy encompasses feelings of compassion, or whether the latter is a distinct construct. Davis's (1983) model splits these concepts into two parts, contributing to a total of four components of empathy: Perspective-taking (taking the perspective of another), Fantasy (the inclination or ability to identify with fictional characters), Empathic Concern (compassion), and Personal Distress (personal, negative feelings in response to others' negative experiences).

*Returning to a Definition*

As we have seen, empathy can and has been conceptualized in different ways. In this dissertation, I adopt Waytz and Mitchell's definition of "simulation" as an overarching, working explanation of how empathy is experienced. Empathy, then, is the internal experience of both mental and physical states by a subject (i.e., listener) with an awareness of self-other distinction (i.e., the listener is not *literally* the music). If empathy is a state, simulation is the process by which individuals are led to that state. This coincides with Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski's (2015) inclusive definition of empathy as "tak[ing] the part of another…without too much concern for how that perspective-sharing comes about" (64). What is crucial is the sharing of another's thoughts, feelings, or other states in one's own body and mind.[24]

Like Waytz and Mitchell, I will also distinguish between mirroring[25] and self-projection when necessary as two distinct forms and/or components of empathy (see **Figure 2.9**). I will further delineate between two forms of mirroring: emotional contagion when nonconscious, and "conscious mirroring" when conscious, during which the listener is aware that the states experienced within themselves are being shared by a virtual musical agent. I will require there to be a conscious component either in mirroring or self-projection in order for empathy to occur, but will otherwise not attempt to further distinguish the when and how of these processes.

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[24] While we can empathize "incorrectly," assuming an other has thoughts, feelings, or states that they do not, it is the *experience* of identification and the *experience* of empathy that is important for our purposes here (see also Petraschka 2021 for more on diverging empathic interpretations). It is also likely that there are less negative consequences to misidentifying the thoughts, feelings, or states of a virtual musical agent compared to misidentifying those of another human being in the "real world."

[25] The term "mirroring" does not require mirror neuron activity here. For the purposes of this dissertation, I remain agnostic in regards to the neurological processes by which the experience of "mirroring" takes place.

**Figure 2.9: Types and components of empathy**

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Empathy (via simulation)<br>(conscious)</td><td rowspan="2">Mirroring<br>(conscious or nonconscious)<br>(locus: self)</td><td>Emotional contagion<br>(nonconscious)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Conscious mirroring<br>(conscious)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Self-projection<br>(conscious)<br>(locus: other)</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

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We have seen that different components of empathy are cued through multiple routes via distinct processes. However, the perception of similarity is the consistent mechanism by which empathy as simulation is experienced, and which accounts for the presence (or absence) of the "agential listener."

*Similarity and Identification*

Empathy has been robustly shown to rely on similarity between subject and target (Laurence 2017; Komeda et al. 2012; Lamm, Meltzoff, and Decety 2010; Slater and Rouner 2002; Preston and de Waal 2001; Cohen 2001). For example, Komeda et al. (2012) performed

two experiments in which participants were presented with written descriptions of characters that were highly extraverted, highly neurotic, or neither. Individuals with personalities that corresponded to that of the character reported more empathy and provided value judgments on the story more quickly, revealing the influence of similarity at a PT level. Preston and de Waal (2001) notably suggest that similarity drives empathy due to an increase in attention (and hence an increase in perception)—but whatever the reason, similarity is known to drive empathy. This is not to say that we cannot or do not empathize with dissimilar others. Lamm, Meltzoff, and Decety (2009) illustrate that in such cases we use the same neural processes that are activated when similarity is present. However, similarity *is* necessary for an experience of identification to occur.

Identification has been defined as "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them" (Cohen 2001, 245). Preston and de Waal go on to illustrate the importance of similarity for identification by considering interspecies empathy:

> The sight of a primate moving a forelimb would more strongly activate a human's representation than the sight of a rodent. In turn, a rodent would activate the representation more than a reptile...The pervasive tendency for humans to anthropomorphize and personify exemplifies the perception-action process, but the extent to which one identifies with these objects is proportional to the extent of overlap [between the input and the representation] (17).

The stronger the similarity, then, the stronger the subject's identification with the target.

Komeda et al. (2012) consider empathy to be "a particular category of identification that involves the detection of similarities with others rather than the adoption of others' thoughts and behaviors" (350). However, I will instead consider *identification* to be a particular category of *empathy*. To illustrate the relationship between these terms, consider someone who has recently

been fired from their job. If this person watches a film depicting the fictional character of Sophie, who has also recently been fired from her *own* job, the viewer will empathize with Sophie's emotions of sadness and anger by simulating these emotions in her own body (based on Waytz and Mitchell's definition, using her own emotions to understand Sophie's emotions), while recognizing that these emotions are also being experienced *by* Sophie, a person who is distinct from herself (retaining self-other distinction). However, the viewer will also *identify* with Sophie to the extent that these emotions are the *same* as the ones that she is experiencing from her own firing. In effect, while Komeda et al. reserve the term "empathy" for sharing the experiences of a dissimilar other and "identification" for sharing the experiences of an identical other, I consider both to be experiences of an "other" (even as the latter is simultaneously an experience of the self), and hence consider them both to be experiences of empathy. I will further use the term "empathic identification" to refer to identification that reserves the distinction between self and other, maintaining the difference between *true* identification (e.g., identifying a photograph of yourself as "you") and *empathic* identification (e.g., identifying, however strongly, with an other).

Listeners are able to empathically identify with music due to the presence of agential structure in both themselves and the music. The higher the perceived similarity between a listener's agency and a virtual musical agency at any level of Hatten's hierarchy, then (and the more such similarity is valued by the listener), the stronger the listener's empathic identification with this virtual musical agent (and the stronger the presence of the agential listener). I will discuss the varying levels of similarity in more depth in the following chapter.

*The Role of Situational Empathy*

In order to understand the importance of similarity for empathic engagement, we must also consider the difference between "trait" and "situational" empathy. "Trait" (or "dispositional") empathy reflects "an individual's general responsiveness to the observed experiences of others, involving both cognitive and affective components such as perspective-taking capabilities and tendencies, and emotional reactivity" (Miu and Vuoskoski 2017). Tools like the empathy quotient, or EQ (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright 2004), the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, TEQ (Spreng et al. 2009), and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, IRI (Davis 1983) have all been used to measure an individual's overall tendency to empathize with others, regardless of the level of similarity between subject and target.

Researchers have drawn a distinction between trait empathy and what has been called "situational empathy," which refers to empathy that can be increased based on the perception of similarity. While much research has shown that trait empathy predicts the extent to which a listener recognizes and experiences emotions in music (Schubert 2017; Balteș and Miu 2014; Vuoskoski and Eerola 2011a; Vuoskoski and Eerola 2011b; for a review, see Miu and Vuoskoski 2017, 131-133), research has also shown that designs to increase empathy create effects similar to those of trait empathy (O'Neill and Egermann 2020; for a review, see Weisz and Zaki 2017).

Situational empathy may even be a better explanation for certain findings that have been traditionally attributed to trait empathy. For example, it is well-corroborated that those with higher trait empathy enjoy sad music more than others (e.g., Sachs, Damasio, and Habibi 2021; Vuoskoski and Eerola 2017; Eerola, Vuoskoski, and Kautiainen, 2016; Vuoskoski et al. 2012).[26]

[26] Vuoskoski et al (2011b) suggest that sad music is enjoyed from a combination of emotional response and aesthetic appreciation—not absorption and dissociation as Garrido and Schubert (2011) suggest, since appreciation for sad music was correlated with appreciation of beauty and people disliked feelings of terror (dissociation suggests every

However, those who have more trait empathy may be more likely to: 1) naturally empathize in their everyday lives with individuals who experience sadness; and 2) be sought out by individuals who experience sadness because of their empathic tendencies. When presented with a sad piece of music, then, those with higher trait empathy may be better able to connect with the music because of more, and more recent, personal experiences with these emotions. These experiences in turn engender a higher degree of similarity with the music. Greenberg, Rentfrow, and Baron-Cohen (2015) are worth quoting at length on this topic:

> Those with higher levels of empathy have a capability to perceive, recognize, and react to a wide range and depth of emotion, and therefore experience and encounter such in their everyday lives. It would be reasonable to expect that if music preferences are a reflection of empathy levels, that empathizers will prefer music that contain emotional, deep, reflective, romantic, and gentle attributes. These attributes are predominant features of the Mellow music-preference dimension…[these] are likely appeal to empathizers because they reflect the emotional depth that empathizers experience in their daily lives (83).

This view is further supported by Rapp and Gerrig's (2002, 2006) findings that contextual features in a text are more directly responsible for empathic connections than trait tendencies, as well as the fact that individuals may exhibit a different sense of personality depending on their mood and circumstances (Clarke et al., 2015). Individual differences in trait empathy may modulate the types of music that are enjoyed, then, not from the differences in disposition themselves, but from the results of the experiences that are naturally born out of these individual differences.[27]

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negative emotion when experienced aesthetically creates a positive affect). In terms of absorption, however, Garrido and Schubert also note that absorption and empathy must be present together for enjoyment—if there is only absorption but no empathy, the music might be disliked because of the negative emotions attached to it.

[27] Garrido and Schubert (2011) relatedly note that people may experience different levels of absorption, rumination, and empathy depending on the day and context.

Furthermore, O'Neill and Egermann (2020) have shown that situational empathy, over and above trait empathy, predicts how strongly musical emotions are perceived and induced in the listener, suggesting that it is *this* type of empathy that is most responsible for emotional response. The fantasizing component of trait empathy does correlate with the degree of situational empathy activated in musical contexts according to the same study, but it was the personal nature of program notes that had the greatest impact on listeners' emotional experience. It will be situational empathy, then, that we will consider in order to understand why a person empathizes with a particular virtual musical agent over others.

## Connections between Empathy and Agency

Agency is crucial for understanding and engaging with music. Hatten points out that agency can: 1) enable memory of musical events, which allows the listener to connect materials and understand the music as a whole; 2) make music relevant by allowing us to relate to or empathize with virtual agencies; 3) help us learn from emotions that differ from the ones we typically experience and which might be harmful to us in real life; 4) enable our bodies and minds to experience new, enjoyable states; and 5) understand more fully the composer's role in staging agency (287-288). As we can see, Hatten critically and explicitly connects agency and empathy in his second point.

Likewise, empathy with music is only possible if the listener perceives a musical agent—there must, after all, be both a subject and target for empathy to occur. Levinson (2006a) asserts this by noting that when music is heard as expressive, there must be some*one* or some*thing* who is expressing that expression. Cora Palfy in her (2015) dissertation and (2021) book connects agency to empathy even more directly by describing how the former is a

specifically social experience between the listener and music.[28] Furthermore, while empathizing with music is not the *only* way to listen, it *is* the most common way according to Kreutz, Schubert, and Mitchell (2008); specifically among nonmusicians, who make up the majority of the population, music empathizing is more common than music systemizing, which occurs when a listener is more focused on musical organization and structure.

Not all consider agency and empathy to be necessary for an understanding of music. It might be argued along the lines of Davies (2003a, 2003b) that musical emotions are communicated solely through the nonconscious process of emotional contagion, rather than any kind of empathy with agential targets. However, his statement that "music is expressive because we experience it as presenting the kind of carriage, gait, or sexuality, and so on" (2003a; 147) requires a source for this carriage, gait, or sexuality. These emotions *cannot* take place by themselves. Hence, while terminology may differ on whether music communicates agency or not, theorists generally agree that there is a sense of movement in music from a being, or movement that occurs with intentional force.

Music theorists tend to shy away from empathy, as well, perhaps due to how personal empathic identifications can be. In Matthew BaileyShea's words, "since the process [of attributing agency] is highly subjective—based on our personal empathic reactions to music—there are no commonly recognized strategies for how to define agency and musical motion" (11). Hatten terms this level of subjectivity "negotiated identification, by means of which interpreters' own experiences can help provide referential grounding for expressive meaning" (24). However, empathy remains more of an afterthought to his analysis of virtual

[28] While her work specifically focuses on the role of meter in agential attribution, she considers that other musical parameters may have similar effects.

musical agency rather than an integrated part. The next chapter seeks to remedy this absence in the literature by introducing what I call the "agential listener."

## Summary

Virtual musical agency arises when intentionality and humanity is ascribed to (some aspect of the) music. This is brought about in part through compositional structures and in part from listeners' subjective interpretations. In addition, Hatten (2018) has arranged virtual musical agencies in a hierarchy spanning from individuated elements to the piece as a whole, in which the ascription of one level of agency affects and implicates each level below it. What actually drives these agential ascriptions, at any level, are the perceptions of (intentional) action or psychological states, both of which can be attributed either through diachronic (i.e. markedness across time) or synchronic (i.e. characteristic) means. However, humanity, action, and psychological states are all mutually implicative to some degree as primary components of human experience.

Empathy, in turn, is the process by which agency is attributed. The term is typically used to refer to, at least in part, the process of taking the perspective of an "other," either by placing yourself in an other's shoes (SOPT) or placing the other in their own shoes (OOPT). It may also feature emotional contagion, or the "catching" of emotions from an other without conscious recognition of the emotions' source. Most helpfully, the term "simulation" has been used to cover both SOPT and mirroring, in which the latter may or may not be conscious but involves a conscious taking on of the other's perspective into one's *own* body/mind, rather than projecting oneself into the *other's* body/mind. In this dissertation, I recognize both forms of simulation as a potential means of engagement with music, while restricting my discussion to experiences which are conscious.

In the next chapter, I argue that empathic identification introduces "the agential listener," or a category of virtual musical agency which arises when listeners empathically merge with music. Because empathy is especially triggered by similarity, when listeners perceive similarity between their own personal human agency and a virtual musical agency, they can experience an empathic merger with that virtual musical agency. I have called this experience "empathic identification" because while there is an experience of identification via a phenomenal merger of two entities, the listener retains an awareness that they are not *literally* identical to the music. In addition, individual differences among listeners provide opportunities for situational empathy to arise, or empathy that depends on environmental cues for bringing similarity into salience. Because listeners experience different personal agencies, I argue that they in turn experience different opportunities for empathic engagement with music, which can explain the variety of agential interpretations that have plagued and perplexed music theorists over the years.

**Table 2.1: Some definitions of musical agency**

| ***Theoretical work*** | ***Assumed features of musical agency*** |
|---|---|
| Cone (1974) | "We attribute to the agent what we deny to the character: full awareness of its musical nature and musical environment…the agent 'thinks' only on the subconscious level" (88)<br><br>Persona = "the experiencing subject of [an] entire composition, in whose thought the play, narrative, or reverie takes place—whose inner life the music communicates by means of symbolic gesture" (1) |
| Karl (1991) | Persona: "the experiencing subject of a musical composition" (14) |
| Maus (1988, 1997) | "The scheme works by identifying certain *events* as *actions* and offering a distinctive kind of *explanation* for those events. The explanations ascribe sets of psychological states to an agent, states that make the action appear reasonable to the agent and that cause the action. The explanatory psychological states can be divided roughly into epistemic states (beliefs and the like) and motivational states (desires and the like). Ascriptions of psychological states are constrained by the need for the agent to shape up as an intelligible person: fairly coherent, consistent, rational, and so on. Besides beliefs and desires, one important class of explanatory states includes character traits, moods, and emotions. These function in a variety of ways: they can affect epistemic and motivational states, and they sometimes help to explain failures of consistency or rationality." (1998: 66) |
| Newcomb (1984, 1997) | An agent = "a unified combination of musical attributes in a given section of music"<br><br>"Music as heard…is a representation and reenactment of a complex pattern of intentional human action" (1993: 131)<br><br>Plot archetype = "standard series of mental states" (1984: 240) |
| Tarasti (1994) | "Actants": "represented by all those features that render abstract musical structures as anthropomorphic" (106) |
| Cumming (2000) | "Elements of vocality and of gestural force can appear in a musical performance, as the effect of an interaction between a prepared body and an interpreted score. Hearing voices, and responding to gestures, is entering into a mode of engagement where a virtual 'presence' or agency can be felt in the work" (160) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Levinson (2006a, 2006b) | "Music is expressive, I maintain, when it prompts us to hear the music as animated by agency of a certain sort, more specifically, when it induces us to hear the music as expressing a mental state, or perhaps equivalently, when it induces us to imagine a persona expressing a mental state through the vehicle of music" (2006a: 433) |
| BaileyShea (2012) | "Moving through a musical space with specific goals, desires, and intentions" action (11)<br><br>"Sentient persona" (15) |
| Monahan (2013) | When theorists "regard musical objects or gestures as volitional, as purposive, in such a way that is indicative of psychological states—states that render them, to use Maus's term, 'intelligible'" (325) |
| Mailman (2013) | "Volition, choice" (126) |
| Rupprecht (2013) | "When listeners can imagine human actors within musical textures, the sounding actions of performers assume a motivated quality and generate plot sequences analogous to those in literature or drama" (189) |
| Clarke (2005) | "Agency is experienced as either subjective identification (motion experienced as self-motion) or the actions of other agents (motion experienced as the motion of others)—or as a hybrid state that combines both 'subjective' and 'objective' components" (184) |
| Palfy (2015) | "The perception of an agent, will, or force emergent from music…the result of an intersubjective social process between music and the listener" (57) |
| Klorman (2016, 2018) | "Multiple agency" is "the capacity for independent action on the part of musical characters enacted by the various instrumentalists" (2016, xxii) |
| Hatten (2018) | "Semiotic attribution of agency typically involves a sentient being that may set into action various tools (such as a cue stick in billiards) or intermediaries in order to attempt and possibly achieve an ascertainable result" (32) |

**Table 2.2: Some definitions of empathy used in music theory and music cognition**

| ***Source*** | ***Assumed features of empathy*** |
|---|---|
| Miu and Balteş (2012); Balteş and Miu (2014) | Empathy is "the capacity to understand and respond to the affective experience of another person" (2012, 1) (trait empathy).<br><br>Both automatic and cognitive components |
| Clark and Giacomantonio (2013, 2015) | Empathy is "a unique capacity in humans to feel the experiences, needs, aspirations, frustrations, sorrows, joys, anxieties, hurt, and hunger of others as if that experience were their own." (179) |
| Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski (2015) | "The term is used to denote a whole range of ways in which an individual might 'take the part of another' (that other being a person, a non-human animal, an aesthetic object such as a sculpture, a fictional character in a novel or film, or a piece of music), without too much concern for how that perspective-sharing comes about. In this inclusive approach, a more directly perceptual engagement (a person hearing the distress in a person's voice and feeling that same distress themselves) and a more conceptual and imaginative engagement (a person reading about another person's predicament, imagining it, and as a consequence experiencing – or imagining experiencing – what they believe to be the same thoughts and emotions) are brought together under the same broad terminological umbrella: these are both manifestations of empathy." (64) |
| Cox (2016) | Refers to a "physical empathy"<br><br>"1. Part of how we understand others is by imagining performing the observed actions (MMI, or mental simulation)"<br><br>2. Part of how we understand music is by imagining performing one or more of the following:<br><br>a. the observed sound-producing actions (intra-modal MMI)<br><br>b. analogous sound-producing actions (cross-modal MMI)<br><br>c. other analogous exertions (also cross-modal MMI)" |

| | |
|---|---|
| Eerola, Vuoskoski, and Kautiainen (2016) | "Elements of vocality and of gestural force can appear in a musical performance, as the effect of an interaction between a prepared body and an interpreted score. Hearing voices, and responding to gestures, is entering into a mode of engagement where a virtual 'presence' or agency can be felt in the work." (160) |
| Egermann and McAdams (2013) | "[Empathy] involves two different components, one cognitive, 'perspective taking,' and another emotional, described as 'feeling with someone else' (Preston and de Waal, 2002)." (140)<br><br>Emotional contagion is similar, but separate. "In empathetic reactions, a conscious distinction between one's own and others' feelings is experienced, whereas emotional contagion lacks this differentiation." (140)<br><br>Focused on emotional empathy + emotional contagion |
| Garrido and Schubert (2011) | "Empathy entails a mirroring of emotion, and the development of parallel and reactive emotions in response to those perceived in another person." (282) |
| Greenberg et al. (2015) | "Empathy is the ability to identify, predict, and respond appropriately to the mental states of others." (2) |
| Juslin and Västfjäll (2008) | Emotional contagion "refers to a process whereby an emotion is induced by a piece of music because the listener perceives the emotional expression of the music, and then "mimics" this expression internally, which by means of either peripheral feedback from muscles, or a more direct activation of the relevant emotional representations in the brain, leads to an induction of the same emotion" (565).<br><br>"Empathy" is not mentioned. |
| Kreutz, Schubert, and Mitchell (2008) | "The generation and intuitive understanding of emotions in other individuals of a group" (57).<br><br>Both automatic and cognitive components |
| Molnar-Szakacs and Overy (2006) | "Emotion and action are intertwined on several levels, and this motor-affective coupling may provide the neural basis of empathy (Carr et al., 2003; Leslie et al., 2004)—especially the aspect of empathy that requires no intermediary cognitive process, but rather, is our automatic and immediate 'motor identification' or inner imitation of the actions of others (Lipps, 1903; Gallese, 2003a). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Peters (2015) | "The interpersonal capacity by which we get a sense of another's emotional state (beyond recognizing or understanding the state they are in) via upheld perceptual involvement with them yet without necessarily being 'infected' by those states is called empathy." (2)<br><br>Basic requirements for empathy: "(1) the observer's or listener's attention is—with some level of consistency—directed towards another person, or, respectively, the music; (2) beyond recognizing or understanding another's state, the observer or listener gets what I have called 'a sense of' that state." (3)<br><br>Further requirements for empathy: "(1) an awareness of the other as a center of consciousness; (2) having a substantial characterization of the other; and (3) having a grasp of the narrative at the basis of an imaginative enaction." (3)<br><br>Distinct from emotional contagion, being "in someone else's shoes," and sympathy |
| Scherer and Zentner (2001) | In empathy, "we directly identify with the person concerned and feel 'with' her or him. The process of empathy requires sympathy—were we to dislike the person in question, we might actually feel the opposite emotion (e.g. joy over our enemy's anger)" (369).<br><br>Emotional contagion involves "the observation of the motor expressions of the person concerned, possibly without any knowledge of the event that caused the reaction. The assumption is that the sheer observation of strong motor expressions can produce similar muscular innervations in ourselves" (369-370). |
| Vuoskoski and Eerola (2011a, 2011b, 2015); Vuoskoski et al. (2012) | Assessing empathy with the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis 1980); four components of empathy include fantasy, perspective-taking, empathic concern, and personal distress<br><br>"Trait empathy can be defined as an individual's responsivity to the observed experiences of another, involving both perspective-taking capabilities or tendencies, and emotional reactivity" (2015).<br><br>Empathy is connected to but separate from emotional contagion. |
| Wallmark, Deblieck, and Iacoboni (2018) | "Trait empathy is commonly divided into two components: *emotional empathy* is the often unconscious tendency to share the emotions of others, while *cognitive empathy* is the ability to consciously detect and understand the internal states of others (Goldman, 2011)." (2) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Walton (2015) | Empathy "always has an object, a target" (while simulation does not) (1)<br><br>Empathy is "using some aspect of one's current mental state as a sample to understand another person, …judging or experiencing the target person to be feeling 'like this.'" (9-10) "This may include the content of a current imagining [but does not *require* imagination]." (14)<br><br>"Sort-of-empathy" = "based just on memories of my experience, not my re-living it" (14)<br><br>"Automatic empathy" = when a person does not "judge, or believe, or know, that the other person is 'like this'…based on emotional contagion, for instance" (9) |
| Wöllner (2012) | "Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to understand the perspective of others and to construct an internal model of their emotional states; affective empathy is manifest in emotional responses to the perceived feelings of another person. Affective empathy is described as a relatively automatic response mechanism; cognitive empathy including perspective taking, in contrast, requires higher brain development especially in prefrontal regions" (214).<br><br>"Motor empathy" is complementary but distinct (214). |

# Chapter 3: The Agential Listener

> *Man, middle-aged*: I have reached a state of very strong identification with music that I have listened to, so strong that I completely co-live with the development of events of the music and am at one with it (Gabrielsson 2011, 7.4C).

Virtual musical agency can align with our human agency so closely that we identify with it. When we "co-live" with any part of the music in this way, we introduce what I call the "agential listener." The term refers to *a category of virtual human agency that originates in the listener, but is located within the music;* it arises when a listener empathically identifies with a virtual musical agent. I reserve the term "agential listener" for this level of virtuality *within* the music, while "a/the listener" will refer to the human individual whose human agency *gives rise to* virtuality, and who *experiences* the agential listener in the "real world."

The agential listener illuminates the subjective, yet systematic manner in which listeners' interpretations are formed. Scholars such as Maus (1988), BaileyShea (2012), and Hatten (2018) have long struggled with how to account for this subjectivity of interpretation. In a field that seeks to explain how music does what it does, the fact that music can "do" different things for different people is often treated as a fly in the analytical ointment. This occurs in one of two ways. One approach views agency as open-ended and undefined, reflected in BaileyShea's assertion that "the process [of attributing agency] is highly subjective—based on our personal empathic reactions to music—[so that] there are no commonly recognized strategies for how to define agency and musical motion" (11). This leaves subjectivity completely unchecked and unapproachable, forcing the theorist to ignore it if they wish to say anything definitive about musical interpretation.

A second group of scholars take the opposite approach by retaining a strong distinction between subjectivity and compositional structure. Hatten's concept of "negotiated identification" introduces the personal experiences of a listener as a means of engaging with music, but relegates it to a second and *secondary* process that nuances what is seen to be a clearly-defined compositional structure. In other words, subjectivity is "just" subjectivity. My theory of the agential listener, however, emphasizes the ways in which a listener's empathic identifications with music can influence the very perception of compositional structure. This virtual agency effectively navigates between these two poles of subjectivity—between unchecked idiosyncrasy and peripheral nuance.

In order to elucidate the effects of the agential listener on the virtual agential hierarchy, I will draw on examples of my own empathic identifications with classical Western Art Music. I do not present these interpretations as superior to others, but instead seek to combine insights from compositional structure with the subjectivity of empathic identification in order to offer a broadly phenomenological theory about how listeners *do* interpret music. While I recognize that factors such as stylistic knowledge and degree of distraction experienced by the listener can additionally encourage one agential ascription over another, my intent is to reveal the agential listener's crucial role in listeners' interpretations. Because these interpretations vary due to the diverse opportunities for identification with music, I do not attempt to offer a complete phenomenology of the listening experience, but only engage with it to the extent that it defines the agential listener and illuminates its effects on the virtual agential hierarchy.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the myriad personal, "real-world" agencies that human beings experience. These are the building blocks which make empathic identification possible. Next, I consider empathic identification in more detail, or the mechanism by which

human agencies can align with virtual musical agencies. Once defined, I discuss how empathic identification interacts with and enters into Hatten's hierarchy of virtual musical agency. A variety of musical examples will illustrate the agential listener's ability to either conform to or depart from compositionally-defined expression. Empathic identification in turn leads to the concept of *empathic markedness,* or markedness occurring from a significant difference between the music's virtual agency and a listener's human agency. This category supplements the stylistic and strategic categories of markedness previously discussed by Hatten (1994), and reveals how empathic identification via the agential listener affects our perception of the music "itself." These effects lead to subjective interpretations of music, which present a challenge to music theorists' pervasive focus on organicism. In the final section of this chapter, then, I offer an alternative perspective of *meta*-organicism which acknowledges the alignment of musical interpretation with internal, human agencies—even when these interpretations seem to be compositionally disjunct.

## A Closer Look at Human Agency

As human beings, we experience an astounding array of agencies, or intentional action/expression/thought in our lives.[29] We might have the agential desire to "harvest crops, educate children, establish a government, rob a bank, travel across continents, attain financial security, win a football game, smuggle drugs, worship God, go to war, regulate an economy, purchase a computer, [or] fulfill a life dream" (McAdams 2015, 172). These agencies also interact with one another in a variety of ways. Often, multiple agencies will coexist within a

[29] I will not attempt to define whether such expressions are *truly* agential or not, setting aside any debate about whether humans have free will. Instead, I focus on the individual's *experience* of these states as intentional and willed.

listener (e.g., desiring to win a football game *and* worship God). However, a single agency may also dominate at certain times (e.g., if the desire to wake up early in order to exercise overwhelms the desire to sleep in).

**Table 3.1: Human agency as it corresponds to levels of virtual musical agency**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Subjectivity | Ex: making a complex decision in one's mind; multiple sides of an individual's personality |
| 2. Narrative/drama/lyric trajectory | Ex: protesting injustice (individual agent vs. antagonist, such as an institution); feeling sad because of another's actions toward oneself (individual protagonist vs. individual "antagonist") |
| 3. Individuated human agent | Ex: choosing to clean the house; desiring to beat one's high score in a one-player video game (individual protagonist *without* an exterior agent) |
| 4. Unspecified virtual actant | Ex: falling due to gravity; performing any task perceived to be against one's will |

Agencies also interact with surrounding, outside-the-self agencies in a variety of ways, which in turn affects how self-agency is perceived. This is consistent with Hatten's hierarchy of virtual *musical* agencies, as well (see **Table 3.1**). For example, an individual experiencing the different sides of their own personality (i.e., a subjectivity) is not directly engaged with any other agent. A narrative sense of agency, however, recognizes agency that is *in opposition to* an external agent or actant, such as when an individual is protesting injustice (i.e., acting or desiring to act against an outside agent or actant). The experience of an individuated human agent provides a more delimited form of subjectivity focused within the individual; for example, desiring solely to beat your high score in a one-player video game rather than holding onto

multiple agencies at once. Finally, an experience of an actant involves an action or expression that is not perceived to originate within the self, such as falling or coercion.

Each of these hierarchical levels of agency can arise through one of two means: the experience of an (at least theoretically) achievable desire, or the purposeful expression of that desire (in which expression refers to both internal, physiological states such as thoughts and emotions and/or external, physical actions). Since both desire and expression involve intentionality, both are agential. In the former case, an individual experiences a desire which they perceive to be achievable—regardless of whether or not they ever actually achieve it. For example, you might desire to be on time for a meeting, but still find yourself running late. Because you *intend* to be on time, however, your experience is that of an agent (who may nevertheless be faced with external agencies, such as bad traffic or a talkative neighbor). If you perceive yourself as being *incapable* of being on time, however, for whatever reason, any desire to be on time is no longer experienced as a state of agency. When expression/action *is* achieved, however, agency is also manifested, so that the achievement of being on time is also agential.

Because agency must be intentional, not all human expression is agential. Actancy refers to a proto-agency in which expression occurs without intentionality—e.g., a chemical imbalance that leads to depression, tripping over the sidewalk, or peacefulness in a naturally peaceful person. As seen in **Table 3.1,** expression has the potential to be experienced as *either* actancy *or* agency depending on whether intentionality is ascribed. An actress who trips on the sidewalk according to her script experiences agency, not actancy. A naturally anxious person who intentionally pursues meditation to achieve calm experiences agency in their newfound peacefulness, unlike the naturally peaceful person. A child cleaning up their room may experience actancy if "forced" to do so by a parent, even if they are not *literally* forced. As a

result, a listener who identifies with musical expression may experience that expression as either actantial or agential depending on the human agency/actancy with which they compare it.

Agencies and actancies can overlap, but they can also conflict with one another. For example, a belligerent individual who believes that God wants them to wage war can experience both the agential desire to wage war and the agential desire to worship God by the single action of waging war. However, a belligerent individual who believes that God does *not* wish for them to wage war can experience the desire to wage war and the desire to worship God as two agencies in tension with one another. These clashes often stem from temporal differences between immediate and long-term agential desires (**Table 3.2**). For example, a teenager training for the Olympics might desire to stay up late to attend a party while simultaneously desiring to get a full night's sleep before their early-morning practice the next day. Agencies can also conflict within a single time-frame, such as the desire to appear happy so as not to burden a friend, while simultaneously desiring to communicate your sadness in order to obtain emotional support. In each case, an individual may choose to disregard one agency in favor of another (choosing to sleep instead of attend the party, or choosing not to convey any sadness), or the agencies may coexist in tension (feeling conflicted from the desire to both be at the party and be in bed, or alternating between conveying sadness and putting on a happy face). Such coexisting agencies will become important when considering possible identifications with virtual musical agents, since identifying with one agent does not necessarily exclude identification with another.

**Table 3.2: Temporal categories of real-life human agency**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Life | Ex: to express personality traits (optimistic, neurotic, etc.); to make a difference in the world |
| 2. Long-range | Ex: to have children in five years; to retire in twenty years |
| 3. Short-range | Ex: to find a job within the year; to break a bad habit in the next few months |
| 4. Immediate | Ex: feeling joy at getting a raise while still in conversation with your boss; leaving now to pick up your child from school |

Even so, our inner cocktail of human agencies does not remain stable, but changes over time. In J.D. Salinger's classic novel *The Catcher in the Rye,* sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield attempts to explain why he loves the natural history museum:

> you could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole, with their pretty antlers and their pretty, skinny legs, and that squaw with the naked bosom would still be weaving that same blanket. Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be *you.* Not that you'd be so much older or anything. It wouldn't be that, exactly. You'd just be different, that's all. You'd have an overcoat on this time. Or the kid that was your partner in line the last time had got scarlet fever and you'd have a new partner. Or you'd have a substitute taking the class, instead of Miss Aigletinger. Or you'd heard your mother and father having a terrific fight in the bathroom. Or you'd just passed by one of those puddles in the street with gasoline rainbows in them. I mean you'd be *dif*ferent in some way—I can't explain what I mean. And even if I could, I'm not sure I'd feel like it (157-158).

While Holden's examples are incredibly detailed and (seemingly) insignificant, Salinger draws attention to how much our emotions and goals can vary from day to day, and even from moment to moment. As a result, even listening to the exact same recording of a piece at different times will result in a (however subtly) different experience, because *you as a listener* have changed and thus have different opportunities for identification with the music. Whenever a listener perceives *any one* of their current, diverse human agencies to be strongly similar to that of a virtual musical agency, then, empathic identification can occur.

## A Closer Look at Empathic Identification

The concept of "empathic identification" must be carefully defined, since both parts of the term have a diverse past across time and disciplines. As a parallel, Hatten's "negotiated identification" is the most similar concept to my current use of "empathic identification" within music theory. He recognizes that "interpreters' own experiences can help provide referential grounding for expressive meaning." (24) This includes their ability to reject, identify, empathize, or sympathize with compositionally-structured agencies "within" the music. (Negotiated) identification is therefore presented as an overarching category which subsumes both identification proper ("feeling through or with") and also empathy ("feeling alongside"). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, identification in this setting is better understood as a type of empathy because there remains a distinction between self and other; the concept lies between "pure" empathy and "pure" identification. In this dissertation, I limit my discussion to Hatten's description of "feeling through or with," which I call empathic identification.

Empathic identification is distinct from both "pure" empathy and "pure" identification, while simultaneously related to both **(Figure 3.1)**. Like empathy, it involves a distinction between self and other, but like identification, there is also a degree of merger between the two.

In effect, the self and other share a phenomenal space even as the self remains aware that the other is not *literally* the self. This is distinct from pure identification, which retains no distinction between self and other (e.g., observing yourself in a mirror or photograph). Empathic identification is also a middleman when it comes to similarity. While empathy can operate with or without a sense of similarity between self and other, empathic identification requires a strong sense of it. Identification requires even *stronger* similarity, however, or literal "identification" that knows no distinction between self and other. By recognizing empathic identification as a type of empathy which mediates between pure empathy and pure identification, then, we are able to recognize the importance and make use of existing knowledge about empathy in order to understand and explain these experiences.

**Figure 3.1: A Continuum of Empathy and Identification**

| Pure Empathy | Empathic Identification | Pure Identification |
|---|---|---|

self/other distinction - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - no self/other distinction

| *similarity or dissimilarity* | *strong similarity* | *strongest similarity (identification)* |
|---|---|---|

As a final note, it is currently impossible to delimit the exact strength of similarity needed to move from pure empathy to empathic identification (or from empathic identification to pure identification, for that matter). I do not attempt to provide a full phenomenology of these experiences, but instead recognize that the agential listener may exist in different strengths and affect the perception of compositional structure to different degrees. In the following examples, I focus on strong instances of the agential listener, however, for the sake of their explanatory power in developing my theory.

*Precedents for Empathic Identification*

Empathic identification has been approached by scholars from a variety of angles and called by a variety of names. Kendall Walton (2015) compares an audience's *pure* identifications with music (when singing) to the identifications experienced by a speaker who is orating a speech written by someone else (see **Figure 3.2**). The speaker is not the original owner of her expressed ideas, emotions, etc.. Rather, the speechwriter has crafted the expression of ideas and emotions in a way that allows, and indeed finds its purpose in, their expression by the speaker. As a result, when the speaker delivers the speech, the speechwriter's expression turns into the speaker's *own* expression. The ideas, emotions, beliefs, and other communications that originated in the speechwriter have found a new host, or a new source, in the speaker.

Similarly, listeners can engage with musical "thoughtwriting" by expressing the composer's thoughts/expression when they sing along with their music (e.g., a crowd singing the national anthem at an American football game, or a church-goer singing a hymn) **(Figure 3.3)**.[30] Singing allows the listener to directly identify with and *become a part of* the music, empathically adopting its perspective and expressing it as their own. It creates an agent whose expression is manifested both visibly and audibly in the "real world." And while Walton limits his discussion to this form of agency, I would suggest that other physical manifestations such as jogging in time, tapping your foot, or dancing along with the music could similarly engender forms of thoughtwriting, since musical expression is being adopted in the listener's own body.

[30] Walton notes that thoughtwriting does not need to be intended by the composer. Instead, music has the inherent ability to be expressed in this way.

**Figure 3.2: Diagram of speechwriting based on Kendall Walton (2015)**

Speechwriter Speaker Speaker as Expresser

**Figure 3.3: Diagram of thoughtwriting based on Kendall Walton (2015)**

Composer Listener Listener as Expresser

However, sometimes listeners are just that—listeners. We do not always sing along with a song or display other direct, physical manifestations of musical action or expression. Tia DeNora (2000) closes this gap by addressing how listeners can *inwardly* engage with thoughtwriting, beyond any outward manifestations. In her qualitative study, she reveals how listeners often operationalize music by "packaging" or "repackaging" their bodies into specific identities. First, "packaging" is a form of empathic identification in which music expresses a listener's *current* agency/actancy. For example, a sad listener may identify with sad music. A jogger may identify with music that is rhythmic and energetic. Listeners can, and often do, consciously use music in this way to reinforce their own agency **(Figure 3.4)**. However, a listener can also identify with music that expresses an *alternate* agency to the listener's current expression through "repackaging," whenever an alternate agency is desirable. A sad listener who desires to be happy

might listen to happy music in order to identify with it, and a listener who feels boisterous but desires to be calm might choose to identify with calm musical gestures. As such, repackaging involves an empathic identification between two different *types* of agency—between an agential *desire* in the listener and an agential *expression* in the music.

**Figure 3.4: DeNora's Packaging and Repackaging of the Self**

| PACKAGING | | | REPACKAGING | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Listener<br>*real-world expression*<br>*(agency)* | ↔ | Music<br>*virtual expression*<br>*(agency)* | Listener<br>*real-world desire*<br>*(agency)* | ↔ | Music<br>*virtual expression*<br>*(agency)* |

Inward manifestations of empathic identification with virtual musical agents are the primary subject of this dissertation. Furthermore, the prevalence of these empathic identifications among the participants in DeNora's study emphasizes that the "peripheral nuance" view of subjectivity described above must be rejected. In fact, empathic identification is a common and meaningful way in which listeners engage with music. Furthermore, both packaging and repackaging reflect an experience of music as "thoughtwriting"—or empathic identification with the thoughts, feelings, or actions of a virtual musical agency by adopting it as one's own expression. The result is an introduction of a virtual *human* agency within the music that coexists with the virtual *musical* agencies discussed in the previous chapter. In DeNora's words,

> [music] provides a way of transferring [listeners'] means of expression from the 'real', physical realm ('hitting someone or doing something like kicking the door', 'punching a pillow') to the imagined, the virtual. *Music thus provides a virtual reality within which respondents are able to express themselves* in a (symbolically) violent manner, for example by choosing 'aggressive' or 'anti-establishment' music, or by playing music at full volume. This virtual realm is a haven for angry individuals; within this haven, they adopt the position of being in control of the symbolic and physical environment (56, italics mine).

Therefore, while listeners boast a *real* (as opposed to virtual) body in the "real world," empathic identification results in a listener's experience of virtual agency "within" the music. The listener transports themselves into the music's "shoes." This agency remains virtual because the listener is not a direct source for the music's sonic output (unlike a performer); however, even *virtual* expression remains expression, leading the listener to an *additional* experience of human, real-world agency. As a result, the agential listener engenders both virtual agency (locus of agency = music) and real-world agency (locus of agency = real world). The category of "agential listener" will, however, focus on the virtual component of agency.[31]

*The Two Spaces of Empathic Identification*

Virtual expression involves a mediation between two "locations:" self and music. First, empathic identification with a musical "other" is experienced *within the listener*. Due to its audible (and hence perception-based) format, music naturally invokes mirroring[32], or the internal simulation of musical expression within the listener (see e.g., Waytz and Mitchell 2011; Cox 2016). Musical expression becomes experientially "transferred" to the listener through internal physiological changes. If a listener experiences nonconscious mirroring (i.e. emotional contagion), a nonconscious form of the agential listener may result. However, I will limit this dissertation to an exploration of listeners' conscious empathic identifications with music (while recognizing that emotional contagion may, in fact, combine with self-projection to create such a conscious experience). Overall, then, mirroring represents the *internal locus* of empathic identification, or the absorption of music *into* the self.

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[31] By focusing on the virtual environment of expression in this dissertation, I do not intend to negate the power and reality of real-world expressions of agency, but rather seek to draw attention to a type of agency that has remained undertheorized, and which directly affects our interpretations of virtual musical agency.

[32] Again, I choose to remain agnostic about the neurological mechanisms behind the *experience* of mirroring.

Conversely, "self-projection" presents an external locus. The listener locates themselves within the *music's* virtual body and mind, experiencing music from the "inside." They place themselves within the music's "shoes." Of course, self-projection must still take place within the listener's body (since we cannot *literally* transport ourselves into music). Yet just as mirroring involves an experience of projecting the music into the listener's body, self-projection involves an experience of projecting the listener into the music's *virtual* body. In both cases, the music and listener merge to become "one." In fact, empathic identification involves both mirroring *and* self-projection, which may be active to varying degrees (as discussed in the previous chapter). Mirroring serves as the scaffold for building a locus within the self, while self-projection involves higher-level, or "top-down" cognitive processing through a locus within the other. The result is a rich phenomenal space shared by both music and listener, which incorporates these two loci into one.

For ease, I will often speak in this dissertation as though the locus of empathic identification is wholly *within* the music; this is because music serves as the "real world" expression of agency with which a listener identifies, or the external stimulus that drives empathic identification *with itself.* Furthermore, the listener's projection into the music is responsible for subjective ascriptions of virtual musical agency, which is one of the foci of this dissertation, and thus the effects of a listener merging *with the music,* or *within the music,* is the most useful locus of experience to be considered. However, I remain agnostic about the exact, overall location of empathic identification and recognize both a component of the music merging with the self and the self merging with the music.

Finally, before we move on, concerns might be raised about the social implications of empathizing with music. To return to the debate between self-oriented and other-oriented

perspective-taking (SOPT and OOPT) from the previous chapter, is it ethical to project ourselves into the music, or should we consider how the *virtual agent* would feel *in its own* shoes? I do not attempt to answer this question here. Because empathic identification requires the agency of the self and other to be extremely similar, if not the same, the argument of SOPT vs. OOPT becomes largely irrelevant for the matter at hand. Whether the listener projects themselves into the music's shoes via SOPT/self-projection or projects the music into its own shoes via OOPT, the "shoes" are in essence the same.

But *is* the music truly similar to ourselves? Is an experience of empathic identification *true*? Unfounded identification with a virtual musical agent does carry less ethical risk than unfounded identification with another human being by nature of its virtuality, yet there is still risk. To draw on a particularly publicized example within popular music, identification allows white supremacists to appropriate Taylor Swift's song "Look What You Made Me Do" as an anthem, despite both Swift's intent and wishes (Mullin Nov 7 2017, Taylor Swift threatens to sue blogger who connected her to white supremacists). Empathic identification with music has, in this case, led to the unintended empowerment of a horrendously racist movement. The social repercussions of empathic identification therefore *do* deserve a deeper exploration. However, the scope of this dissertation is limited to the effects of empathic identification on musical interpretation. Future research should provide additional and careful consideration of the social effects of empathic identification, to which I am unable to do justice here.

*Summary*

Empathic identification involves an experience of feeling "through or with" music, experiencing it as though the listener were in the music's own "shoes." This type of identification can be described as a form of Walton's "thoughtwriting," in which the listener adopts the music

as their own expression. It can be further split into DeNora's two categories of musical packaging (in which the music's expression matches the listener's current expression) and repackaging (in which the music's expression matches the listener's *desired* expression). In each case, empathic identification leads to the presence of a virtual human agency (i.e., the listener's expression, or the agential listener) within the music. Finally, empathic identification is achieved through a combination of mirroring (a projection of music into self) and self-projection (a projection of self into music). These processes will be understood to work together to create a space that is phenomenally shared by both music and listener, leading to a merger of listener and music that requires a rejection of subjectivity as "peripheral nuance."

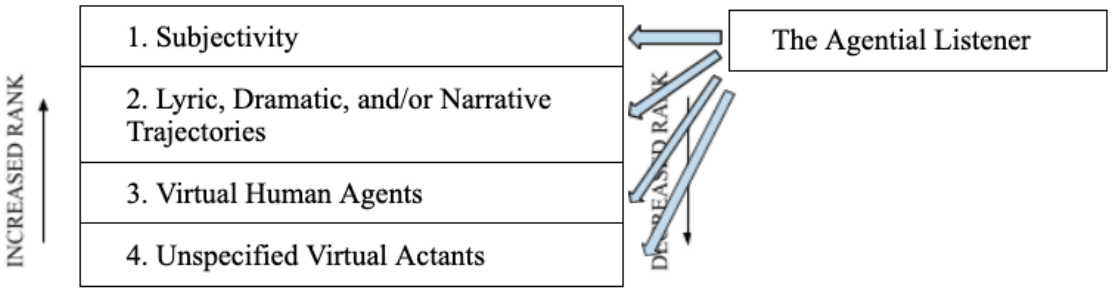
## The Agential Listener and Hierarchical Engagement

Now that empathic identification has been defined, I will consider its relationship to Hatten's hierarchy of virtual musical agency. When a listener empathically identifies with a virtual musical agent at any level of the hierarchy, they experience *themselves* as a virtual agent acting and expressing *within* the music, resulting in a virtual human agency that I call the agential listener.[33] In other words, if "the listener" represents the human being who is listening to the music, the "agential listener" is like a hologram projected inside the music. Like the higher levels of virtual musical agency in Hatten's hierarchy, the agential listener may either be present or absent, and constantly or sporadically ascribed during a listening experience. When present, however, the agential listener overlaps with the level of virtual musical agency with which the

[33] One might also suggest that it is possible for the agential listener to identify with other agencies proposed by Monahan. For example, the listener might identify with a fictional composer, experiencing themselves as an agent who gives rise to and creates the entire musical landscape. Anecdotal evidence from colleagues suggests that this is, in fact, a possible mode of listening. In this dissertation, however, I will only be concerned with identifications occurring with virtual musical agents within the music "itself."

listener is identifying. It cannot exist on its own. As such, I place the agential listener in a separate category outside the rest of the hierarchy (see **Figure 3.5)**. A number of musical examples will illustrate further the nature of these identifications.

**Figure 3.5: A hierarchy of virtual agency, modified from Hatten (2018)**



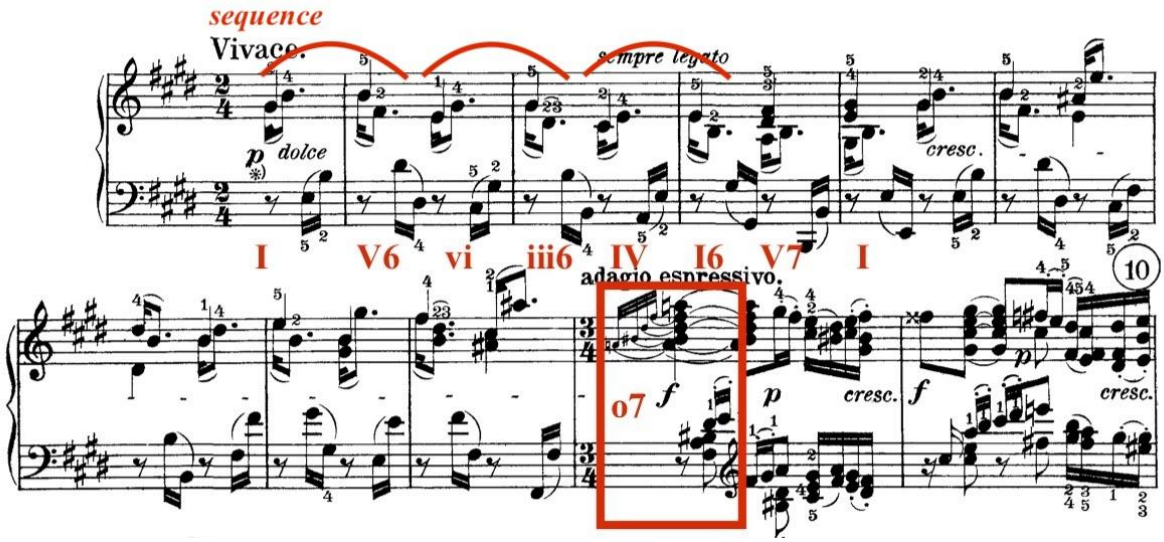

*Empathic Identification with a Subjectivity*

Empathic identification with a virtual subjectivity involves hearing an entire piece not only as a complex mind, but as *one's own* complex mind. This complexity is typically enacted by an internalized narrative structure, so that oppositions between virtual musical agencies are heard as different sides of the mind—as contrasting yet coexisting agencies. When a piece contains multiple movements, a subjectivity can be ascribed to either/both the level of the movement and the level of the piece.

As an example, I identify with a subjectivity in the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 30, Op. 109 **(Figure 3.6)**. The peacefulness of the opening theme is emphasized by its simple sequential progression (presented in the figure), and the gently billowing melody presents an idyllic mindset with which I *desire* to identify when I am anxious. The entrance of the surprising, fully diminished seventh chord at the *adagio espressivo*, however, introduces a striking shift in mood that catapults the music into angst and struggle (my current, yet undesired

identification). Since the remainder of the piece continues to vacillate between peaceful optimism and anxious negativity through oppositions between major and minor key areas, I can identify with the entire movement as an expression of the inner workings of my own mind. I experience both the desire to achieve a peaceful state and the reality of strife in this world, causing me to experience the entire movement as a representation of myself, and hence a subjectivity.

**Figure 3.6: Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 30, Op. 109: I. Vivace ma non troppo, m. 1-15**




*Empathic Identification with a Narrative (/Lyrical/Dramatic) Trajectory*

By contrast, a listener who empathically identifies with a narrative[34] trajectory within the music introduces their virtual agency at the narrative level through empathic identification with a virtual fictional character. Hatten asserts that such identification within musical narratives typically occurs with the *main* agent, or protagonist. However, an example from film

[34] Lyric and dramatic trajectories are also possible. Because theorists tend to focus more on narrative, and because empathic identification with lyric and dramatic trajectories operate in the same way as empathic identification with narrative trajectories, I will limit my focus to identification with narratives.

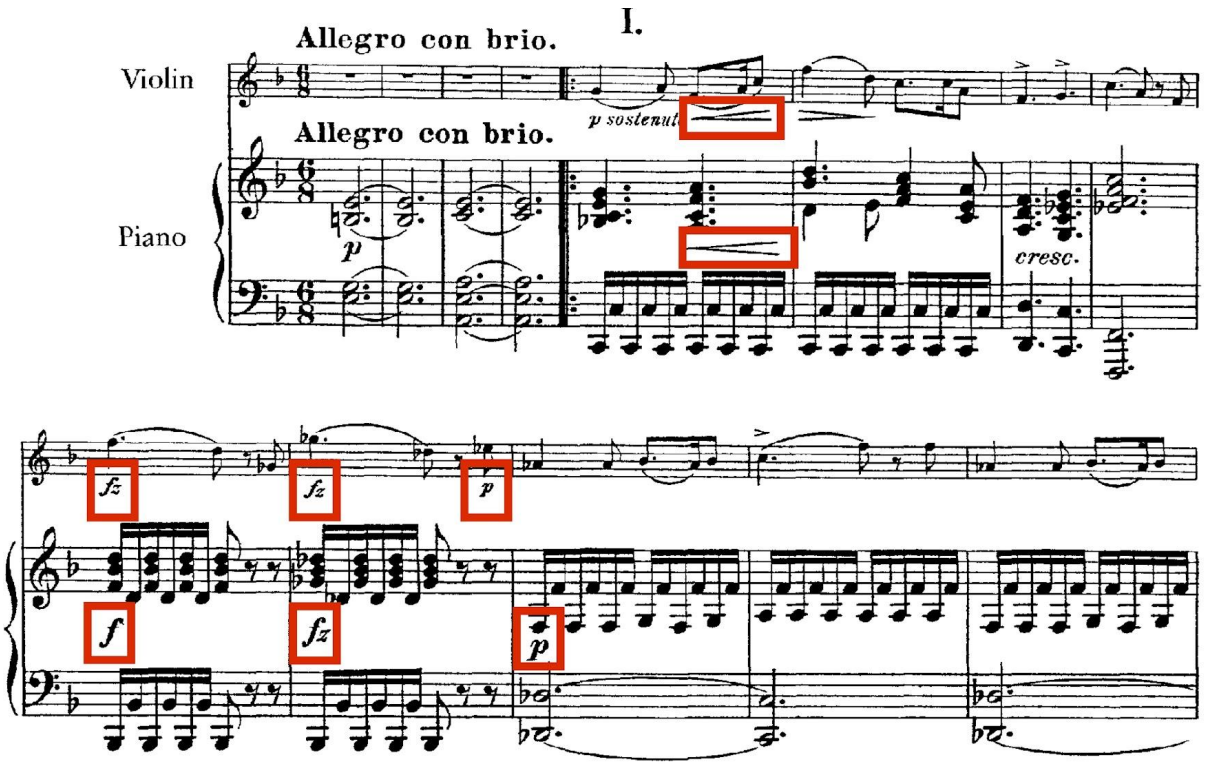
problematizes this limitation.[35] While watching Disney's (2013) film *Frozen,* I identify with Anna's perseverance and determination when she traverses the bitter cold in search of her sister. When the film becomes focused on Elsa during her song "Let It Go," however, I identify with Elsa's desire to release her fears and break free from other people's judgment. As a result, I no longer experience Anna as the protagonist, but as a newly external character. Once Anna finds Elsa, however, Elsa once again becomes an external and even villain-like agency with which I do not identify. Because she cynically refuses to listen to her sister and violently drives her away, I shift to identify with the more desirable agency of Anna's selfless love. As a result, we can see that empathic identifications can change based on which agencies are available (when more than one agency is present), as well as whether particular manifestations of agency are desirable or not (Elsa's desire for freedom leading her to accept herself for who she is vs. the agential action of pushing her sister away). If protagonism is defined as the positively-valenced main character in a work, my non-organic flux of identification will affect my ascription of this protagonist.

Music can allow for similar shifts in protagonism. For example, in the first movement of Grieg's Violin Sonata No. 1 in F Major, Op. 8 I first interpret (and identify with) the opening violin melody in m. 5ff as the protagonist, with the piano a part of its agency through the supporting and similarly-valenced accompanimental figures, which largely mimic the violin's dynamics (highlighted in **Figure 3.7**). However, the violin's pickup in m. 26 interrupts the piano's repetition of the soft, carefree melody to continue the line much more loudly and forcefully in m. 27ff (highlighted in **Figure 3.8**). At this moment, the violin strikes me as an

[35] Empathic identification with agents in film differs from empathic identification with agents in music. In this dissertation, I do not attempt to delineate *how* they differ, but use this and other non-musical examples as relatively tangible instances of identification in order to better illustrate the more elusive, invisible identifications we can have with music.

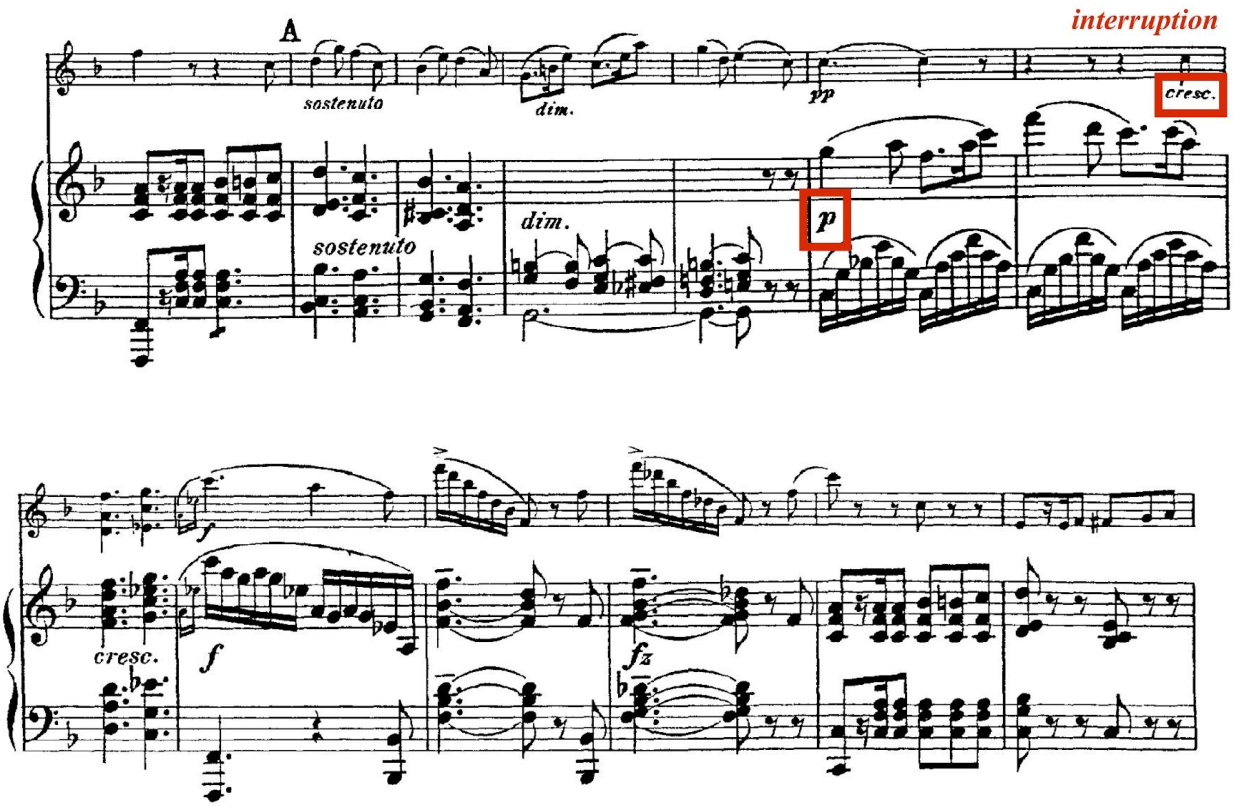
antagonist who rudely interrupts the piano protagonist. Yet the piano immediately accepts the violin's change, offering no resistance, so that they become subsumed for me once more into a singular protagonist.[36]

**Figure 3.7: Edvard Grieg, Violin Sonata in F Major Op. 8, I: Allegro con brio, m. 1-8**



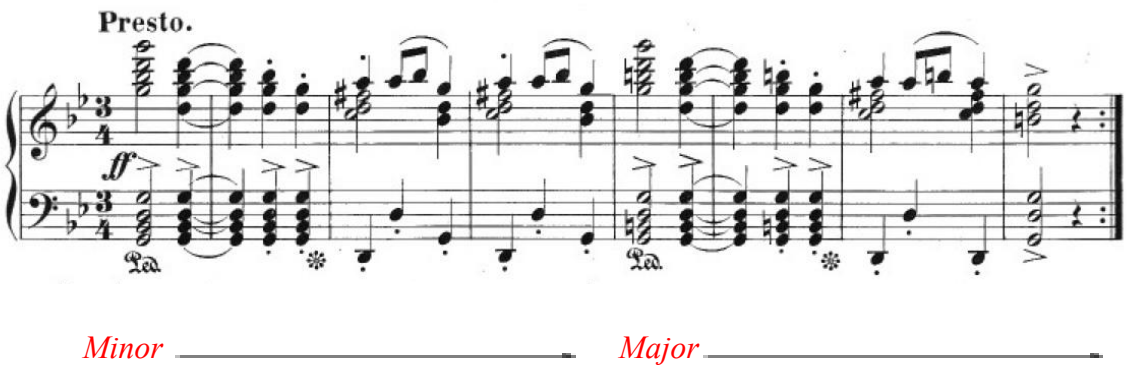

[36] It would also be possible to retain a sense of separation between piano and violin, viewing the piano's acceptance of the violin's change as the piano's tragic submission to the violin's bossiness.

**Figure 3.8: Edvard Grieg, Violin Sonata in F Major Op. 8, I: Allegro con brio, m. 20-32**




Dvořák's Slavonic Dance Op. 46 No. 8 in G minor provides an additional example of retrospective shifts in protagonism. The piece opens with a minor theme that is immediately repeated in the parallel major, illustrated with arrows in **Figure 3.9**. At a time when I was angry, I identified strongly with the opening force of this minor theme, experiencing the subsequent major version as an external agency to myself. A narrative emerged from the opposition of these agencies, leading me to interpret the initial negatively valenced agency as the protagonist. When the major version of the theme returned at the end of the piece, then, it did not feel like a victory, but a perfunctory dismissal of my own human agency.

**Figure 3.9: Antonin Dvořák, Slavonic Dance Op. 46 No. 8 in G minor, m. 1-8, arranged for solo piano**




If I had *desired* to identify with a positively-valenced agency, however, I could have used the ending as a means of repackaging myself, retrospectively experiencing the minor version of the theme as a negative antagonist that had been overcome. In other words, I may retrospectively reject empathic identification with what I previously understood to be the protagonist and come to view it as an *an*tagonist. Hence, the ascription of "protagonism" may shift from one agent to another depending on a listener's shifting empathic identifications.[37]

A listener may also identify with a narrative on a larger scale, however, retaining empathic identification with a single character for an entire piece. In Hatten's (1994) book, he describes the four movements of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 28 Op. 101 as members of a "tragic-to-transcendent" expressive genre, enacted through various developmental techniques. A listener who first identifies with a tragic agent in the first movement and who continues to empathically identify with this theme's newly transcendent character in the final movement

[37] Shifting protagonism has implications for Byron Almén's (2008) theory of musical narrativity, as well. Musical narratives are not mandated through compositional means, though certain interpretations can be encouraged over others. Almén's notion of the transformation of agents' value over the course of a piece is highly useful, but may differ depending on individuals' empathic identifications.

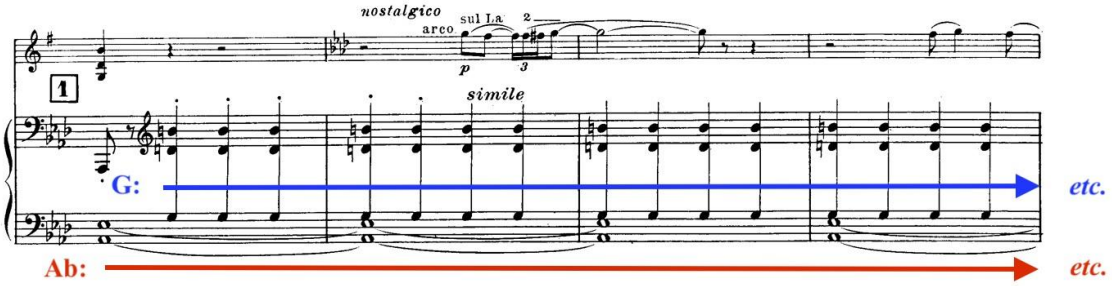
identifies with the narrative structure (of the protagonist) as a whole. As such, narrative oppositions can occur at both a small scale (the moment-to-moment oppositions shown in **Figures 3.8** and **3.9**) and large scale (overcoming oppositions over the course of an entire four-movement piece).

There is a key difference between empathic identifications with film and music, however. While in film it is easy to identify with multiple agents and retain a sense of narrative structure (e.g., identifying with both Anna and Elsa in *Frozen*), musical characters are left under-defined. When the listener imports themselves into the music, then, empathic identification with multiple agencies in opposition to one another will result in the perception of a subjectivity (see the discussion of Beethoven's Op. 109 above).

*Empathic Identification with a Virtual Human Agent*

Hatten limits his concept of "negotiated identification" to "subjectivities"—either the overarching subjectivity of a piece or "an implied subjectivity, a protagonist-like agent that works its way through a kind of 'pilgrim's progress' of experiences" at the narrative level (193-4). Yet empathic identification can occur at *any* level of the agential hierarchy—including the level of virtual human agency. A virtual human agent is similar to a fictional character, but is not located within a narrative structure. Fictional characters may, in fact, be initially ascribed with virtual human agency before any oppositional agencies are introduced; and just like with fictional characters, a listener can identify with a virtual human agency, introducing the agential listener at that level. For example, I identify with the violin melody beginning in m. 12 of Ravel's Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major **(Figure 3.10)**. It presents what I hear as a virtual human agent: an expressive, song-like melody (which I thus identify as human-like) against the stable, relatively neutral background texture of the piano.

**Figure 3.10: Maurice Ravel, Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major: II. Blues, m. 11-14**




The contrast between A-flat and G centered tonalities in the piano, as shown by the arrows in **Figure 3.10**, causes the G-centered violin melody to have a mysterious, and almost haunting quality to it, while the melody's blues-influenced inflections, such as the lowered seventh in m. 12, also present a degree of boldness. All of these features can be elements with which I either *currently* identify or *desire* to identify. While this melody may become reinterpreted as a fictional character as the music progresses, if the listener interprets the surrounding musical gestures as oppositional in nature, its current expression is heard independently of any oppositional agential forces.[38] Where empathic identification with a subjectivity or narrative requires oppositional markedness, then, empathic identification with a virtual human agent occurs when such markedness is not perceived.

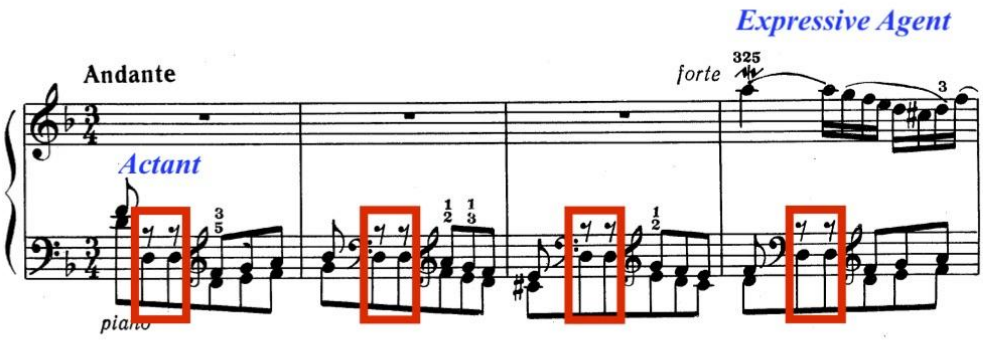
*Empathic Identification with an Unspecified Virtual Actant*

Empathic identification can even occur with actants, or proto-agents which act or express without intentionality or will. The listener can experience any lack of intentionality as strongly similar to their *own* unintentional action or expression, if present. The second movement of Bach's Italian Concerto begins with such an actant: the slowly plodding eighth notes, the simple

[38] It is possible to ascribe the A-flat center as an oppositional force, but its lack of movement and repetition lead me to view it as nuance here. I recognize, however, that other interpretations are possible.

movement first up and then down the scale, and the firmly rooted tonic via pedal point (presented through boxes in **Figure 3.11**) present a lack of both intentionality and strong emotion—especially when compared to the entrance of the right hand's plaintive melody in m. 4. However, I identify with this actant when I feel as though my life is stuck in a rut. If I continue to identify with the agency introduced in m. 4 as it continues throughout the movement, I might subsume the opening actancy into this agency, but in the first three measures alone before the melody enters I hear an actant and identify with it.

**Figure 3.11: J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto, BWV 971: II. Andante, m. 1-4**




I am presenting this interpretation as though I were listening to the piece for the first time. However, if I *do* identify with the melody begun in m. 4, subsequent hearings will enable me to immediately interpret the opening as part of an overarching agency. Even the *expectation* of a melody that is yet to be introduced (drawing upon stylistic competency to recognize that the first four measures are an introduction, even as one is in the process of hearing them) may lead to an interpretation of these measures as part of an agency that will soon arise. However, I emphasize here that there is *also* the possibility of immediately identifying with an actant *as an actant,* without hearing it in relation to any other musical material.

*Further Examples*

Alf Gabrielsson's (2011) interviews with listeners who had strong experiences with music reveal the presence of these empathic identifications in the "real world," collected in an interpretive category he has more simply called "identifying with music" **(Table 3.3)**.[39] His examples 7.4A and 7.4E describe, for instance, an experience of identification with one or more movements of a piece at a broad "subjectivity," level. In 7.4B, however, a listener identifies with a fictional character within an operatic narrative. This places the listener within the music as a fictional actor, identifying with the conflicts of the character Rigoletto. Without a narrative structure within which to situate a character or feature of the music, however, the listener in example 7.4D still identifies with it strongly. For her, a vocal melody became synonymous with her own self, and she achieves expression through it as a result. Finally, while Gabrielsson does not provide an example of a listener who identified with an unspecified virtual actant, we have seen that this, too, is possible when a listener perceives similarity between a lack of personal human agency and a lack of virtual musical agency (see "Empathic Identification with an Unspecified Virtual Actant," above). Thus, what I have been calling empathic identification is not limited in scope to theoretical discussion, but has already been displayed by listeners in the "real world."

[39] In this section, Gabrielsson also includes examples of listeners who identified with a performer. However, here I will limit my discussion to identifications with (some aspect of the) music.

**Table 3.3: Examples of the agential listener as virtual musical agent drawn from Gabrielsson (2011)**

| **Level of virtual agency** | **Examples from Gabrielsson (2011)** |
|---|---|
| Subjectivity | "Then the third movement started, and the experience was gigantic, I felt myself a part of the music…it is me, myself." 7.4A<br>"Every part of the music that reached my ears became a part of me, and the first and second movements [of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor]—that was me just then. No feeling of time, just a now, a point. I was inside the music, and the music was inside me. It wasn't possible to distinguish one from the other." 7.4E |
| Lyric, dramatic, or narrative trajectories | "The horror and shock that Rigoletto expresses…I share totally, and however many times I hear the work, I am paralysed with horror for a second or two when I hear the first bars of '*La donna'* in the last act [of *Rigoletto*]." 7.4B |
| Virtual human agents | "This was the most perfect melody together with the most perfect voice, this was *me*, but in the form of music." 7.4D |
| Unspecified virtual actants | N/A in Gabrielsson *(see "Empathic Identification with an Unspecified Virtual Actant" above for an example)* |

## Empathic Markedness: The Agential Listener as Explanation for Subjective Hierarchical Engagement

My theory of empathic identification not only explains how we experience ourselves within music, but *how we experience the music itself*. This is a crucial development that allows music theory to more conscientiously engage with the subjectivity of musical interpretation. After all, each of the above musical examples is only one of many possible interpretations, as the example of Bach's *Italian Concerto* in particular shows. But what drives these alternate

experiences? Can we predict or understand why one listener may experience the music in one way while another experiences it in a different way? Critics will argue that we cannot predict with any specificity when a listener will engage with a particular hierarchical level of virtual musical agency due to agential indeterminacy. This "unchecked idiosyncrasy" approach to subjectivity, in which nothing definitive can ever be said about musical interpretation, has been put forth especially strongly by Maus (1988):

> as the listener discerns actions and explains them by psychological states, various discriminations of agents will seem appropriate, but never with a determinacy that rules out other interpretations. The claim is not that *different listeners* may interpret the music differently (though they undoubtedly will), but rather that a *single* listener's experience will include a play of various schemes of individuation, none of them felt as obligatory (68; emphasis original).

According to Maus, *even an individual listener* will not be convinced of their own interpretation!

"Stylistic" and "strategic" forms of markedness, as previously described by Hatten (1994), are an attempt to provide more concrete musical interpretations, but are not enough to assuage this indeterminacy. Stylistic markedness refers to a valued alteration from the stylistic norms of a particular genre, such as the first instances of a Picardy Third, or any chord other than a I6/4 just before a cadenza. Strategic markedness refers instead to a valued alteration from the musical context within a particular piece, such as a stark change in texture, mode, or rhythm. One might hear a strategically marked change from active transition material to a more calming secondary theme in a Classical sonata. Here, the secondary theme would be strategically marked, yet stylistically *un*marked, since this shift in musical features is quite common in sonatas of the time period.

These two forms of markedness drive Hatten's ascriptions of agency and place them at particular levels of the hierarchy. When a listener interprets a musical gesture as marked, either from a synchronic or diachronic standpoint, agency is introduced, leading to a particular level of

hierarchical engagement. For example, and as we saw in **Table 3.1,** a narrative is heard *as* narrative because musical gestures are marked in opposition to earlier gestures (i.e., because of changes in markedness). A virtual human agent, by contrast, obtains its identity through synchronic means of expression, or expression that is *not* antagonistic toward other gestures but may be stylistically or strategically marked. If there are no marked changes in a piece of music at all, the entire piece will be heard as an actant, or at most a virtual human agent; narrative and subjectivity levels of the hierarchy will be unavailable, due to their reliance on changes in markedness.

However, stylistic and strategic markedness do not need to support each other or align with synchronic means of agential attribution. In his postlude, Hatten (2018) uses the pastoral mode as an example of this point:

> despite [the] marked expressive aspects of the pastoral mode,...it may also be understood as providing a larger unmarked environment relative to various marked (dramatic) events that may occur within. While the pastoral may serve as background in this sense, it is never neutral: it places a certain mood or emotional framework over those events that may occur within its bounds and constrains the kind of expressive trajectories that one is likely to encounter (285).

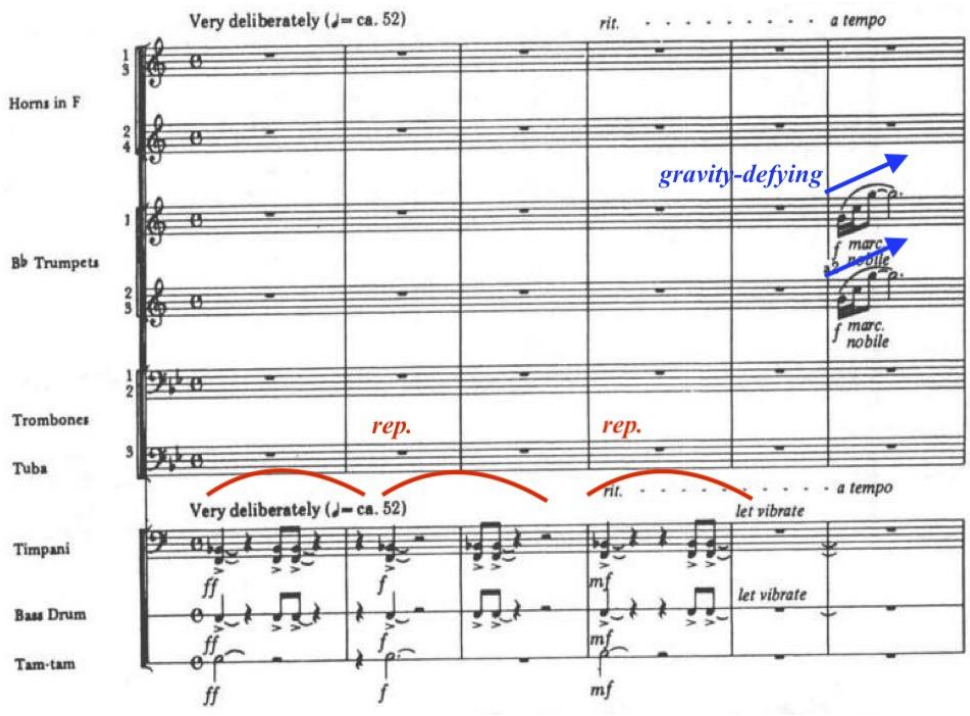
The pastoral mode will consistently present a strategic actancy *in relation to* surrounding musical gestures, despite its identity as an expressive genre (which implies agency). While strategic markedness is not present, agency from a topical/expressive standpoint is. It remains unclear, then, whether pastoral material will be engaged as an actant or agent.

Another example can be found in the opening of Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* **(Figure 3.12)**. An actantial interpretation might arise from its unadorned and highly-patterned rhythm, which would seem to lack intentionality due to repetition and humanity due to insufficient emotive expression—especially when retrospectively compared with the

upward-rising, gravity-challenging brass theme which enters shortly thereafter, as illustrated in **Figure 3.12**. As a result, this material is strategically unmarked as an actant. However, this material is *stylistically* marked due to its percussive opening (because fanfares typically begin with brass). The opening could also be heard as agential if the listener hears a military topic invoked by the percussion through synchronic means of agential attribution. Because this topic is associated with the intentional human action of marching into war, the material might be ascribed with agency. Hence, different compositional features present different possibilities for agential ascription, leaving agency (presumably) indeterminate.

Still further questions remain: what drives a listener to ascribe a musical narrative with external oppositions rather than a subjectivity with internal oppositions (or vice versa)? In Copland's *Fanfare,* a listener might hear the agential brass entrance as a narrative contrast to the opening rhythmic percussion *or* hear both percussion and brass together as an overarching subjectivity. Compositional features alone are clearly inadequate for determining an answer. And how is it possible for a musical gesture to be described as *both* a potential virtual human agent *and* an actant, as in Hatten's work? If the percussive opening might be either a human-like (i.e., agential) march or an unintentional and inexpressive sound (i.e., actantial), then which of these interpretations will occur? Stylistic and strategic markedness are simply insufficient for explaining listeners' *actual* hierarchical engagement with agency.

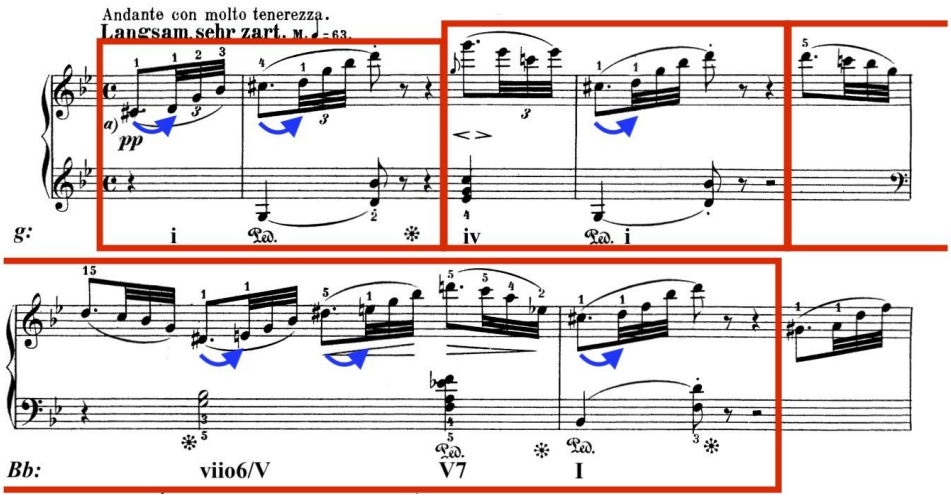
**Figure 3.12: Aaron Copland, Fanfare for the Common Man, m. 1-6**




Subjective musical interpretation is a legitimate "problem" within the field of music theory if it is, indeed, unchecked. My theory of the agential listener, however, offers a solution to this problem by explaining why a listener might arrive at one particular interpretation over another due to empathic identification, which arises from what I call "empathic markedness." This category supplements stylistic and strategic markedness to better explain how agency is ascribed, and even the hierarchical level at which an individual listener will engage. I define empathic markedness as *a valued alteration stemming from a difference between a listener's human agency (whether current or desired) and the music.* Empathic markedness can occur at any time, including the beginning of a piece. For example, consider the opening of Schumann's "Vogel als Prophet" from *Waldszenen, Op. 82.* The arrows in **Figure 3.13** illustrate the primary motive's tendency to begin with an agogic accent on the unstable leading tone of the subsequent

note—in most cases for this passage, C#, which is a tritone away from the tonic G and the leading tone of the dominant. The meter is similarly unstable. While the piece begins on beat four (a notated meter supported by the entrance of the bass on the first beat of m. 1), the dotted gestures are grouped into a 2 + 2 + 6 pattern (shown through boxes in the figure), which creates an ambiguous metric displacement.

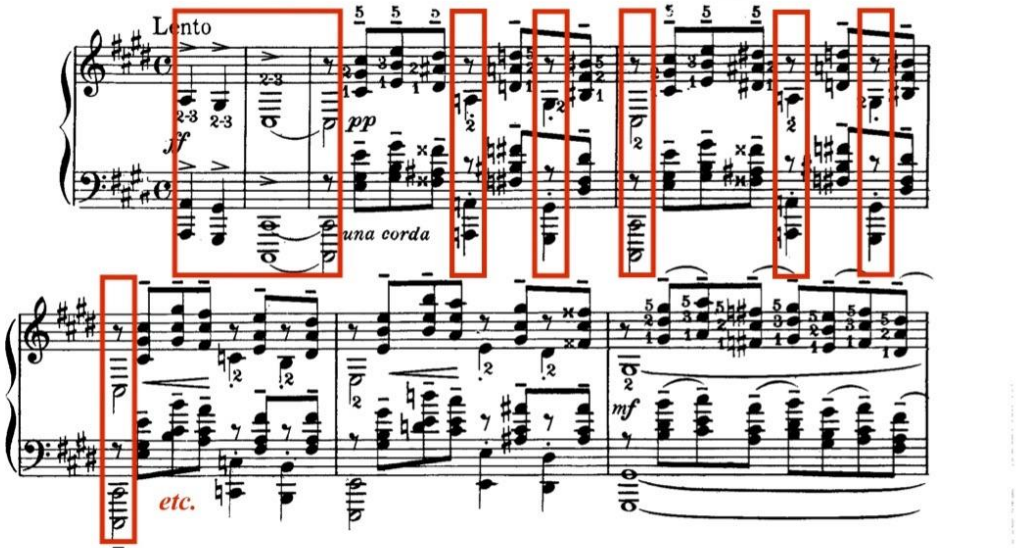
**Figure 3.13: Robert Schumann, *Waldszenen,* Op. 82: No. 7 Vogel als Prophet m. 1-4**




When combined with the *pp* motive's rapid arpeggiations of i and iv in G minor in m. 1-2, this opening takes on a hauntingly mysterious quality. The practically immediate modulation to B-flat (III) in m. 4, combined with the frequently alternating contours of the motive, adds an additional air of whimsical capriciousness. While a listener may empathically identify with this material if they experience or *desire* to experience a mysterious and capricious human agency (experiencing the music as empathically *unmarked*), this agency will be empathically *marked* for any listener who does not. The result is the sense of either an agent or actant acting/expressing in opposition to the self.

Empathic markedness also occurs when the music introduces an agent that differs from the agent with which the listener is currently identifying. It is in these cases that the hierarchical level of engagement is affected. To draw on another example from my own listening experiences, when I am feeling angry and determined I identify with the opening forceful three-note motive of Rachmaninoff's Prelude Op. 3 No. 2, shown in red in **Figure 3.14**. It is strong and assertive like my perception of myself at such a time. Yet in the midst of this motivic power, the accompaniment introduces unsure interjections on the offbeats that are quite different: they lack the willful force of the motive through their soft dynamic range, and they relay ambivalence through their rapidly changing contour. Overall, they do not seem to be asserting themselves in any particular way or moving anywhere in particular. As a result, I hear these interjections as an actant, and because they are very different from my own human agency at the time, I do not identify with them. This leads me to interpret the opening as a narrative, or an opposition between the protagonist (the opening motive with which I identify), and an external actant (the interjections).

**Figure 3.14: Sergei Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op. 3 No. 2, m. 1-6**

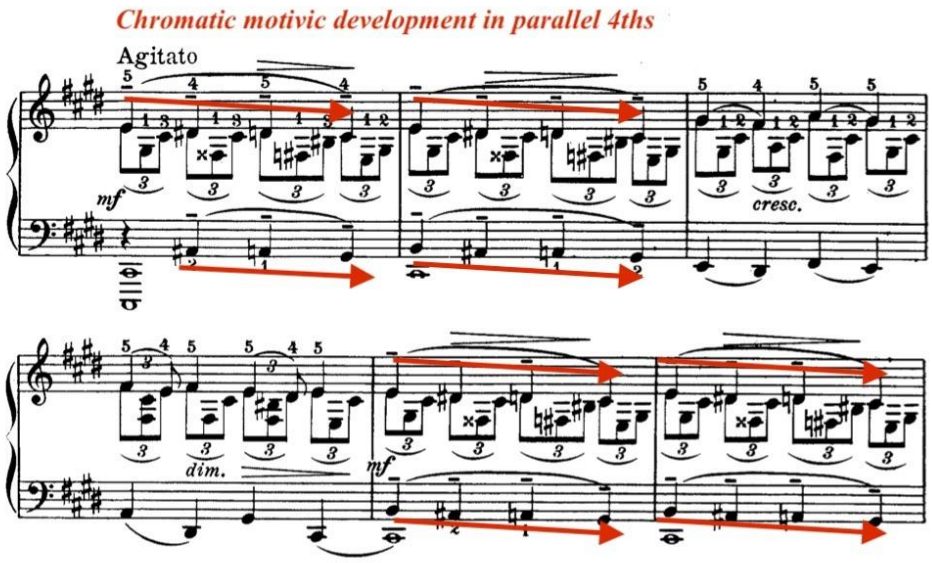


However, sometimes I hear these interjections quite differently. Sometimes, when I am feeling strong and assertive in a particular situation, I am also experiencing moments in which I feel unsure and weak about the same situation. As a result, I empathically identify with *both* the forceful opening motive *and* the unsure interjections of the prelude. I still hear these gestures as operating in opposition towards one another, but the opposition becomes internalized, resulting in a personal ascription of an unmarked subjectivity rather than a narrative. The music as a whole has become a representation of my own multifaceted body and mind.

Of course, I am not always angry when I hear this music. When I am feeling sad and dejected, I also identify with the opening three-note motive—this time as an expression of tragedy. The loud dynamics present the immovability of fate; the minor, downward movement becomes a representation of the painful and negative aspects of my life. In this mood, I hear the minor-mode, offbeat interjections as a continuation and nuancing of the tragedy of the motive. Once again, I identify with the music as an unmarked subjectivity, but now as a different *kind* of subjectivity—a tragic one rather than an angry and forceful one.

When the character of the music shifts with the agitato entrance at m. 14, I have the opportunity to either continue empathically identifying with the music or to interpret it as an agent/actant in opposition to myself. When I am feeling both angry *and* harried, the obsessively-repeated, chromatic downward-moving lines (as emphasized by the arrows in **Figure 3.15**) present a more hectic and anxious agency that continues to correspond with my own. When this is the case, I hear the agitato as a developed continuation of my own human agency. This interpretation is further compositionally supported by the chromatic extension of the initial downward motive and consistent negative valence of the piece's emotional landscape, and results in my ascription of an unmarked subjectivity to the piece as a whole.

**Figure 3.15: Sergei Rachmaninoff, Prelude Op. 3 No. 2, m. 14-19**




However, if I do *not* identify with the subsequent material, I may reinterpret any opening subjectivity as a new virtual human agent in opposition to a newly-introduced, empathically marked external agent or actant. If I am not feeling similarly anxious in the midst of either my anger or sadness, this difference will introduce an external virtual agency which is in conflict with my perceived protagonist (the three-note motive). As a result, I now interpret the opening as a virtual human agent existing within a larger narrative, *not* as a subjectivity.

When an agent is subjected to variation, empathic markedness can also affect the hierarchical level of agential engagement. A listener might initially identify with a virtual agent, but lose this empathic identification if the agent is developed in a way that no longer corresponds to the listener's own agency (as with my changing identifications with Elsa from *Frozen*). For example, the introduction of the idée fixe in the first movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* presents a mellifluous combination of flute and viola with delicate dynamics and an upward-rising, soaring melody **(**see **Figure 3.16)**. Its beauty and grace suggest an agency with

which I desire to identify, while its yearning presents an agency with which I *already* identify. However, when the melody is developed in the final movement to become demonic through the lurching and dance-like embellishment figures of the E-flat clarinet and the ominous underlying timpani, it becomes empathically marked for me because I no longer identify with this agency **(**see **Figure 3.17)**. Programmatically, the angelic beloved from the first movement has been transformed into a reveler at the witches' sabbath. While fundamentally the same agent, the portrayal of this agency has shifted so that I no longer experience empathic identification with it. The agential listener disappears, leaving behind an empathically marked version of the agent, transformed into a newly oppositional agency.

**Figure 3.16: Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie Fantastique,* Op. 14, H. 48: I. Rêveries - Passions, m. 72-110**

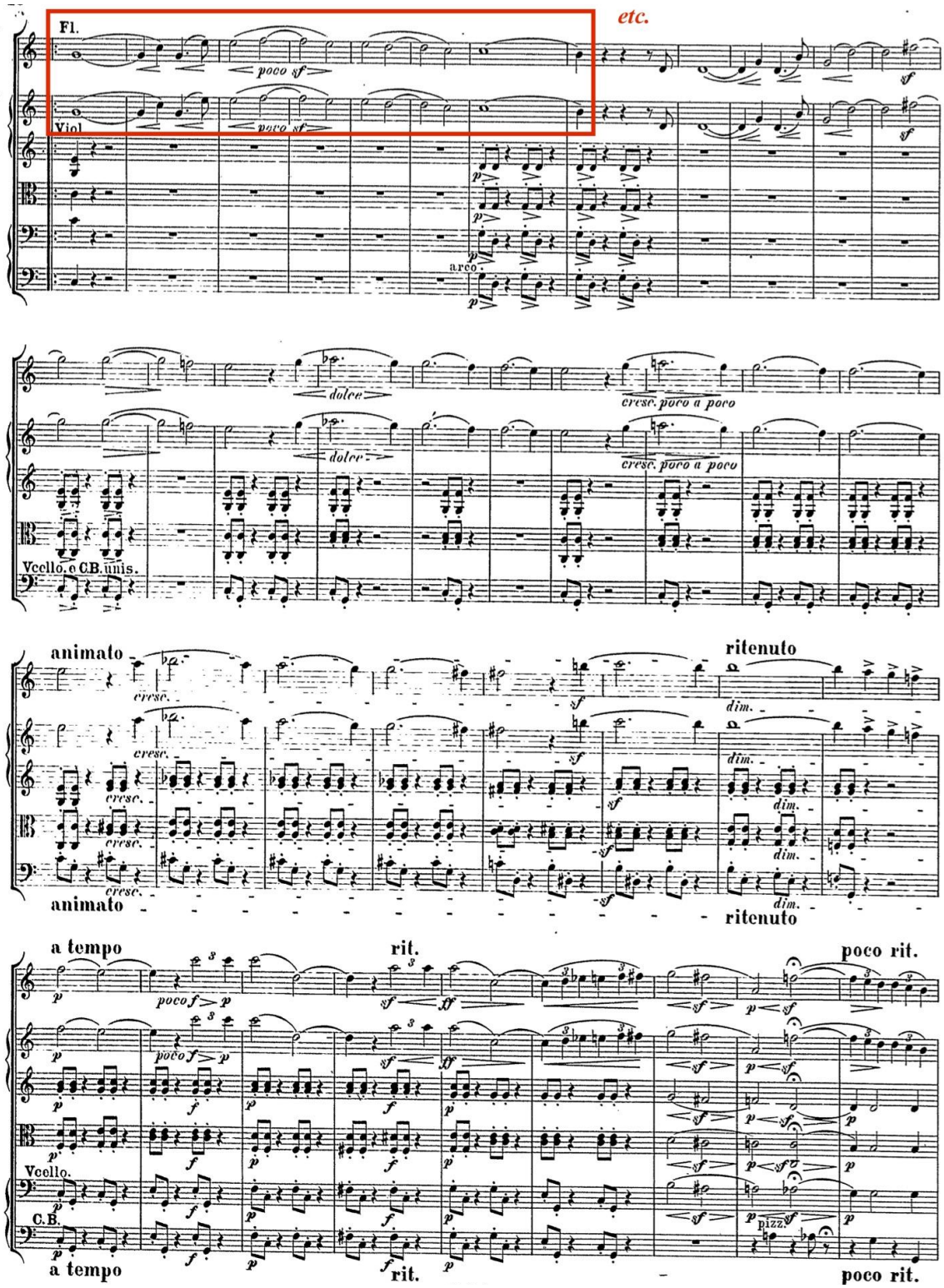
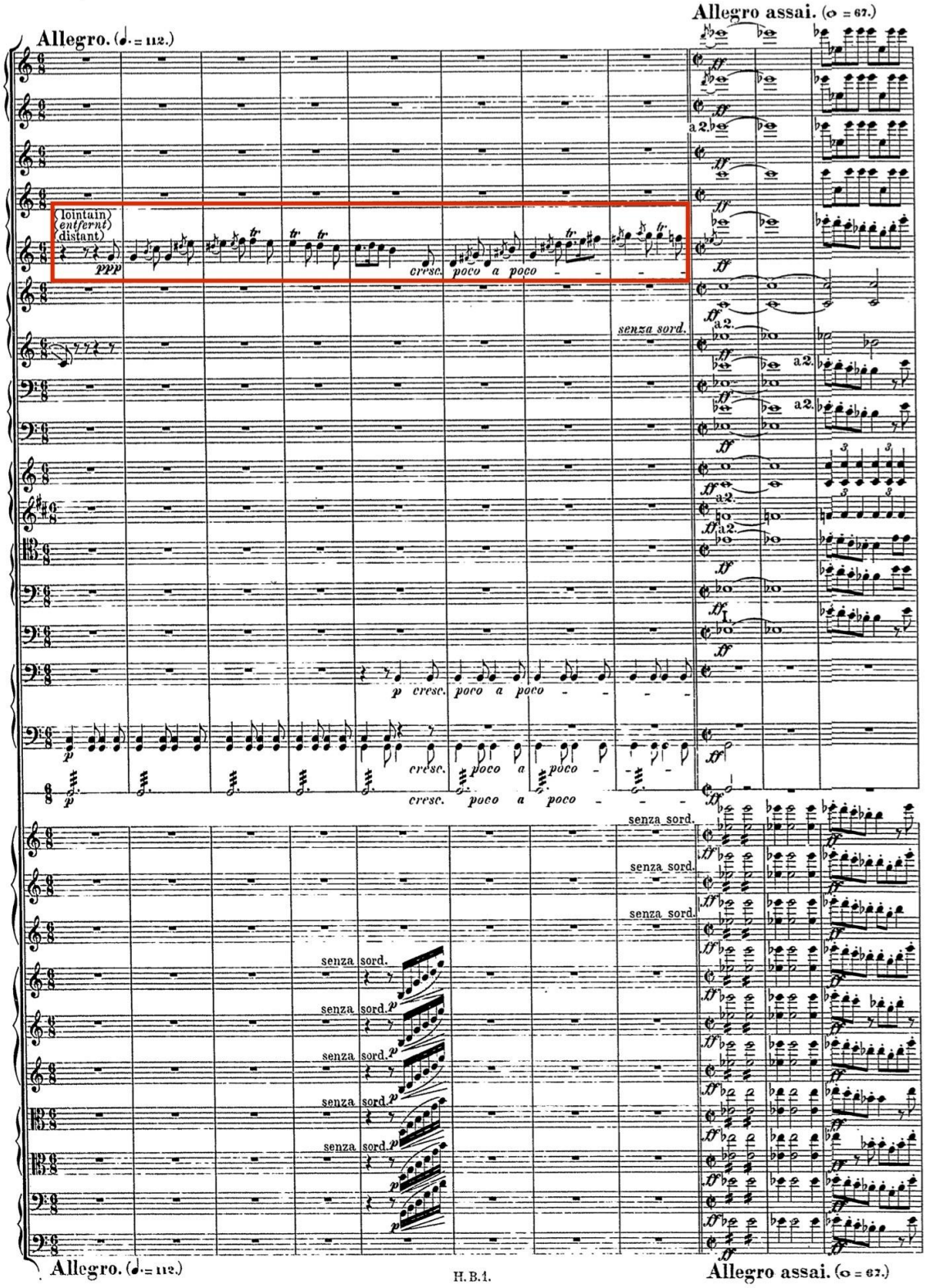


**Figure 3.17: Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie Fantastique,* Op. 1 4, H. 48: V. Songe d'une nuit de sabbat, m. 21-31**



However, thematic variation can also *lead* to empathic identification when none was initially present. For example, in Smetana's *Moldau,* I do not identify with the initial winding flute melody **(**see **Figure 3.18)**. Its wave-like movement and light timbre sound very natural, like a feather floating on the wind—or two small mountain streams, as the program reveals. Because this movement does not feel particularly similar to my own expression, I interpret it as an empathically marked actant—marked, because it is different from my personal agency at that time.

**Figure 3.18: Bedřich Smetana, *Má Vlast* No. 2 Moldau (Vltava), m. 1-4**

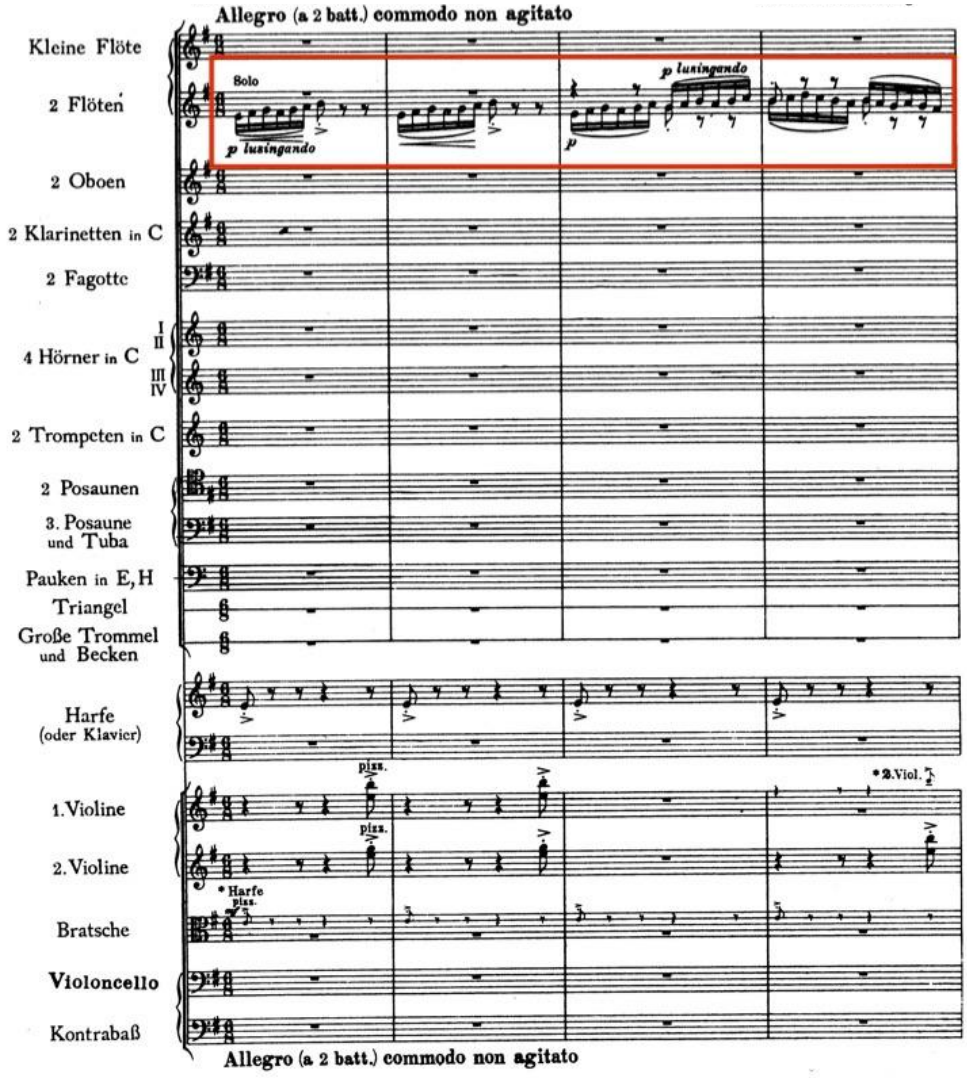
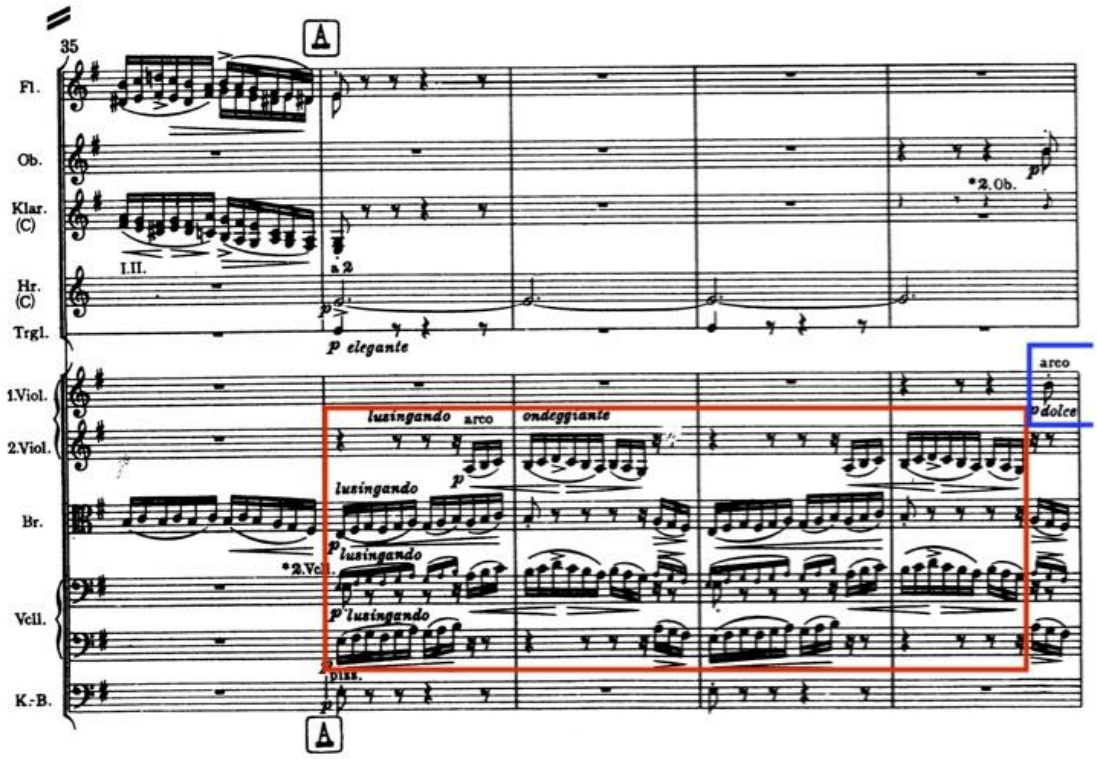
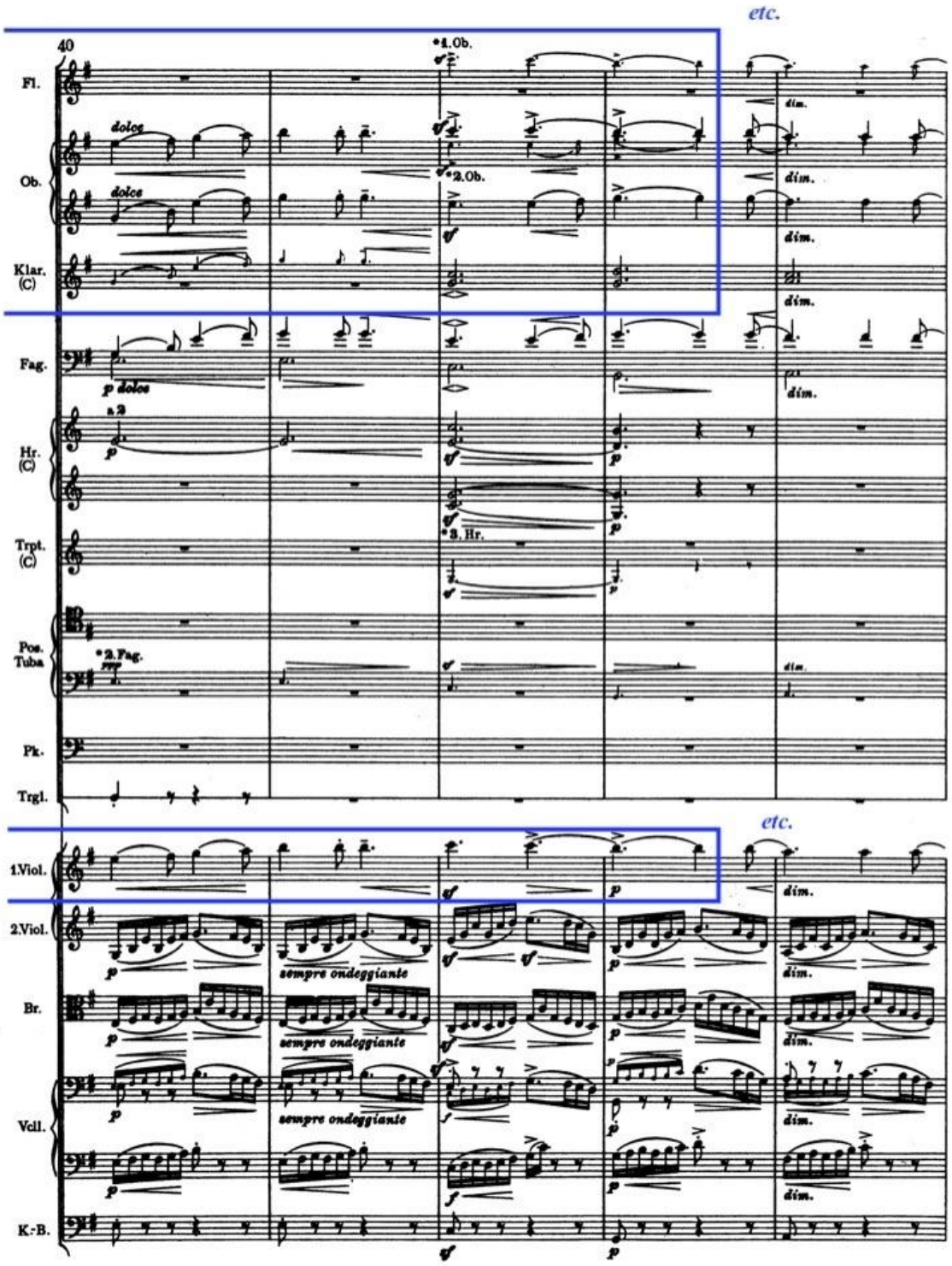


**Figure 3.19: Bedřich Smetana, *Má Vlast* No. 2 Moldau (Vltava), m. 35-44**




etc.
40
Fl.
Ob.
Klar. (C)
Fag.
Hr. (C)
Trpt. (C)
Pos. Tuba
Pk.
Trgl.
1.Viol.
2.Viol.
Br.
Vcll.
K.-B.
*1.Ob.
*2.Ob.
*3.Hr.
*2.Fag.
dolce
p dolce
a 2
dim.
sempre ondeggiante
etc.

When the cellos repeat this winding melody, however, it takes on an increasingly agential character. As a musician, I am aware of the increased effort that is required to perform these fast and virtuosic motives on the cello (as opposed to the flute or clarinet) because of the instrument's bulk and the thickness of its strings.[40] The now-exaggerated dynamic swells further contribute to the music's newly emotional, effortful, and yearning quality, so that I find it to be empathically unmarked in relation to myself, and thus identify with it. When these motives are subsumed into the background of the main melody and theme for the Moldau river in m. 40, however, I identify with this composite agency *even more* because of its *even stronge*r yearning and triumphant character so that it remains unmarked **(**see **Figure 3.19**; boxes illustrate the melody and focus of attention at any given moment**)**. My shifting perceptions of empathic markedness have therefore transformed an actant into an agent.[41]

Overall, empathic markedness, centered around the presence or absence of the agential listener, challenges the "unchecked idiosyncrasy" view of subjectivity by explaining why listeners ascribe certain agencies over others—and even why an individual listener will ascribe different agencies to the same music at different times. In my example of Dvořák's Slavonic Dance in **Figure 3.9,** even different moods can lead to different agential ascriptions. While this example emphasizes the variability of musical interpretation, it does not support the view of unchecked subjectivity. Rather, it presents a subjective experience that can be understood, and even predicted, to the extent that we understand the nature of our own and others' human agencies (for more on this topic, see Chapter 5).

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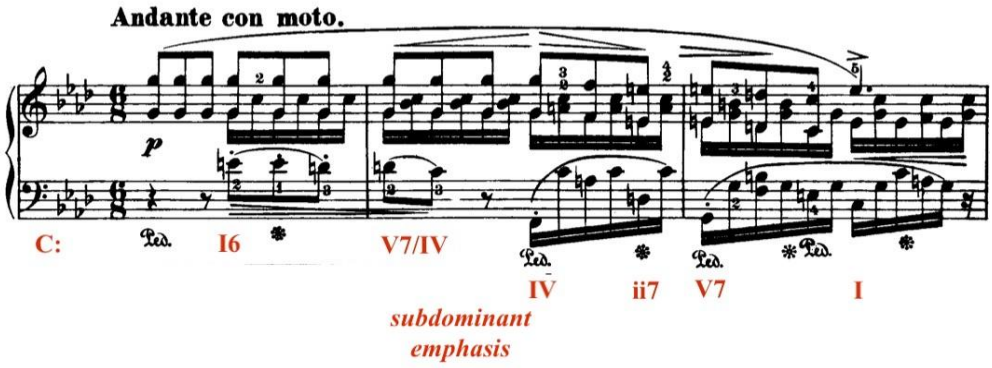
[40] A listener's level of knowledge certainly affects their experience of music, as well.

[41] While the previous two examples have engaged with programmatic music in order to more clearly demonstrate the effects of empathic markedness, thematic variation also occurs quite frequently in absolute music. We will see an in-depth example of this in the following chapter's analysis of Chopin's Ballade in F minor.

*Interactions between Categories of Markedness*

Like stylistic and strategic markedness, empathic markedness is an independent phenomenon that may either support or contradict other markedness cues. To preview the following chapter's discussion of Chopin's Ballade No. 4 in F minor, the introductory character of the first few measures is *stylistically* typical for a ballade, and hence unmarked **(Figure 3.20)**. This material is also *strategically* unmarked because of its calm, pastoral character with its soft dynamics, gently moving lines, and emphasis on the subdominant, in opposition to the anxious theme that follows. However, when I am feeling stressed, the opening is *empathically* marked in opposition to myself because of its emotional valence. If I desire to become calm, however, the same material can be empathically *un*marked and enable empathic identification through repackaging. Hence, empathic markedness may, but does not need to, coincide with other forms of markedness.

**Figure 3.20: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, m. 1-3**




A central argument of this dissertation is that empathic identification (through empathic markedness) affects hierarchical ascriptions. However, empathic markedness does not always completely overrule stylistic and strategic experiences of markedness. Instead of using a binary categorization which forces the pastoral mode or the opening of Copland's *Fanfare* to be *either*

agential *or* actantial, then, I argue for the coexistence of markedness cues, leading to a composite and nuanced listening experience. A particular type of markedness may dominate a listener's experience for different reasons, however (such as a lack of stylistic knowledge or the amount/type of attention being paid to the music), resulting in a specifically agential or nonagential interpretation—though empathic markedness is perhaps particularly likely to dominate a listening experience because of the relatively direct entrance of the listener into the music as a persona, and thus will be our focus in the following chapter.

A "persona," or specified human agent, does in fact arise when the listener projects themselves into the music (in empathically unmarked material). This results in a *specification* of virtual musical agencies which were otherwise unspecified. In other words, by "stepping into the music's shoes," the listener introduces into the music a specific human body. An unspecified virtual musical agent becomes a specific human listener; an actant is no longer wholly an actant, but merges with the listener's humanity. The agential listener, then, introduces a persona "flavor" akin to a subjectivity on top of any virtual musical agent, much like adding an extra ingredient to a recipe. While the other ingredients remain present and still affect the taste, the dish's flavor adjusts to reflect the additional ingredient.

Hatten's restriction of empathic identification to the overarching subjectivity level of his hierarchy betrays a lack of recognition of the persona "ingredient" in the listening experience. Because empathic identification with a musical gesture requires an ascription of a human subjectivity, he mistakenly presents this subjectivity as though it arises from within the music itself. However, this unnecessarily simplifies the listening experience to ignore the different types of empathic identification that can occur with various compositionally-structured gestures. By separating out the agential listener from the overarching subjectivity of a musical work, then,

analysts will be better able to explain the dynamic interdependence of music and listener. After all, it is not that a listener fails to grasp a musical gesture's actancy in strategic relation to its surrounding gestures, or fails to comprehend stylistic departures in a genre in which they are competent. Rather, the listener's human agency *flavors* the listening experience towards agency, even as it coexists with other markedness cues.

## A Brief Consideration of Organicism

Those who reject a subjective approach to music tend to emphasize organicism, requiring all interpretations to be consistent, coherent, and complete so that every part of the music is explained in relation to every other part. Previous interpretations of virtual musical agency are no exception. One illustration of this tendency can be found in Monahan's and Hatten's hierarchies, which require gestures that are agential at the beginning of the piece to remain agential at the end of the piece. In other words, agential identity is required to be stable for compositionally consistent gestures. However, as I have demonstrated in the examples of Bach's *Italian Concerto,* Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique,* and Smetana's *Moldau* (among others), agential interpretations are not always consistent and may change over the course of a listening experience. Agency can be retrospectively reinterpreted, lost, or gained. Are we then to dismiss organicism? Must we choose between organicism and an acknowledgment of the subjectivity of interpretation?

In fact, neither organicism nor subjectivity must be dismissed wholesale. The agential listener presents a middle-of-the-road approach that is *meta*-organic in its recognition of how complex and dynamic human agencies drive the surface variation of agential interpretation within music. While the subjectivity of musical interpretation is undeniable, a disjunct agential experience is organic at a higher level due to its consistency and coherence in relation to the

individual listener's fluid human agency. One can say that each interpretation is organic *in relation to* a listener's own agential states at the time of listening—even as organicism is not required *within* the listener or *within* the music.

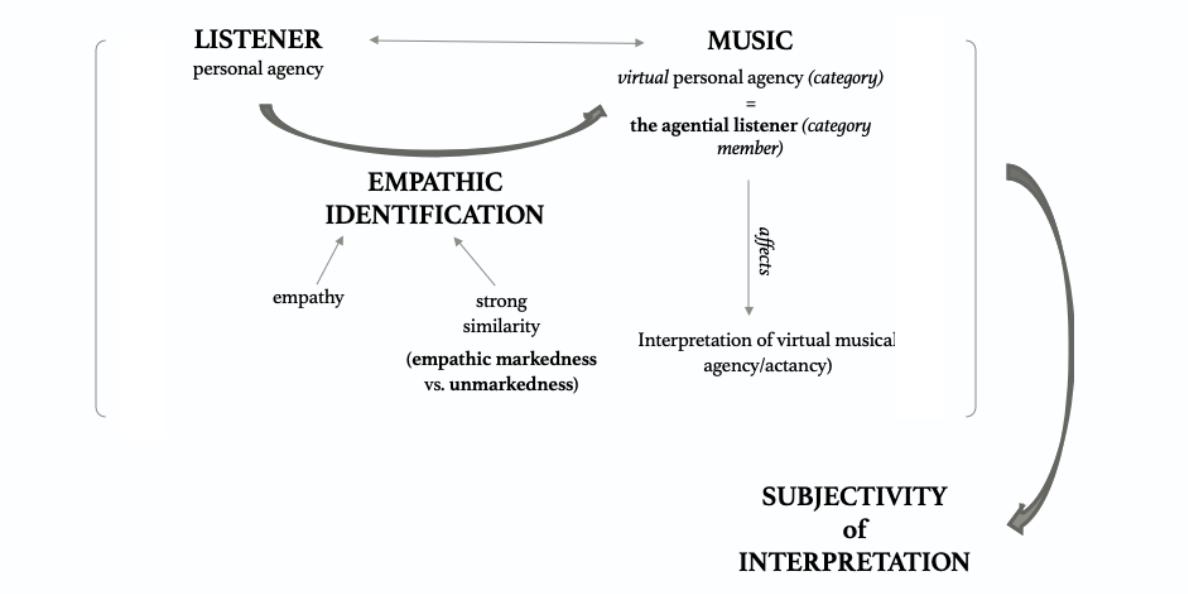
To be clear, I am not arguing for a complete lack of organic hierarchy or coherence at a musico-structural level. Music *is,* in fact, organized, and thus may feature individuated parts that are nested within larger formal structures. Human beings also seek coherence and meaning across many aspects of their lives, with the result that any attempts to identify these aspects within music are both natural and plausible. Agencies within a human being may also have a level of hierarchy and coherence to them, with certain agential desires taking precedence over or leading to others. However, human agencies can also be contradictory (as discussed above). Organicism when defined as coherence and consistency within a human being may hence not be found.

Thus, the virtual human agency of the agential listener explains subjectivity, while not explaining *away* subjectivity, by presenting an organic relationship between the listener and music. Ascriptions of agency that are lost are lost because of a listener's lack of empathic identification, caused by some novel feature in the music or even a reduced *attention* to the music on the part of the listener. Similarly, agency that is gained may be gained not due to a change in musical features, but to a change of interpretation brought about within the listener, perhaps made salient by intervening musical material. While human agency may be diverse and inorganic, then, and while we do not need to assume that virtual musical agencies are any different, each musical interpretation that results from a particular collection of human agencies will be consistent, coherent, and holistic in the way that it interacts with the music (via the agential listener).

## Summary

Music theorists have largely ignored the very real impact of subjectivity when interpreting music, either rejecting it as completely unchecked to the point that it cannot be theorized, or considering it to be superfluously tangential to what is "in" the music, compositionally-speaking. However, when a listener empathically identifies with a virtual musical agency (retaining a distinction between self and other), they introduce a new category of virtual agency within the music: the agential listener (see **Figure 3.21**). These empathic identifications can occur between any one of humans' diverse and multiplicitous personal agencies (which can arise from either a *desire* or the *expression* of that desire) and any one of music's virtual agencies, as put forward by Hatten's hierarchy. Strong similarity is what drives these empathic identifications through what I have called empathic (un)markedness, and it is this process as a whole which can explain the subjective interpretations of virtual musical agency that often arise.

**Figure 3.21: A Diagram of Empathic Identification and the Agential Listener**



Empathic identification has been foreshadowed in part by Walton's concept of thoughtwriting (in which the listener directly takes on musical expression into their own body), as well as DeNora's concepts of packaging and repackaging (in which the listener experiences empathic identification between musical expression and their own expression, or musical expression and their *desired* expression, respectively). Music offers a virtual environment within which a listener can express themselves, leading to a new and virtual *human* agency located within the music. Both mirroring (locus of empathy = self) and self-projection (locus of empathy = other) contribute to this rich experience, producing a phenomenal space that is shared by both music and listener.

When empathic identification occurs, the listener's virtual agency (i.e., the agential listener) enters the agential hierarchy at the level of virtual musical agency with which the listener is identifying. Its entrance provides a mechanism for understanding why a listener might hear a particular level of agency over another through variations in empathic markedness, or the valued departures in music from the listener's own agency. Stylistic and strategic markedness alone cannot delimit agential interpretations; empathic markedness is crucial for explaining the subjective variations in interpretation. Instead of an organic requirement that agencies be consistent both among and within listeners, then, the agential listener offers a meta-organic approach for understanding the diverse interpretations that arise from the presence or absence of the agential listener.

# Chapter 4: An Agential Listener's Interpretation of Chopin's Ballade in F Minor

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, we considered the agential listener as a category of virtual agency—one that allows the subjective nature of musical interpretation to enter into analysis. When a listener empathically identifies with a virtual musical agent (made up of a series of gestures, or groupings of notes), they holographically and imaginatively import themselves into the music so that their human agency becomes present within the music "itself," interacting with compositional agency in a way that affects musical interpretation. This theory expands on Hatten's (2018) hierarchy of virtual musical agencies, which systematically puts forward the different types of agency that can arise and how they do so.

Hatten devotes a full chapter to an integrative agential analysis of Chopin's Ballade in F Minor in order to demonstrate more practically how virtual musical agency arises and leads to interpretation. Now, because my work extends and expands on Hatten's theory, I will undertake my own analysis of this ballade while mirroring Hatten's purposes to "explore how virtual agential levels are activated, how they overlap in moving the listener toward engagement at various levels, and how they can reveal still more of the work's expressive meaning" through the agential listener (244). While many analyses of this piece have been published (perhaps most notably Klein 2004), I situate my analysis in relation to Hatten's in order to demonstrate how the agential listener enters into his hierarchy. More specifically, Chopin's Ballade will provide a backdrop with which to explore how empathic identification complements and supplements prior discussions of virtual musical agency, and how it achieves a mediation between subjectivity as complete idiosyncrasy and mere compositional nuance (as problematized in Chapter 3).

In this chapter, I first explore how the agential listener is activated in my own experiences of Chopin's Ballade. I consider and analyze musical gestures that I perceive to be similar to my own human agency (enabling empathic identification), as well as gestures that I perceive to be *dis*similar to myself (causing empathic markedness and a *lack* of identification). Whether or not I empathically identify with a musical gesture will be seen to affect how I interpret this material in relation to others.

Second, the activation of the agential listener affects whether I hear musical gestures as an actant, virtual human agent, "actor" in a narrative, or a subjectivity (i.e., Hatten's categories of virtual musical agency). Because the listener becomes imaginatively imported into the music through self-oriented perspective-taking (see Chapter 2), their personal context modifies interpretation. If I perceive musical gestures to be similar to an *actancy* in my life (i.e., action or expression in music that is perceived to be unintentional), I will interpret it as an actancy; but if I experience them as a particular type of *agency* in my life (e.g., narrative, subjectivity), I will interpret it as that particular type of agency.

The agential listener also affects the groupings of gestures that I perceive. These differences in interpretation result from empathic identification, or the importation of the self into (some parts of) the music. Musical gestures that are perceived to be similar to the listener become one agent, while those that are different become one or more "other," or external, agents. Because human agency varies from listener to listener (and even from moment to moment in the same listener), different groupings of gestures will naturally lead to different agential interpretations. These differences affect the hierarchical level of virtual musical agency at which a listener engages with the music, since different groupings result in different agential

"entities"—which, as a result, exist in different relationships with one another. This claim, introduced in the previous chapter, will now be demonstrated more fully.

Third and finally, I consider how the agential listener contributes to expressive meaning. While I do not presume to present *the* expressive meaning of Chopin's Ballade, I explore how the agential listener *affects* such meaning. In contrast to Hatten's focus on "illustrat[ing] how a theory of virtual agency can help us hear differently, thereby opening up fresh possibilities for expressive interpretation" (244), I focus, not on how music *might* be heard by conscious choice, but on how music *is* heard by different people at different times.

I have found that my own listening experiences are left unexplained by Hatten's theory alone. To the extent that the field of music theory seeks to explain how music affects and communicates with its listeners, then, we must take subjective interpretation into account. The agential listener is able to present a theory of subjectivity that can be integrated with more traditional approaches, including that of Hatten. Now in this chapter, I use my own experiences with Chopin's Ballade as a case study of the ways in which the agential listener affects an overarching experience of virtual musical agency. Like Hatten, I hold an undergraduate degree in piano performance, which affects my interpretation of the music. However, unlike Hatten, performance is no longer an active part of my life; therefore, this effect will remain backgrounded in the analysis that follows.

In the following analysis, I seek a balance between in-time and retrospective ascriptions of, and identifications with, virtual musical agency. Because I no longer have a reliable memory of the first time I heard this piece, my current experiences will be affected by previous ones in ways that I cannot fully ascertain. I have also listened to this piece many times, both in part and as a whole over the course of my analysis, with and without a score.When I speak of what I

"hear" in the piece, then, I will be referring to normative, in-time experience that occurs for me as I listen, including all of the conscious and nonconscious motives and experiences which that entails. When I allude to an interpretation that took place through retrospective analysis or while I was experiencing a personally abnormal human agency, I will clarify that this is the case. And while it might be assumed that such multiplicity and uniqueness of experience is a drawback, I will rather seek to show that the benefit of a theory of the agential listener is that it can be used for any listener at any time when they (consciously or nonconsciously) seek to identify with the music.

As a final note, different performances can cause different types of agency to be more or less readily heard, as Hatten himself notes. Hence, I will specifically conduct the following analysis with Evgeny Kissin's (1999) recording. This will allow me to reference particular performance choices that have led me toward one interpretation over another.

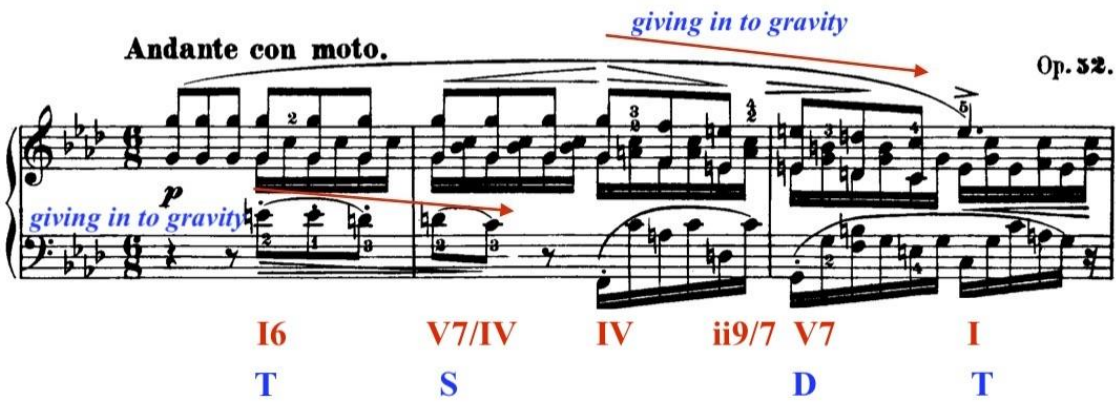
## Analysis

*Introduction*

The first seven measures present an introduction that is both *stylistically* unmarked for Chopin's Ballades and *strategically* unmarked due to a calm (and hence unstriving) pastoral topic—especially when compared to the winding, yearning primary theme which enters in m. 8. Hatten specifically emphasizes these features of strategic unmarkedness, including a T-S-D-T chord progression and a descending motive which "gives in" to the tonic C's gravitational pull (presented in **Figure 4.1**). Their result is an apparent lack of effortful action or expression which would seem to communicate a compositionally defined actancy. Yet Hatten also notes the potential for other categories of virtual musical agency to be ascribed, including virtual human agency from dynamic hairpins and appoggiaturas, and a subjectivity from the invitation to pause

and reflect during the fermata in m. 8 (see next section). Hatten concludes his analysis with an admission that "even for this relatively unmarked introduction, we can infer several different levels of agency" (246). But which level *will* an individual listener infer?

**Figure 4.1: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, m. 1-3**




In the previous chapter, I used the term "empathic markedness" to refer to the meaningful difference between the agency/actancy of a compositional gesture and the agency/actancy of a listener. I further suggested that empathic markedness affects listeners' individual interpretations as the means by which the agential listener is encouraged or discouraged. If a musical gesture's agency/actancy is perceived to be similar to the listener's agency/actancy, there is a lack of empathic markedness, or what I have called empathic *un*markedness; however, if the listener does *not* perceive the music to be similar to themselves, they experience empathic markedness. This perception of similarity is not limited to physicalized action—in fact, the similarity which drives empathic identification and an experience of the agential listener takes place between the *desire* of a listener (i.e., a state of agency) and the *expression* within the music (whether agential or actantial).

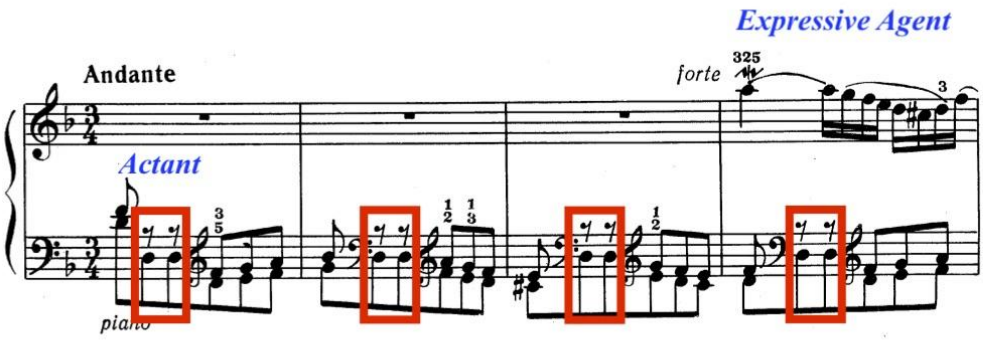
In the introduction of this ballade, when I *desire* to be calm, whether or not I am *currently* calm, this state of agency allows me to empathically identify with the compositionally actantial expression of the introduction. In other words, I perceive a strong similarity between my own agency (the *desire* to be calm and peaceful) and the music's *expression* of being calm and peaceful. However, while this material is a compositional actant, the importation of personal experience via the agential listener may lead to an interpretation of either actancy *or* agency. For example, if the listener is typically calm and experiences this calm as an actantial, non-intentional state, they may experience these gestures as an actancy. However, if a listener is *not* usually calm, they may experience these gestures as an agency in opposition to, or in contrast with, their own human agency.[42] In my own experiences, I infer an oppositional agency when I specifically do *not* desire to be calm (when I actively wish to express a different emotion), which introduces a narrative level of agency. I infer the presence of a virtual human agent, however, when I do not specifically desire to be calm, but also do not specifically desire *not* to be calm. I might desire to express anger or sadness instead. In my normative experience, however, I *do* identify with the calm of the opening. A lack of empathic markedness causes me to experience myself as a virtual presence entering into the music, which introduces the agential listener.

This empathic identification results in the importation of a persona "flavor" of agency within these musical gestures (see Chapter 3)—even as I recognize them to be a compositional actancy. To understand this, consider again the example of Bach's Italian Concerto from Chapter 3. The second movement's introductory actancy—expressed by slowly plodding eighth notes, simple movements up and down the scale, and a firmly rooted tonic via pedal point presented via

[42] As a reminder, I am discussing interpretations that occur during an identificatory mode of listening. I recognize that this mode may not be activated, may be only partially activated, or take place alongside other modes (e.g., a structural mode of listening) in any given listening experience.

boxes in **Figure 4.2** (reproduced from **Figure 3.11**)—is absent of apparent intentionality and strong emotion, especially when compared to the right hand's plaintive melody in m. 4. However, I identify with this actant when I feel as though my life is stuck in a rut. If I continue to identify with the agency introduced in m. 4 and throughout the movement, I might subsume the opening actancy into this agency, but in the first three measures alone before the melody exists for me I hear an actant and identify with it.

**Figure 4.2: J.S. Bach, Italian Concerto, BWV 971: II. Andante, m. 1-4 (reproduced from Figure 3.11)**




Similarly, when I am currently experiencing the actantial state of calm and desire to express it, my identification with the introduction endows it with a degree of humanity through my holographic importation of self into music (the agential listener). The compositionally actantial set of gestures becomes an avenue for human expression, and more specifically a "packaging" of the self, to use DeNora's (2000) vocabulary. Yet if I were to experience calm as an agency in my life (for example, if I am habitually anxious and desire to *become* calm), I would experience this downward-trending line, simple chord progression, and pastoral topic as a form of agency.

Even so, the music remains stylistically and strategically unmarked as a compositionally defined actancy. Let us return to the example of *Frozen* in Chapter 3: as previously discussed, different viewers may identify with side characters or even change identifications from one character to another over the course of the movie. Further, some may experience Anna as the main "protagonist" while others experience *Elsa* as the protagonist depending on the strength of their personal empathic identifications with one or the other. Yet there are arguably "compositional" reasons for ascribing protagonism to a particular character (based on its fundamental relationship to the surrounding characters and forces). In this case, Anna undergoes most of the action and enjoys the largest amount of screentime, making her the "compositional" protagonist. However, in the same way that viewers can still experience Elsa as the protagonist due to empathic identification, music can have both compositional and empathic levels of agency. In Chopin's Ballade, we can recognize that while the introduction is not a compositional protagonist, it may take on the role of an empathic one if the listener strongly identifies with it and nothing else.

In summary, the introduction of this Ballade, while short (just seven measures), presents a number of potential agencies and actancies, all of which are subject to a listener's empathic identifications with compositional gestures (summarized in **Figure 4.2**). The perception of similarity between the music and myself drives empathic identification, in that when the music is similar to an agential desire (whether this corresponds to my current internal states or not), I can experience empathic identification and a persona flavor of agency through the presence of the agential listener. When calm is an agency in my life, I project that agency onto the music and interpret it in such a way. Yet when calm is an *actancy* in my life, I project *actancy* and interpret

the music as actantial. However, my agential *desires* also affect my interpretation of the music and are ultimately what drive whether or not the persona "flavor" of agency is present.

**Figure 4.3: Agency and Actancy in Chopin's Ballade No. 4 mm. 1-7 through the Lens of Empathic Identification and Empathic Markedness**

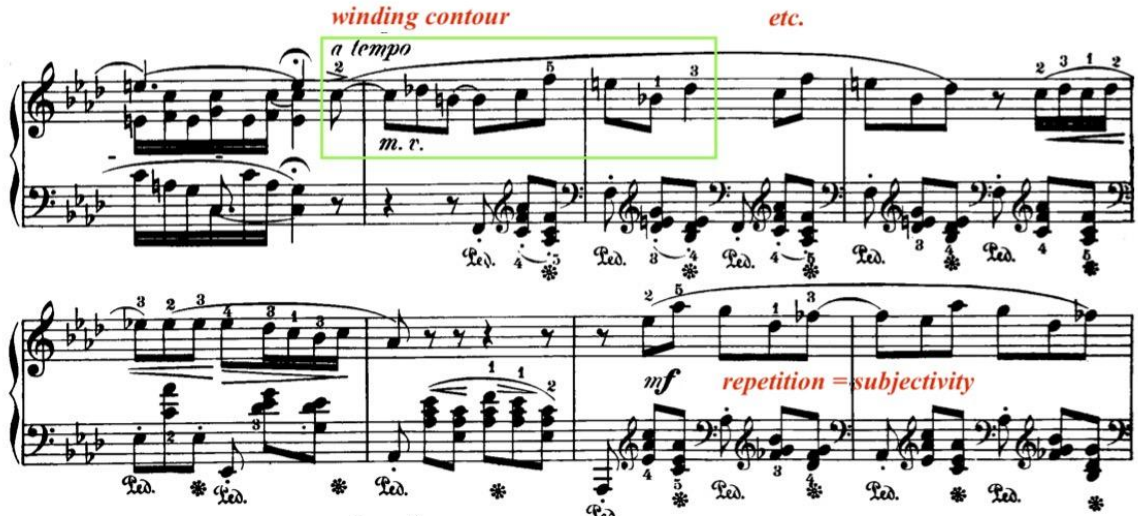
I perceive calmness as *agency* (i.e., abnormal experience) → music is agential
I perceive calmness as *actancy* (i.e., normal experience) → music is actantial

I *desire* to be calm (in any state) → empathic identification → "persona" flavor of agency
*[music is empathically* un*marked]*
I *do not desire* to be calm (in any state) → NO empathic identification → "other" agency or actancy
*[music is empathically marked]*

*Primary Theme*

When the primary theme is first heard in m. 8, Hatten points to its winding contour as a sign of a more emotional, and hence more agential, entity.

**Figure 4.4: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, m. 7-14**



However, he also notes that this material can be heard as a protagonist within a larger narrative structure, since the introduction is a stylistically prototypical narrative "frame," and that with the repetition in m. 13 it becomes a subjectivity (i.e., a more contemplative, even obsessively thoughtful human agency) (see **Figure 4.4**). Hatten considers these levels of agency to be interchangeable in a listener's experience, but the question remains: which level will be heard by an individual listener at any given time?

Consider, for example, the ascription of a subjectivity. At what point does this happen? Before the theme repeats, we do not *know* that it will repeat; a compositionally determined attribution of a subjectivity is thus only possible in retrospect.[43] A listener may initially hear a virtual human agent, then, but shift to ascribing a subjectivity once repetition occurs. However, in my own personal experiences with this piece I find myself interpreting the material as a complex mental subjectivity much more quickly as a result of empathic identification. The theme's searching, yearning, and slightly dysphoric tone, vacillating between minor and major, is normally similar to my own emotions when I have chosen to listen to the piece.[44] As a result, while the compositional feature of repetition or pause is not yet present to drive the ascription of a *compositional* subjectivity, I nevertheless already experience it as a subjectivity because I identify with it as a representation of my *own* subjectivity/mind.

Empathic identification also affects whether or not I ascribe narrativity. When I hear the introductory material as an actant, the primary theme can become *either* an actant *or* an agent in

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[43] I assume a first-time listening experience here; once a listener is aware of how the work progresses as a whole, it may be possible to ascribe a compositional subjectivity immediately by drawing on one's relative omniscience.

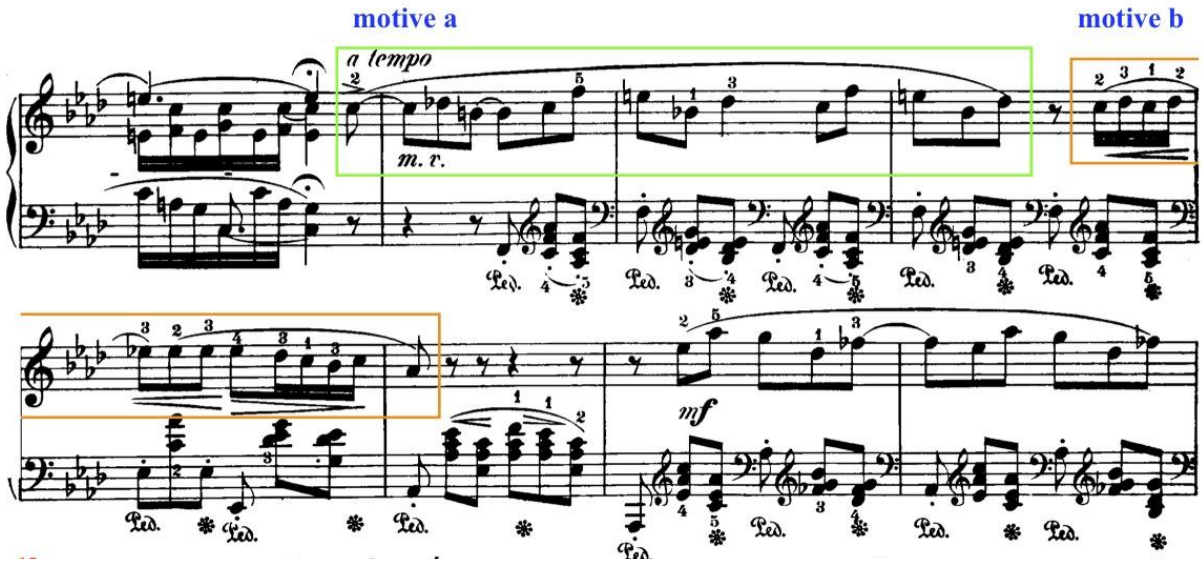
[44] As DeNora (2000) discusses, listeners tend to employ particular music in particular contexts to help them achieve or express a particular state. In this case, I tend to listen to this ballade when in a dysphoric and vacillating emotional state that I wish to express.

opposition to myself, in which the former is a more neutral and less oppositional ascription. In these cases, I experience the vacillation and negative valence of the theme as dissimilar to my internal mental states. If I hear this material in opposition to myself (hearing vacillation and negativity as an unwelcome intrusion into the my or desired state of agency), a narrative is immediately invoked. The primary theme with which I am currently identifying is experientially placed in contrast with the introductory material.

*Primary Theme: Motives a and b*

Hatten further splits the opening theme into two motives, which he labels "a" and "b" (presented in **Figure 4.5**). He understand motive *a* to be a subjectivity arising from repetition, presenting a "ruminative" characteristic (247). Motive *b,* by contrast, takes on a narrative role by moving the theme from minor to major. Hence, while the theme as a whole can be heard at a broader hierarchical level, a listener who is attuned to the individual motives within the theme will recognize a combination of actancy and agency, according to Hatten.

**Figure 4.5: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, m. 7-14, expanded**



Like the retrospective interpretation of the primary theme, motive *a* could garner the attribution of a subjectivity through other means. Empathic identification can immediately cue the interpretation of a subjectivity if the listener experiences empathic identification with the beginning of the motive, identifying its winding contour with their own unresolved thoughts, perhaps. Alternatively, if these gestures are *not* experienced as similar to the listener, they can be understood as *relatively* human compared to the introduction (compositionally speaking). In this case, the motive becomes an "other," or *external,* agent.

The second part of the primary theme, motive *b,* transforms the introduction's motive as a means of moving the music from minor to major. As a result, Hatten attributes this motive with a narrative agency for its ability to act on the agency of motive *a*. Once again, retrospection plays an important role here: an introduction which was initially (compositionally) actantial takes on a retrospectively latent narrative role as a fictional actor, due to its subsequent placement and function.

What does empathic identification contribute to this interpretation? Considering my own normative experiences with the piece, I can identify with the winding and anxious motive *a*. Thus, I either: 1) *continue* identifying with motive *b*'s peaceful/euphoric turn if I desire to become more euphoric, allowing the modulation to repackage my agency; 2) *continue* identifying with the peaceful/euphoric turn if I recognize within myself an agency that is *already* peaceful/euphoric *in addition* to the anxiety I am facing; or 3) *stop* identifying with the theme if I do not desire to become more euphoric.

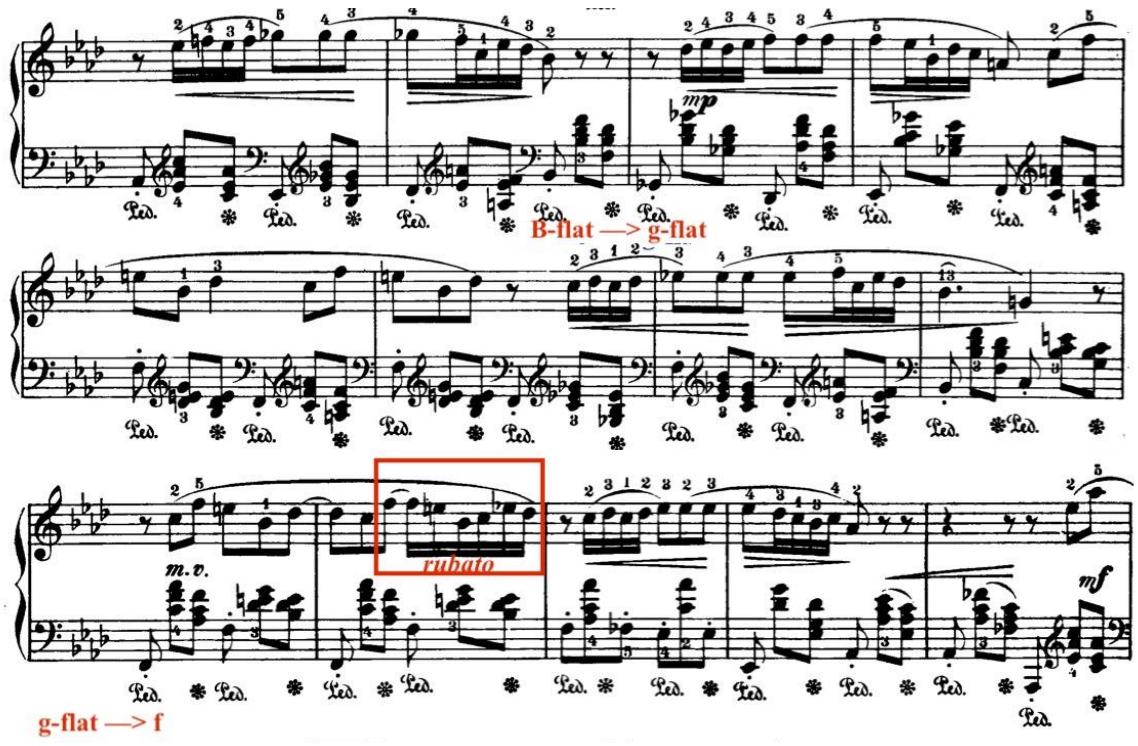
In most cases I choose to repackage my agency in the first manner and continue identifying with the music. The entire theme is thus, for me, empathically unmarked. Furthermore, when I continue to identify with motive *b* because I recognize both of these aspects

to be a part of my subjectivity (e.g., if I am experiencing internal friction between anxiety and optimism that I find similar to the dysphoric/minor and euphoric/major modes of the theme, respectively[45]), I immediately experience the entire theme as a subjectivity.

*Parenthesis*

Hatten hears tragedy in the parenthetical, minor subdominant departure of mm. 18-22 (a transition displayed in **Figure 4.6**). However, empathic identification causes me to hear this material as simply "lost" (a less negatively valenced interpretation). Due to my (usual) empathic identifications with the winding motive *a* of the primary theme, the negatively valenced rumination here continues to correspond to my own internal rumination.

**Figure 4.6: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, m. 15-27**




[45] I do not presume that minor and major always lead to dysphoric and euphoric ascriptions; however, because these have been my ascriptions when listening to the piece, they are the ascriptions I use here.

The constant vacillations between minor and major, facilitated by motive *b*, can also be similar to my own conflicting agencies of expressing (current) anxiety and achieving (future) peace. As a result, I come to interpret the rapidly changing keys as another representation of emotional vacillation. The descent into the minor subdominant, then, tucked as it is between many other key explorations, becomes simply another expression of being lost in keeping with my prior experience.

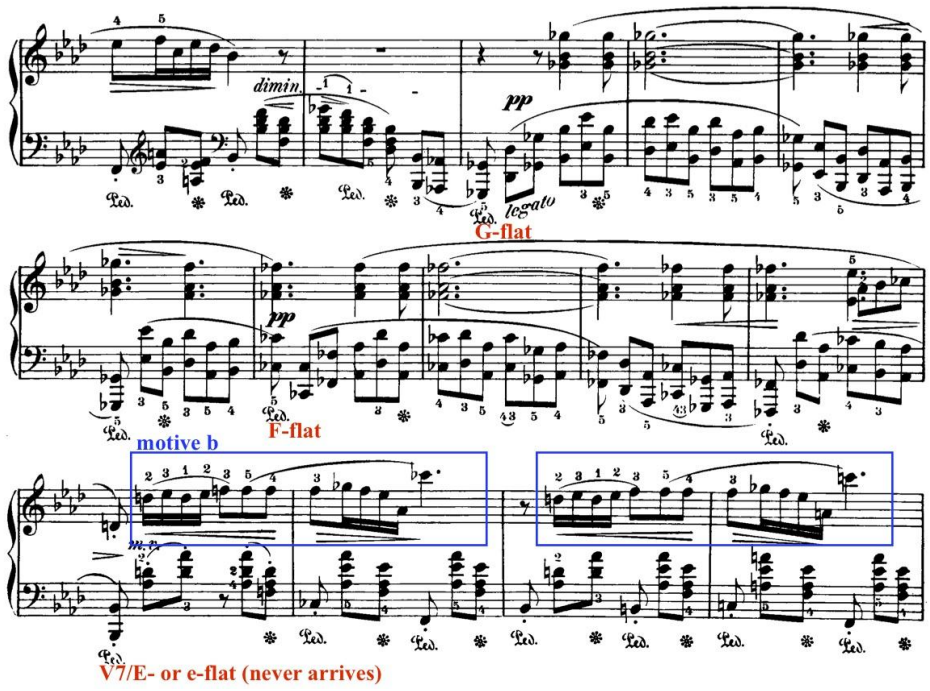
Kissin's extreme and unexpected rubato (especially upon the tonal "return" of the material in m. 24) further contributes to this interpretation, demonstrated by the box in **Figure 4.6**. The push and pull of sixteenth notes sounds as though the music is not sure where it is going, or perhaps that it is not fully able to arrive at its destination. Overall, Kissin's performance choices combine with my empathic identifications to produce a different interpretation (in my normative experience) than the one described by Hatten.

*Development 1*

The first developmental section of the primary theme in mm. 38-57 presents a series of sequences that elaborate on motive *b* (see **Figure 4.7** for an annotation of key areas). The rejection of a positively valenced key at the end of the last sequence provides, for Hatten, an additional emphasis on the inexorable rumination of motive *a.* And while Hatten does not discuss it, the propulsion of the dominant seventh chords in these sequences further contributes to this effect. When I empathically identify with the anxiety of motive *a,* I continue identifying with this section and understand the return of the minor mode as a sort of "comic" achievement of my chosen protagonist's identity. However, it can also serve as a tragic warning that the peace I desire from motive *b* will remain unattainable.

Ultimately, the music settles on a joyous waltz in B-flat major. Notably, this is the *major* subdominant rather than the parenthetical *minor* subdominant heard in mm. 18-22, which would seem to offer an opportunity for the partially sonata-form piece to achieve its natural goal. Once again, the valence of this moment is largely determined by my goals in listening to the piece: if I desire to express my anxiety, the major mode is unwelcome; if I desire to achieve peace, it is welcome; if I desire to do both, I can experience a mixed sense of both positive and negative valence, welcomeness and unwelcomeness. But the music "itself" does not offer any one interpretation.

**Figure 4.7: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 36-49**




In fact, my normative empathic identifications once again lead me to an interpretation that is different from Hatten's: rather than an *embrace* of suffering, I understand it as an *intensification* of suffering. When I have listened to this piece at difficult times, feeling anxiety

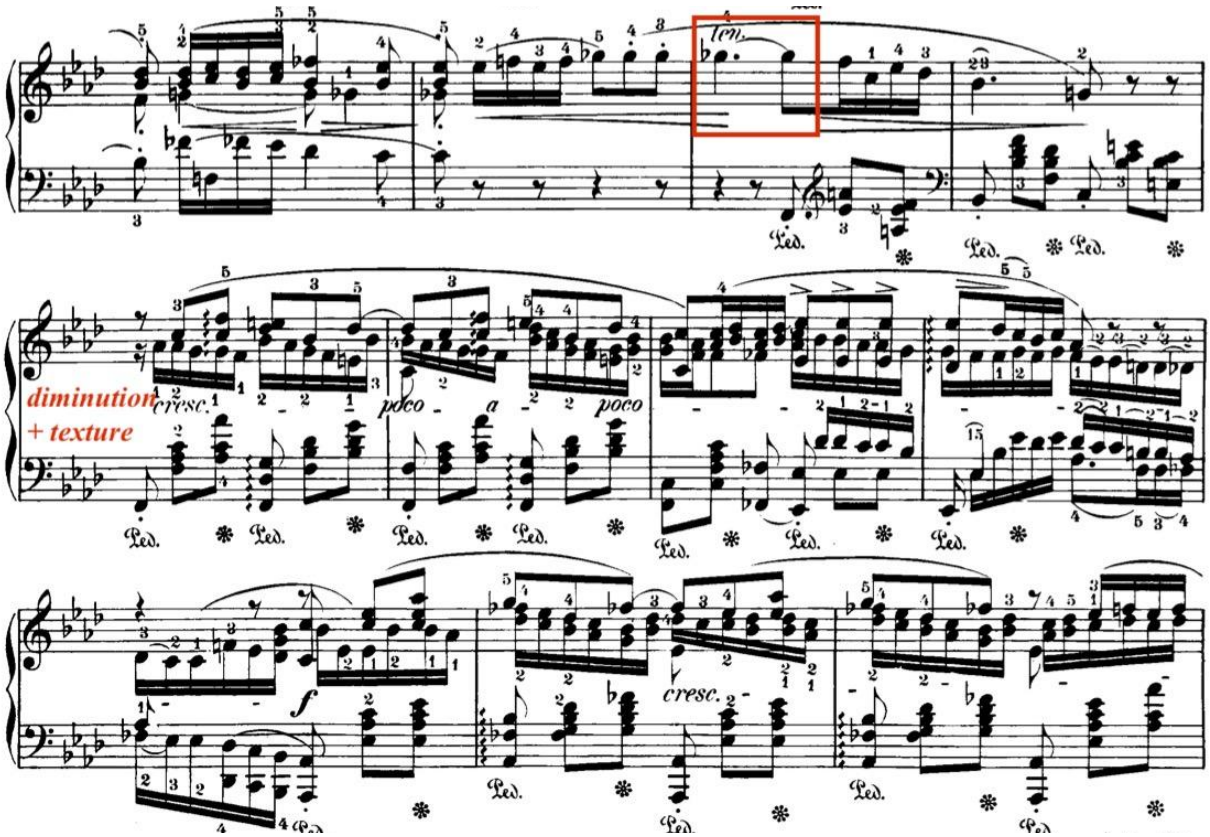
and experiencing rumination, the increase in querying and emotions are similar to my *own* increase in querying and emotions, which I experience as I dwell on my experiences by identifying with the primary theme. My human agency endows the music with a particular context and a particular persona, so that the importation of my active and actively changing agency as I listen affects how I interpret the music as *it* changes, too.

I wish to be clear: I am not arguing that Hatten's interpretation of this piece is "incorrect." Hearing the second development of the primary theme as an acceptance of suffering is certainly possible. I rather seek to demonstrate that the individual listener's or analyst's personal experiences can affect the degree to which a listener interacts with the music and the manner in which they do so, which in turn affects interpretation. Instead of asserting what is present "in" the music, then, it is important to recognize that different interpretations of the same gestures will arise due to the presence of the agential listener.

*Development 2*

Kissin emphasizes the inevitability of the primary theme's return through an especially long tenuto on the downbeat of m. 56, as though the theme were fighting the gravitational pull of the flattened sixth scale degree down to the fifth. Now, Hatten describes the tempesta diminutions of the first part of the development (mm. 58-61) as a further emphasis on the primary theme's "querying aspect," displayed in **Figure 4.8** (249). Hatten also attributes to these diminutions a deepening of emotion that is imbued with increased complexity. Altogether, the combination of emotional enhancement and querying is understood to indicate a "suffering that is fully embraced (rather than simply queried)" (250). This results in a clearer overarching subjectivity for Hatten.

**Figure 4.8: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 54-64**



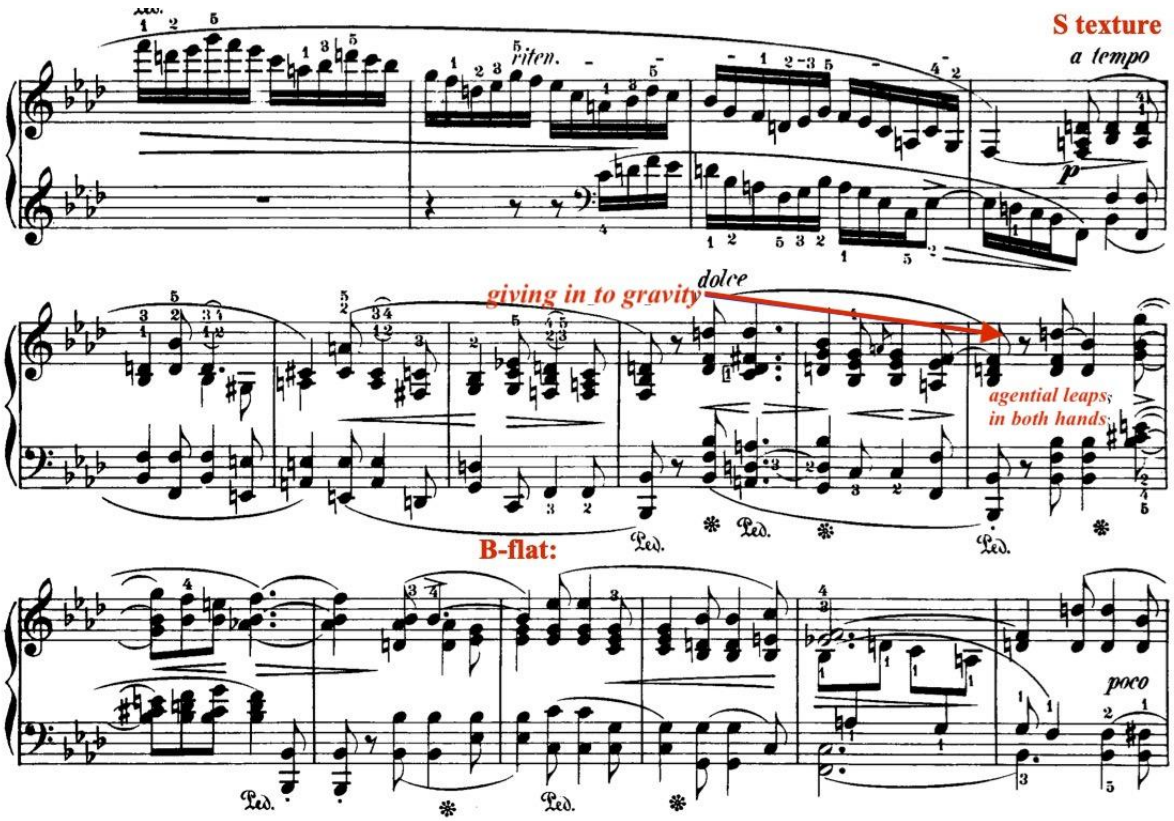

*Secondary Theme*

Hatten emphasizes the oddity of the secondary theme's major subdominant key area. Yet despite its strategic markedness, it nevertheless presents a positively valenced contrast to the primary theme—a valence that is stylistically unmarked, presenting a mixed source of agency. Empathic identification can thus serve to clarify or further confuse agency here, depending on the strength of each type of markedness as heard by the listener (i.e., the extent to which they are aware of the stylistic norms of the genre).

Hatten also demonstrates that the secondary theme's descent is actantial in an analogous way to the introduction. By calmly descending, it submits to gravity (shown through the arrow in

**Figure 4.9**), though a more willful agency arises in m. 86 when the melody begins to leap upward prior to the cadence (also shown in **Figure 4.9**). The move from compositional *actancy* to *agency* here contrasts with the primary theme, which moves from compositional *agency* to *actancy*. Thus, these two themes are agential "mirrors" of each other and my empathic identifications become similarly mirrored. In other words, if I have identified with the pastoral introductory material, I continue identifying with the pastoral secondary theme (or at least the actantial gestures within it).[46] However, if my desire is only to express internal rumination, this theme may be experienced as an oppositional narrative actor that interrupts my identifications.

**Figure 4.9: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 77-92**

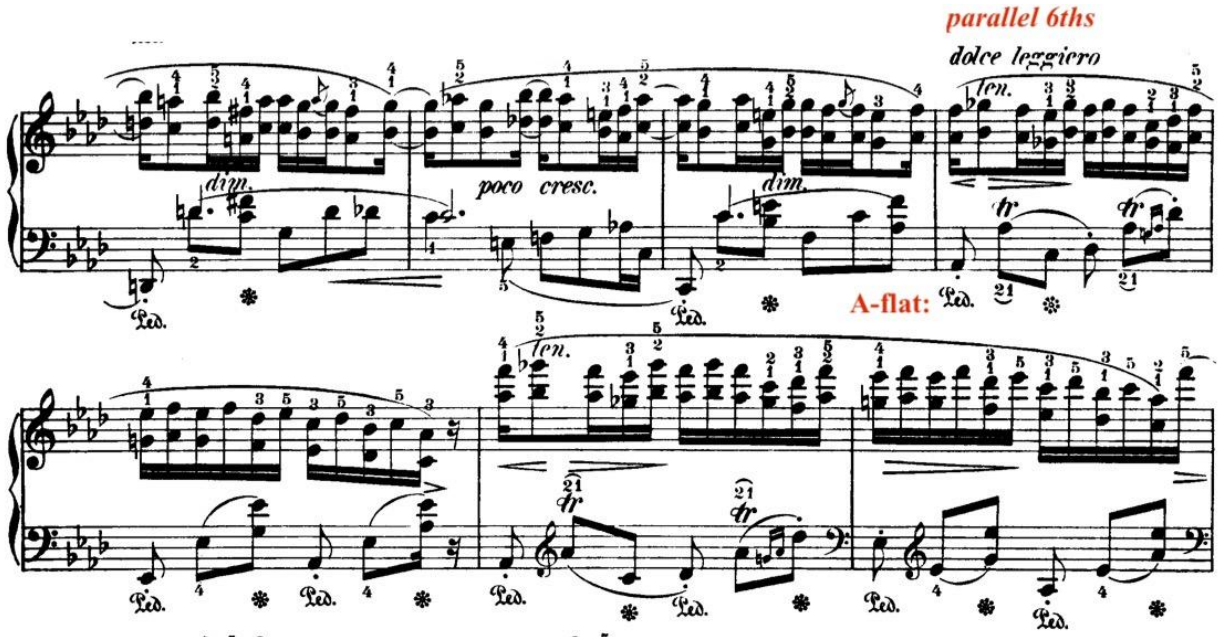



[46] Empathic identification is also affected by the level of attention paid to individual gestures. A listener whose attention is more divided will identify or fail to identify with broader spans of music, while a listener who is less distracted is more likely to do so with shorter spans.

*Development 3*

The tempesta topic of the second development returns after the secondary theme. In m. 112, it is followed by a newly flamboyant waltz topic enacted through quickly moving sixteenth notes. Kissin emphasizes this *dolce leggiero* section with a distinctly audible change in color, and emphasizes its flamboyance with an *accelerando*. However, while the waltz topic is a development of the primary theme, the pastorale topic as described by Hatten (expressed through bird call trills and parallel sixths, shown in **Figure 4.10**) develops both the secondary theme *and* the second half of the primary theme. Because of the interconnectedness of material, the question becomes: will a listener hear this development as more similar to the primary theme or the secondary theme? Since they have quite different functions and opportunities for empathic identification, the answer to this question has significant implications for an individual listener's interpretation of the piece.

**Figure 4.10: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 109-115**



Particularly crucial here is that empathic identification does not simply impact interpretation of the music that is heard—it can also direct attention to certain aspects of the music over others. During my normative listening experiences with this piece, I identify with the ruminative emotional content of the primary theme, expressed through the minor key and winding contour of motive *a,* in particular. In these cases, I either continue to identify with this version of the waltz if I desire to find joy, or *stop* identifying with it once the development begins if I wish to express rumination alone. In both instances, however, I experience the developmental waltz as more strongly similar to the secondary theme because of my attention to its emotional content, which became salient due to the similarities I experienced between myself and the primary theme.

In fact, the waltz topic becomes a much more active part of my personal experience in this post-thematic developmental section due to its euphoric character. While I am aware at a cognitive level that waltzes can occur in minor keys, my experience from film and television in particular has led me to expect them in a major key. Hence, I experience the major mode waltz as stylistically unmarked and the minor mode waltz (of the primary theme) as marked. While this might suggest that the waltz would be more prominent in my experience when I hear the primary theme, because I am drawn to emotional content more strongly than topical content in this piece, the winding and ruminative character would seem to have distracted my conscious experience from topical considerations. It is only when the waltz topic fits my (at first nonconscious) expectations that it becomes relatively conscious.

Other listeners may find themselves identifying more strongly with the waltz topic of the primary theme, however, if this topic communicates something that is strongly similar to one of their human agencies. A listener who hears the waltz topic in the primary theme as an important,

conscious part of their experience may hear a stronger similarity between this development and the primary theme. In other words, since empathic identification is driven by the material to which a listener attends, and vice versa, this can affect how a listener groups and interprets the agencies and actancies of a piece.

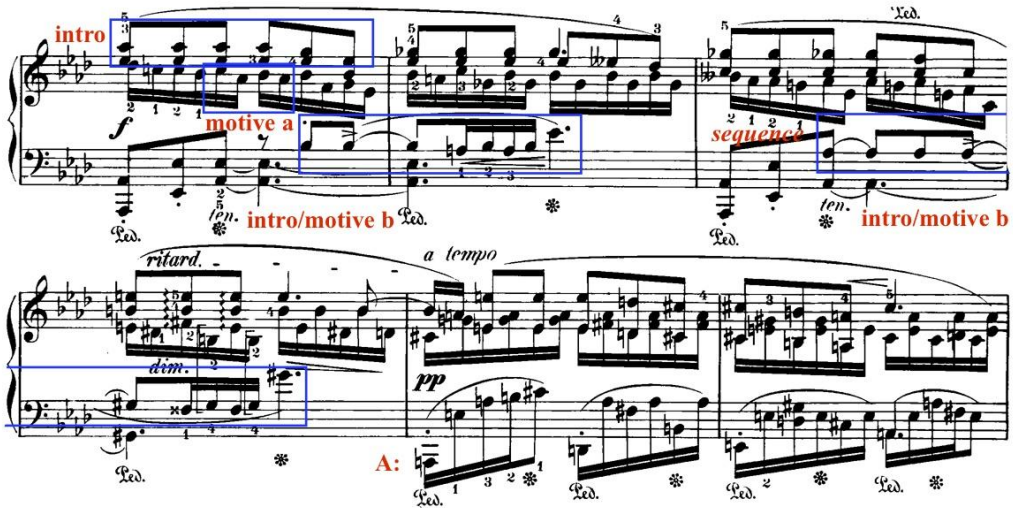
*False Recapitulation and Climactic Integration*

The introduction returns quite suddenly in m. 129, which Hatten describes as a quasi-false recapitulation and Michael Klein (2004) as a "sublime...interruption"—two very different interpretations of the same moment (see **Figure 4.11**). Intriguingly, however, different empathic identifications drive my interpretation of one or the other. First, I hear a return that is similar to Hatten's when I have identified with the introduction because of an agential desire to achieve its peace in my own life. However, in the rarer occurrences during which I do *not* identify with the introduction because I only wish to express anxiety/rumination, I hear an interruption to P—especially once P returns in the "true" recapitulation. Even so, I hear what I would call an "irrelevant" interruption rather than a "sublime" one. In this case, the return of the introductory pastorale is an unwelcome intrusion into my personal expression and virtual agency. The result is a temporary expulsion of the agential listener.

Hatten further describes mm. 125-128 as a "climactic integration" of the introductory motive (i.e., the descending passage in the left hand) and both motives of the primary theme. For him, this intricate stretto (also presented in **Figure 4.11**) presents hope that the piece may finally reach the expected secondary key area of A-flat major. Hatten further and retrospectively transforms the introduction's actancy into a narrative role as a result of this integration; it has become part of a heroic force. For him, this moment is "the climactic completion of a motivic/agential process" (254).

Like Hatten, I experience a climactic integration of my prior identifications when I identify with both the primary and secondary themes, yet not because I have audibly recognized the combination of motives. Instead, the rumination of the primary theme is integrated with the hope and positivity of the secondary theme, especially when the latter is agentially connected with the vibrant transformation of the immediately preceding waltz (in my experience). If I *only* empathically identify with the rumination of the primary theme or the peace of the secondary theme, however, I experience an unsettling mix of identification and non-identification—empathic markedness and unmarkedness. Once again, because my empathic identifications lead me to a particularly emotional engagement with the piece, emotional content is what I now hear combined and reworked.

**Figure 4.11: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 125-130**

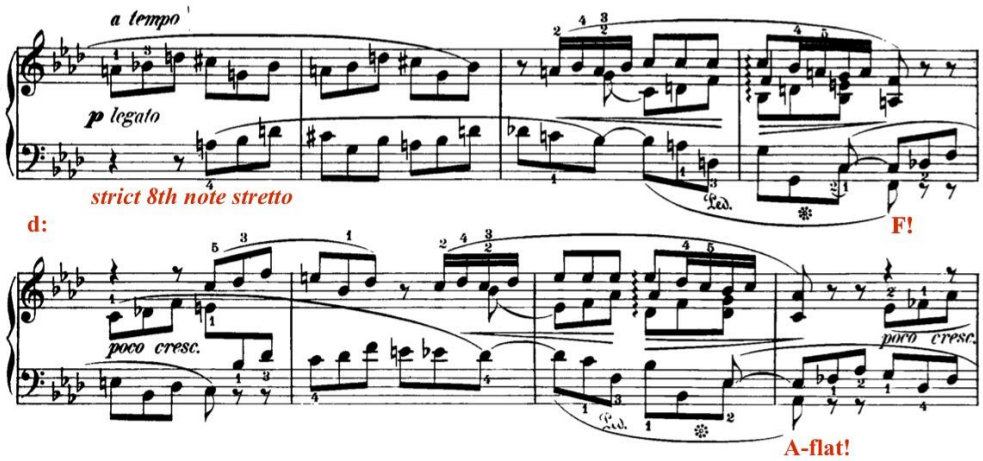



*Retransition*

When a ricercar-like stretto introduces what Hatten calls the "retransition" material in m. 135, I hear it as a descent into psychopathy. Its close and exact imitation is obsessive, even more so than the original eighth note imitation (presented in **Figure 4.12**). This interpretation is also

brought about by my empathic identifications, which had previously led me to an interpretation of the various key areas of the primary theme as lost wanderings. Continuing along this interpretation, then, the current version of rapidly changing key areas leads me to the interpretation of an increasingly desperate and sporadic search.

**Figure 4.12: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 135-142**




Whereas the primary theme is empathically *un*marked in my normative experience, this iteration of the theme is marked. I no longer identify with it because it has changed in an empathically unrecognizable and undesirable way. My experience with this material is akin to my experience reading Thomas Hardy's (1891) novel, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.* In this novel, I originally identified and *desired* to identify with Tess, a protagonist who undergoes a series of horrible events by no fault of her own. She remains optimistic and perseveres through it all—the reason for my desired identification. However, at the end of the novel she descends into insanity and eventually commits murder, at which point I no longer identify or *desire* to identify with her. Likewise, I experience a similar change in my (normative) identifications with Chopin's Ballade when it becomes unhinged. The presence of a false recapitulation-like section in m. 129 has

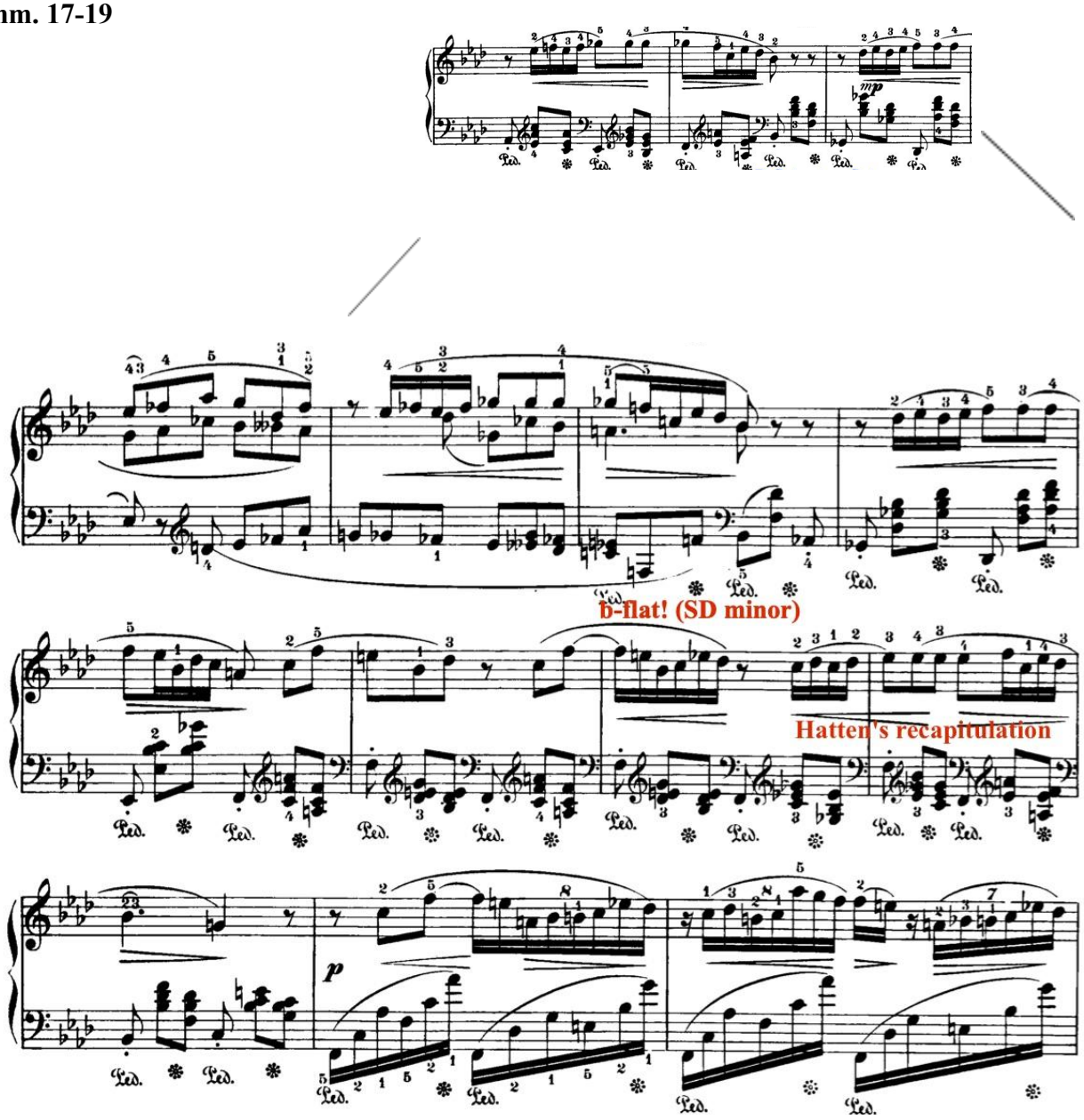
further contributed to the unsettling nature of the moment; the introduction's last offer of hope is negated by an abrupt and extreme descent which rejects this hope with even more finality.

*Recapitulation*

Hatten hears a recapitulation *in medias res* at m. 149. However, I hear the recapitulation beginning earlier, in m. 144. This occurs in part because of Kissin's performance, which brings back the same softer, more diffuse tone that he employed for the primary theme. However, this material is also *compositionally* analogous to mm. 17ff with very minor accompanimental changes **(Figure 4.13)**. My empathic identifications also contribute to this interpretation: because I normatively identify strongly with the primary theme, I once again identify with this material, even though it occurs *in medias res*. In effect, my identifications have already "recapitulated" in m 144.

Again, I do not wish to argue that any particular interpretation is "correct." Depending on a performer's expressive choices, I do not find it unreasonable to hear the recapitulation in m. 149. In fact, the beauty of this recapitulation lies in its ability to slip into being. Before I underwent an analysis of this ballade, I did not have a strong sense of the recapitulation's beginning; by the time I was aware that a recapitulation was occurring, I was not entirely sure where it *had*, in fact, begun. Since Kissin's performance encourages me to hear the recapitulation occurring in m. 144, however, this is the moment at which the agency of the primary theme returns for me. Instead of hearing the continued tragedy of insanity, I hear a return of the (at least somewhat more stable) negatively valenced primary theme.

**Figure 4.13: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 143-153, compared to mm. 17-19**




As a result, the agency of the primary theme interrupts the "insanity version" of the theme. Even if I do not wish to identify with its rumination, it is more empathically tolerable than insanity. Then, through retrospective reflection, I can interpret this return as a commentary on choosing between the lesser of two evils. Hence, while the minor ending of the piece is not euphoric, it is also not the strongest tragedy possible. The strength of my empathic identifications

(or the degree of revulsion felt for a particular iteration of a theme) can modulate the valence of my interpretation of the recapitulation's agency.

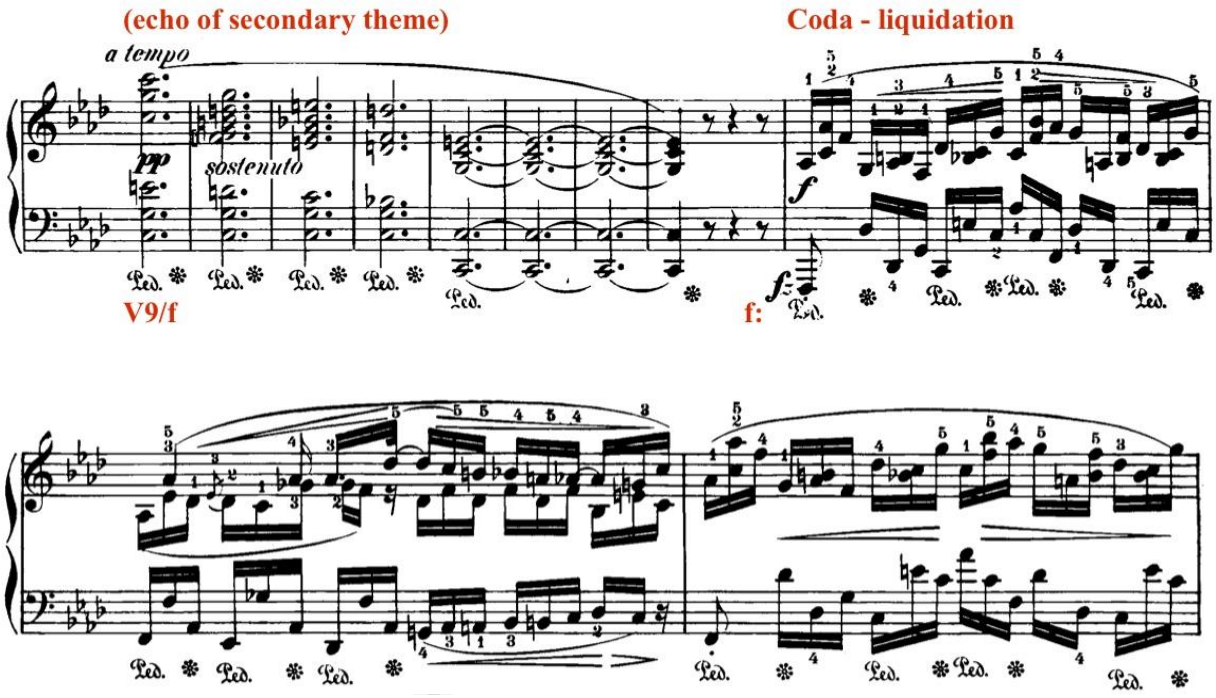
The primary theme also becomes increasingly shortened as the recapitulation progresses. It is then subjected to further variation and suggests a new *fantasia* topic which results in "the most interiorized (dream-like, lyrical) virtual subjectivity staged thus far" for Hatten (254). My empathic identifications result in a similar interpretation of a hopeful dream: its flowing, explorative nature expressed through semitonal diminution is more positively valenced through the occasional use of A-natural in the right-hand, as if to suggest a healthier way for the primary theme to move forward with its "search."

*Coda*

Chopin's Ballade ends tragically and suddenly through liquidation to the tonic F minor, rejecting the hope of achieving the key of the secondary theme (see the dynamic and chordal contrast between mm. 203-210 and 211ff in **Figure 4.14**). Hatten returns to a narrative level of agency here, interpreting it as fate slamming the door shut on any remaining hope to which the musical protagonist might have been clinging.

However, if I am in an agitated state and do not wish to become calm (perhaps because I believe my agitation to be justified), I empathically identify with the ending and do not experience it as a tragedy. In fact, I experience the ending as an empowerment of my own agency through its expression. This can be better understood by considering Byron Almén's (2008) theory of narrativity: a piece of music is considered to fit one of four different narrative archetypes based on how the opening material is valued and how that material becomes valued *differently* by the end of the piece. Hence, since empathic identification drives different valuations of musical material, it can similarly drive different narrative interpretations.

**Figure 4.14: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, mm. 203-213**




In this case, I *value* the primary theme's negatively valenced material and wish for it to "succeed" (or at least to be present as a means of self-expression). The result is a comic archetype when the coda brings back the tragic material that had been interrupted earlier in the piece by introductory and secondary theme material. If I disvalue the primary theme, however, and wish to escape its turmoil, its triumph at the end of the piece matches the compositional tragedy which Hatten describes.

*Formal Commentary*

Hatten considers sonata form to be the driving force behind this Ballade's narrative structure. The secondary theme's two key areas (B-flat and D-flat) "are expressively motivated as illusory, and they impart a sense of vulnerability to their positively oriented expressive topics"

(254). More specifically, Hatten describes the first iteration of the secondary theme as a "serene consolation or reassurance," before it becomes transcendent through the "spiritual epiphany" and "apotheosis" versions in the recapitulation (ibid.). However, interpretations like "spiritual epiphany" are asserted more than supported. One might ask why the epiphany must be *spiritual*. And why must it be an epiphany at all?

My empathic identifications present an alternate interpretation. By empathizing with these positive transformations, I virtually enter into the music and introduce the agential listener. This virtual agency overlaps with compositionally determined agencies to provide a stronger persona "flavor" which imports my own personal context into the music. When I hear this positive turn of the secondary theme, then, I interpret the music in light of my own struggles. Since these struggles were physical at the time of writing this dissertation, I interpret this change as *success breaking through*. In other words, I hear the apotheosis as a relatively physical, rather than a mental ("spiritual") success.

Hatten's discussion of the secondary theme also includes multiple levels of agency. The theme functions both as an actor within a larger narrative and as part of an overarching "subjectivity/consciousness." However, will these two categories be ascribed in equal measure by an individual listener? This chapter's analysis provides an answer in the negative: different interpretations may be more or less operative at different times. Overall, empathic identification affects whether a theme is experienced as oppositional to other musical materials (if it is empathically marked as an *undesirable* agency for me) or as a subjectivity/consciousness (if it is emphatically *un*marked as a *desirable* agency for me).

**Similarities between Empathic Identifications**

In **Table 4.1,** I lay out two different sets of empathic identifications I have experienced while listening to this Ballade, on two different days. I do not describe each and every moment here, but rather focus on a few key moments that shaped my interpretations of the piece as a whole. For each moment that I describe, I have recorded brief notes about these identifications while listening to the piece in real time, using these notes to retrospectively elaborate on them after my in-time experience. The purpose of this chart is to provide an even more concrete example of how even a single listener (in this case, myself) can experience a piece of music in different ways based on different states of human agency. I have already provided numerous examples of how empathic identifications can lead to different interpretations on both a small and large scale. Here, however, it is noteworthy that my different empathic identifications combine to present a similar overarching narrative of the same piece.

**Table 4.1: A Comparison of Empathic Identifications on Two Different Days;** ag.l. = "agential listener"

| *Intro* m. 1 | *Primary theme (P)* m. 8 | *Parenthesis* m. 18 | *Developments 1 & 2* m. 38 | *Secondary theme (S)* m. 84 | *Development 3* m. 100 | *Development 4* m. 112 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ag.l. | Some ag.l. (end of theme, angst is relatively hidden) | Return to more ag.l. | Want to have ag.l. but cautious (not sure I can trust its calm with low notes…)<br><br>ag.l. with waltz m. 50-53 (peaceful joy)<br><br>Losing ag.l. with P transformations | Some ag.l. (more than P, less than Intro); more yearning than I want to be | Hesitant about ag.l. (mix of emotions present in the music) | Some ag.l. (more energy than I want, but at least happy) |
| No ag.l. | Some ag.l. (a little angst = a little anger) | *same* | No ag.l. except m. 46-49 and m. 53-55 (some) | Minimal ag.l. (yearning = slight anger breaking through) | Some ag.l. (some anger) | No ag.l. |

| *Climactic Integration* m. 125 | *False Recap.* m. 129 | *Retrans.* m. 135 | *Recap.* m. 145 | *S apotheosis* m. 177 | *Echo of S* m. 203 | *Coda* m. 211 | **Summary of interpretation** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hesitant about ag.l. (again, mix of emotions present) | ag.l. | No ag.l. | ag.l. (not as much as *False Recap.* but still strong) | Minimal ag.l. (triumph) | ag.l. | No ag.l. | Negative/ tragic |
| More ag.l. | No ag.l. | No ag.l. | Very little to no ag.l. | Moderate ag.l. and then ag.l. with m. 195 increase in anger | ag.l. (calm from achieve-ment of agency) | No ag.l. (no longer desire to express anger) | Move from positive achieve-ment of expression to tragic inability to escape that expression |

The introduction is a particularly significant moment that sets up my empathic engagement with the rest of the music. On these two different days in two different moods (i.e., experiencing two different sets of prominent intentionalities/agencies), I experienced very different degrees of empathic identification. In the first[47] (and my most normative) experience, I identified with the introduction's calm compositional actancy, introducing the agential listener. At the time of listening, I had desired to *become* and *express* calmness. However, when I experienced the second interpretation, I desired to express anger and angst. This led to a lack of identification with the introduction, since I was *neither* calm, nor *desired* to be.

[47] I refer to these hearings as "first" and "second" as a reference to their placement in the figure. These were not, however, my first and second hearings of the piece overall.

Intriguingly, however, I experienced a similar partial empathic identification with the primary theme in both listening experiences. In the first, I only identified with motive *b* of the primary theme; but in the second, I only identified with motive *a*. This caused me to experience the primary theme in its entirety as unsatisfying in both cases—a theme which must be "resolved" somehow.

The moment which Hatten refers to as "climactic integration" was also a key turning point for both experiences of narrative structure, yet in different ways. In the first, the combination of motives and emotions left me newly lost from an empathic standpoint. I wished to identify with this culmination because of its apparent triumph, but the music shifted so suddenly that the calm moments (with which I desired to identify) were never stable or consummate. In the second experience, however, my empathic identification strengthened here since I had previously experienced no empathic identification with Development 4 (due to its joyful emotional landscape). Hence, the presence of the agential listener was once again affected by my interpretations of prior material.

Finally, the echo of the secondary theme in m. 203 is striking because it led to empathic identification in *both* listening experiences. In the first, I identified with the calmness that I had been earnestly seeking to obtain; in the second, my human agency shifted after the achievement of angry self-expression in the previous gestures so that the calm that was unwelcome in the introduction and secondary theme was now a welcome opportunity for repackaging. As a result, the abrupt coda entrance in m. 211 felt tragic in *both* cases since it rejected the calm actancy I *agentially* desired to achieve. While the first listening experience presented a slow and steady build to tragedy, the second shift toward tragedy from triumph arguably resulted in an even

greater tragedy: the tragedy of finally achieving that which you desire, only to realize that it has kept you from a *greater* desire.

Of course, if my anger had not been fully expressed by the material before m. 203, I might have heard the ending of this piece as a positive achievement of agency. The possibilities for empathic identification with this piece are numerous. However, I hope that by using these two examples I have been able to show how empathic identification, as driven by similarity between virtual musical and personal human agency, can lead to unique (and yet at times, similar) interpretations.

## Conclusions

Hatten concludes his analysis with a brief acknowledgment of the listener's role in meaning-making:

> As listening interpreters, we can enlarge the significance of this passionate struggle by situating the expressive drama with respect to our own emotional lives. We may experience emotional growth if we come to understand the drama of the work's virtual subjectivity to have exceeded our prior experience. Or we may find that the ballade offers a deeper, more distinctive expression of what we may have sensed but never fully understood in quite this way (257).

In this chapter, I have attempted to more deeply explore the implications of this first sentence in particular. Chopin's Ballade *does* become deeply personal to me when I empathically identify with its actancies and/or agencies, which in turn affects how I interpret the music "itself." To that end, I challenge Hatten's premise that listeners hear the same "expressive drama" or "passionate struggle." Depending on the actancies or agencies with which I identify, the drama can be either positively or negatively valenced (and hence result in a different narrative archetype).

Any struggle between actancies/agencies is also dependent on my identifications. For example, I may not interpret the introductory and primary theme motives as fundamentally in opposition to one another if I recognize these motives to be a part of my own inner subjectivity. Whether the primary theme material is heard to return in one measure or another is also affected by my empathic identifications (as well as the performative choices of the pianist).

Furthermore, Leonard Meyer in his highly influential (1956) book *Emotion and Meaning in Music* argues that meaning arises when expectations are thwarted. However, expectations can arise for any number of reasons. Just as an individual may expect others to be honest if they themselves are a habitually honest person (or expect others to be lying if they are a habitually *dis*honest person), a listener can expect that music will operate in a way that is consistent with their own human agency once they have introduced the agential listener through empathic identification. To put it another way, if the listener has identified with the music at any level, then when the music becomes *different* from themselves it thwarts an inertial, empathic expectation. At these moments of empathic markedness, the listener can either adopt the newly introduced agency via repackaging, if desirable (for instance, turning from identification with the agitated/ruminating primary theme to identification with the calmer, pastoral secondary theme); or, if the agency is *not* desirable, it can become interpreted as an external agent.

Before closing this chapter, I also wish to very briefly acknowledge Hatten's other conclusions about the expansion of the self. While I have not explored these ideas directly in the preceding paragraphs, any time I repackage my *desired* agency into an *expressed* agency, I achieve an expansion of self. I can also achieve self-expansion through a better understanding of my agential states. For example, the first time I listened to Chopin's Ballade in a state when I desired to *express* my agitation rather than escape it, my lack of identification with the calm,

secondary theme surprised me. The altered layout of my empathic identifications from my normative experience is what made it known to me that I was experiencing this type of human agency in the "real world."

Finally, I have not attempted to explain Hatten's own interpretation of this piece through empathic identification. Such a goal would be arrogant and misguided. Instead, my goal has been to explicate how empathic identifications can alter interpretations due to differences in human agency. Empathic identification directly affects how a listener hears and interprets musical gestures, encouraging attention to particular levels of the agential hierarchy. Now in the following chapter, I explore how we can better understand and predict audiences' interpretations and empathic identifications, and even encourage certain interpretations over others.

# Chapter 5: Empathy-Building Interventions in the Concert Hall

## Introduction

In Chapter 2, I reviewed current findings on the prevalence of empathy and agency in music, as well as how they interact. Chapter 3 proceeded to expound upon what I have called "the agential listener," or the virtual *human* agency of a listener introduced by a listener's empathic identification with a virtual *musical* agency. Next, an analysis of Chopin's Ballade No. 4 provided a more in-depth example of how this theory interacts with previous theories of virtual musical agency (in particular, Hatten 2018). Now in the current chapter, I consider some of the practical implications of empathic identification with music, including how such identifications might be directly enabled.

In what follows, I consider empathic identification more broadly as a type of "pure" empathy. Remember from Chapter 3 that empathic identification exists between the two "poles" of pure empathy and pure identification (see **Figure 5.1**). In each case there is an experience of oneness with the target on the part of the subject, but the subject who experiences *empathy* maintains a clear sense of self and other while *identification* preserves no such distinction. Empathic identification constitutes an experience between these two extremes—an experience during which the subject maintains a sense of separateness between self and other, but strongly identifies with the other in a phenomenally co-inhabited space.

Pure identification is not, in fact, an empathic experience, since there is no self/other distinction. However, both pure empathy and empathic identification display this attribute. As such, the literature on empathy as discussed in this chapter can be applied to both pure empathy and empathic identification with music, but not to pure identification (e.g., believing that the notes are *literally* you in the same way as your arm or a photograph of yourself). For the sake of

concision in this chapter, then, I will use the term "empathy" to *include* experiences of empathic identification, but be open to "weaker" forms of empathy in which less merging of self and other takes place, as well.

**Figure 5.1: A Continuum of Empathy and Identification (reproduced from Figure 3.1)**

| Pure Empathy | Empathic Identification | Pure Identification |
|---|---|---|

self/other distinction - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - no self/other distinction

| *similarity or dissimilarity* | *strong similarity* | *strongest similarity (identification)* |
|---|---|---|

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, empathy is an integral part of the listening experience and increases listeners' enjoyment (Carraturo 2022, Ladinig and Schellenberg 2012). In addition, while empathy is a biological capacity that occurs in different amounts in different people, empathy is most directly responsive to contextual cues (e.g., Weisz and Zaki 2017). As such, empathy is a powerful means by which musicians and music organizations might seek to increase audience engagement. In addition, increasing listeners' empathy with genres they perceive to be dissimilar to themselves can yield benefits: a listener who does not typically identify as an angry person may dislike and fail to identify with heavy metal. However, when they *do* feel angry, they may find that this music helps them gain agency by taking ownership of the undesirable emotion. By extension, this expansion of the self would also provide a listener with more possibilities for perceiving similarity between themselves and otherwise "dissimilar" others, offering increased opportunities for empathy and social bonding in real life.

But *can* an individual's empathy, in fact, be increased? Recent studies in the social sciences have revealed the impact of what have been called "empathy-building interventions," or

techniques employed with the goal of increasing another's empathic response, most often in a particular context. These interventions include verbal instructions and the creation of specific types of environments to encourage empathy, and have shown that empathy (while biological in nature) *can* be manipulated successfully through a number of means.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore these means—including how they can be (and already have been) transferred to musical contexts. While ultimately speculative, my hypotheses are grounded in psychological and musical research with the hope of inspiring and empowering future empirical work on the subject. I begin by summarizing the types and success rates of empathy-building interventions at large. Then, I argue that the increased engagement observed from audience interventions in performance settings is the result of implicit empathy-building. At the same time, I propose a number of as-yet underexplored empathy-building interventions in the concert hall based on findings from psychological literature.

## A Summary of Empathy-Building Interventions

Weisz and Zaki provide a comprehensive review of empathy-building interventions in their (2017) article; the following discussion is predominantly based on this summary, as well as Zaki's (2019) book. In these sources, empathy-building interventions have been split into two overarching categories: *experience-based* and *expression-based* interventions. As their names suggest, the former involves a modification of the subject's *experience* of the target (subject-focused), while the latter seeks to improve *communication* of the subject's empathy for the target (target-focused). The latter, then, does not seek to increase the degree of empathy experienced by the subject, but seeks to increase the target's *perception* of the subject's empathy. Since the empathic experience of the subject is the matter under consideration here, I will limit my discussion to experience-based interventions. I will also consider how a subject's motives

may lead to or detract from that subject's empathy, as also discussed by Weisz and Zaki. All of these factors are summarized in **Table 5.1.**

**Table 5.1 - Types of Experience-Based Empathy Interventions**

| **Types of Experience-Based Empathy Interventions** |
|---|
| 1. Instructions to engage in perspective-taking (SOPT or OOPT[48])<br>a. Verbal<br>b. Role-playing |
| 2. Loving-kindness meditation *(longer-term effects)* |
| 3. Storytelling (especially theatre training and reading) |
| 4. Changing approach/avoidance motives<br>a. Changing views of the self *(longer-term effects)*<br>b. Changing group membership (emphasizing shared goals)<br>c. Changing perceived social norms<br>d. Changing approach/avoidance motives directly (e.g., telling subjects that empathy won't take much time) |

Experience-based interventions can take on a number of forms. First, they may involve explicit verbal instructions to the subject to: 1) imaginatively place themselves in the target's "shoes" (i.e., to engage in self-oriented perspective-taking, or SOPT); or 2) imagine how the target is feeling in *their own* shoes (i.e., to engage in other-oriented perspective-taking, or OOPT). Encouraging both forms of perspective-taking has been shown to increase subjects' empathic response. However, instructions can also include more active "role-playing" elements, which introduce a physical component—for example, having medical students spend the night in a hospital so that they can better understand how their patients feel (Wilkes, Milgrom, and Hoffman 2002).

[48] Self-oriented perspective-taking or other-oriented perspective-taking, respectively; see Chapter 2.

Such interventions cause higher levels of empathy to occur in the individual target when applicable (e.g., when asking the subject to imagine how a drug addict is feeling while watching an interview) *and* the group of which the target is a part (e.g., all drug addicts). This occurs even among individuals with a low biological tendency toward empathy. For example, while psychopaths do not show an empathic mirroring response when viewing a target who is in pain, they *do* show a mirroring response when specifically instructed to imagine what the individual is feeling (Meffert et al. 2013). Hence, simply encouraging individuals to empathize by taking on the perspective of their target is a remarkably effective way to increase a subject's empathic response.

Compassion or loving-kindness meditation is another means by which empathy can be increased (e.g., Jazaieri et al. 2013). This form of meditation typically invites the subject to focus on warm feelings or well-wishes they have toward a loved one before inviting them to extend those feelings out to someone they do not know very well, to someone for which they do not feel compassion, to themselves, and/or to the entire world. By naturally invoking feelings of compassion and then consciously extending that compassion outwards toward a variety of targets, the subject's overall tendency toward empathic response is increased over the long-term and in a variety of contexts. Because compassion is a distinct concept from (though related to) empathy, however, and more appropriately a *response* to empathy, it is less useful for the discussion at hand.

Thirdly, studies have shown that theatrical training and reading also increase subjects' empathic response. In Zaki's (2019) words, "art—especially in narrative forms such as literature and drama—helps us untether. It makes empathy safer and more enjoyable, even in the hardest circumstances" (93). He points to the program "Changing Lives Through Literature" as an

example, which produces an increase in empathy after placing convicts into reading groups. Zaki suggests that convicts see themselves in the books' characters, enabling them to view self and others in more three-dimensional ways. In other words, by engaging subjects with a narrative, they are able to adopt that narrative as part of their own story and expand their sense of self.

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Each of the interventions above aim to increase a subject's biological capacity for empathy. However, biological capacity does not always predict our actual engagement. As we have seen, humans can experience a variety of agential desires that drive them to engage with the world in particular ways. In the case of music, DeNora describes the process of "repackaging" whereby listeners identify with music in order to change their emotional states, i.e. achieve an alternate expression of agency (see Chapter 3). In Zaki's (2019) words, "emotions reflect not just what happens to us, but how we *interpret* those things...by thinking differently, we can choose to feel differently" (37). For example, he describes how an individual can intensify their emotions for an elderly man whose wife had just died by imagining him waking up the next day without her. Conversely, an individual could diminish their emotions for the man by choosing to think instead about how much they had loved each other. How we think and feel, then, is affected by our motivations.

More specifically, "approach" and "avoidance"[49] motives affect whether or not we empathize. Approach motives correspond to the reasons we may find it appealing to empathize in a particular situation (e.g., to adopt or express a desirable emotion), whereas avoidance motives discourage empathy (e.g., when empathy will cost something, be painful, or conflict with goals, such as during competition). As a result, Weisz and Zaki conclude that

[49] Weisz and Zaki's terms.

empathy-building manipulations will be more effective when they are able to increase approach motives and decrease avoidance motives. This can be achieved "by changing views of the self, by changing perceived social norms, and by shifting people's construal of particular empathy-evoking situations" (210).

First, subjects can be encouraged to see themselves as changeable. This is important because if a subject believes that they cannot become a more empathetic person, they create a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, when subjects are encouraged to think that they *can* become more empathetic, that empathic failure is temporary, this fatalistic avoidance motive can be avoided. Such interventions may involve teaching subjects about how empathy is malleable (with statements backed by science) or encouraging a subject to convince someone else that they can become a more empathetic person (because when humans seek to persuade, they end up convincing *themselves*—for a review, see Briñol, McCaslin, and Petty 2012).

Second, since the perception of group membership can be changed (Gaertner and Dovidio 1977), Weisz and Zaki encourage empathy-building interventions as a way of expanding a subject's concept of the group to include the target. For example, Levine et al. (2005) found that subjects were only more likely to help an individual who was wearing their preferred soccer team's jersey when a rivalry between teams was emphasized. However, if the "in-group" was defined as soccer fans in general, subjects helped individuals who wore *any* team's jersey, not just their own. If a subject's concept of group membership is permanently altered, there will be longer-term effects on empathy, as well, since targets who were once out-group members will now be perceived as in-group, leading to more empathy for these individuals in the long term.

Third, just as the boundaries of a group are malleable, so too are the group's norms. And since in-group members are likely to abide by their perception of the normative characteristics of

their group, and since these perceived norms are not always accurate, this is another productive area for empathy-building interventions to address. If the perception of norms is changed, subjects' behavior will likewise change. Thus, if empathy is introduced as a trait norm of the group, members will be more likely to empathize. Changing the perception of norms can be achieved through a number of means, such as marketing and the distribution of informational materials, but in each case they can be a powerful means of encouraging empathy among group members.

Fourth, the benefits of empathy can be emphasized to increase the salience of approach motives while decreasing the salience of avoidance motives. This can be done by emphasizing empathy's ability to "help people feel good and...help people satisfy the demands of their important social roles" (212). For example, subjects might be told that taking the perspective of another will be fun, or that it will help them become a better mother. Grant and Hofmann (2011) showed that reminding doctors why it is important to wash their hands for the sake of their patients led to an increase in hand-washing by the same doctors. In another study, when gender roles were emphasized, women empathized more than men (since women are traditionally seen as more empathetic than men) (Klein and Hodges 2001). Another option is to specifically deemphasize avoidance motives, for example by informing subjects that empathizing in a particular instance will not take much of their time (see Shaw et al., 1994).

However, Weisz and Zaki conclude with a warning: even when approach motives are present, avoidance motives may be greater. As discussed in Chapter 3, individuals can experience multiple agential goals simultaneously, thereby complicating efforts to encourage empathy. In other words, if a subject experiences multiple agential goals that are in conflict with one another, it may be difficult to develop a strategy which touts empathy as an answer to all of

these goals. Not all empathy-building interventions are helpful in every situation, as well. Zaki (2019) points out that when the in-group has significantly more power than the out-group, attempting to foster empathy through perspective-taking only increases animosity (e.g., Bruneau and Saxe 2012). Instead, increasing contact between groups and emphasizing shared goals is crucial for achieving prosocial results (62). Therefore, empathy-building interventions should be pursued with caution.

Finally, empathy-building interventions may be limited to short-term results; in other words, they may not change an individual's overall, lifelong tendency toward empathy. "Slow-twitch empathy," or empathy that remains elevated over time, can, however, be produced in certain cases. Currently, loving-kindness meditation and changing beliefs about empathy are the two most powerful techniques for fostering long-term change (Weisz and Zaki 2019). In other cases, interventions will likely be needed on a case-by-case basis.

## The Necessity of an Empathic-Interpretive Theory in Music

I argue that empathy-building interventions are the implicit cause of increased audience enjoyment and engagement, as found in certain studies of the classical concert hall setting. Researchers have not always understood why certain interventions have worked while others have not, and different areas of intervention (e.g., providing program notes, synchronization activities, and interactive performances) have largely been studied in isolation from one another. However, empathy is crucial for understanding when and how audience interventions are successful; it is the thread by which successful attempts in different research areas are connected, and once understood it can be used to better predict and explore the results of future interventions. Without an understanding of empathy, by contrast, a full interpretation of findings

will be lost and it will remain unclear which variables are the most economical to test in future studies.

Empathy-building interventions may be used in a variety of genres, but I focus here on the classical music audience, especially in a concert hall setting.[50] I do so because there has been a recent surge in interest to understand and increase classical music engagement due to a lack of arts funding. Research has been centered around a number of areas, which I will briefly review here to reveal the power of empathy as an explanatory force behind disparate and often isolated findings. I will additionally hypothesize future interventions that might successfully increase musical enjoyment and engagement, based on empathy-building interventions that are as yet under-explored in the concert hall setting.

*Program Notes*

A number of studies have attempted to determine whether and what kind of program notes increase musical enjoyment and/or understanding. However, the findings from this body of literature have often led to mixed results. While some studies suggest that program notes increase musical enjoyment, others show that they are ineffective, and may even *decrease* enjoyment. How do we make sense of these seemingly incompatible findings? I argue that whether or not program notes increase enjoyment is determined by whether or not the program notes build empathy. More specifically, when program notes build empathy through a storytelling or (implicit) perspective-taking approach, they increase listeners' enjoyment. When program notes focus on analytical, music-specific, and/or impersonal information, by contrast,

[50] I recognize that the live setting of a concert-hall performance will necessarily change a listener's empathic experience with the music due to the presence of human performers, audience members, and other social cues; however, my goal here is to show that empathic interventions *increase* empathy that is already present in this setting, rather than create it in the first place.

enjoyment is *not* increased and may even be decreased. A number of studies will help to illustrate this point.

In 1993, Halpern found that historical program notes increased nonmusicians' enjoyment more than either analytical notes or a control setting without notes. Whereas the analytical notes were abstract, related to musical elements such as dynamics and rhythm, the historical notes provided "a description of certain circumstances of the composer's life or surroundings at the time that the piece was written" (42). The historical example Halpern gives reads as follows: "[For women] to cut their hair short and wear dresses with hems above the knees…was a reaction against the uptight Victorian morals of the previous era, just as Poulenc's music was a reaction against the overbearing gravity of the late Romantic composers" (42). This note provides a personal, human story related to the historical context of the music. Thus, the storytelling approach of social psychological empathy-building interventions is naturally at work.

Halpern's story involves a struggle against social norms: a situation in which similarity, a crucial factor for empathic identification, can be more readily found because of the shared domain between a human listener and a human composer (as opposed to a human listener and a *musical* composition). There is a larger degree of literal similarity available to listeners in such settings. As a result, empathy is more readily available to the listener; and while the listener is not specifically instructed to take on the music's perspective, I suggest that the implicit "instruction" of similarity between the composer and listener encourages the listener to transfer empathy to the composer's music. In other words, the music becomes a conduit for the composer's agency since the two are directly linked via program notes. Therefore, Halpern's program note can be understood as an empathy-building intervention. This would also explain

why her results differ from an earlier study by Payne (1980), which found that historical notes did *not* increase musical enjoyment. Halpern herself suggests that the reason for this discrepancy lies in the fact that Payne's historical notes were of a much more "impersonal nature" than her own (40). Rather than using historicity as a variable when studying program notes, then, researchers would do better to consider *empathy* as the most important variable moving forward.

It is also worth noting here that a listener does not have to *purely* identify with program notes; it is not necessary for a listener to have *literally* cut their hair short or worn above-the-knee dresses to defy social norms. Instead, if a listener perceives similarity between this situation and another situation they have personally experienced, this similarity encourages them to empathize with the situation (see Chapter 2), and empathy can in turn be processed through the music. It is possible, of course, for a listener to fail to empathize with the human situation presented in the program note and hence fail to empathize with the music. However, by drawing a parallel between the music and a particularly common human experience (e.g., feeling restrained by a previous generation's social norms) Halpern's study suggests that it *is* possible to invoke empathy through program notes. Similar findings were shown in O'Neill and Egermann's more recent (2020) study, in which empathy was successfully induced through program notes about the composer's life, but not in structural, analytical, or control conditions. It is indeed the *human* component of program notes that enable an empathic response.

Storytelling via a human component can also bring insight to Vuoskoski and Eerola's (2013) study, which considered the effects of providing "sad" versus "neutral" program notes. In the sad condition, participants were told that the music was excerpted from a movie about WWII—in particular, from a scene in which soldiers were attempting to help starving prisoners at a concentration camp. In stark contrast, the neutral condition of the study described a change

in season, from fall to winter. Unsurprisingly, participants experienced more emotion (specifically, more sadness) in the sad narrative condition than in the control condition. This suggests that they may have *also* experienced more empathy in the sad condition, since empathy leads to increased emotion (for a review, see Miu and Vuoskoski 2017, 131-133). Overall, the human/emotional component of the sad program condition might make it easier for listeners to empathize due to a shared domain.

Margulis's (2010) findings would seem to introduce a fly in the empathic ointment, however. In her study, "dramatic" program notes did *not* increase enjoyment.[51] In fact, participants who received *no* program notes in a control condition reported a higher degree of enjoyment than any other group. How can this be explained? How could "dramatic" program notes fail to induce enjoyment (suggesting a failure to induce empathy) through a storytelling empathy induction mechanism?

Once again, the content of these "dramatic" program notes reveals the answer. Here is an example of the notes, as provided by Margulis:

> The opening evokes a deeply-felt hymn; it is as if we are hearing not the hymn itself, but rather the sounds of the hymn filtered through the ears of someone passionately connected to it. The melody that breaks away on top of the hymn seems to be expressive of this person's emotional reactions to the music (289).

While it might appear as though this note should be able to build empathy by introducing a human presence, the person who is "passionately connected" to the hymn is relatively abstract, discussed from a third-person perspective. This might make it difficult for listeners to naturally experience empathy. In fact, the only identifying information we are given about this individual

[51] Neither did "structural" notes that described chords and other strictly musical elements. However, the previous discussion makes this unsurprising.

is that they are listening to music and experiencing a strong emotional reaction; the character is not outside of the current context and the listener is not given any reason for why the individual is experiencing the music strongly. The combined lack of personal information and the nature of the setting could hence explain the lack of empathy induction, then, and the lack of increased emotional response.

In fact, a later study by Margulis, Kisida, and Greene (2015) provides some of the strongest support for the hypothesis that successful program notes prompt empathic engagement. In their study, elementary school children attended an Irish bluegrass concert, where some students were given program notes containing information about the lead musician's life ("Every summer, she would go to Ireland to see her grandparents. These trips deeply connected her to her Irish heritage"); others the band as a whole ("their music brings traditional Irish music together with rhythms and sounds from the American art forms of jazz, blues and rock-and-roll"); others the general importance of Irish immigrants ("The first Irish immigrants arrived more than 200 years ago and brought their fiddles with them…These immigrants literally saved Irish music from oblivion"); and still others historical information about the theater building (603). Results showed that program notes in the first group increased attention and comprehension (measured by a questionnaire with both self-report and objective measurements) but did *not* affect enjoyment except in the case of the (underprivileged) Hispanic students. The Hispanic students were, in fact, the only group for which musical enjoyment was increased.

First of all, why were stories about the musician's life more successful than the other program notes? We can once again notice that the content of the program notes provides a human being with whom the listeners could (at least theoretically) empathize: a story about the primary performer's life and their reason for performing music. The second group, by contrast, was given

non-personal, strictly musical information. Finally, due to "the identifiable victim effect" in which people feel more empathy when they consider individuals rather than a group (e.g., see Jenni and Loewenstein 1997), the third condition is not likely to have encouraged a significant amount of empathy, either.

The fact that the underprivileged Hispanic students experienced higher enjoyment than the other students provides additional crucial insight. The study notes that these children were recent immigrants; hence, they would have been more likely to perceive a high degree of similarity between themselves and the immigrant performer described in the program notes. While Margulis et al. suggest that these students experienced more enjoyment because they had less experience with music and the arts, empathy offers a different explanation. By using a program note to describe a human individual with which these listeners could more easily empathize, empathy was effectively activated in the Hispanic students, resulting in higher enjoyment.

Before concluding this section, I will explore how program notes compare to listeners' internally driven interpretations. Zalanowski (1986) directed listeners to either form their own mental imagery (including all of their senses) or follow a pre-given storyline while listening to a three-minute excerpt of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. Afterwards, participants rated their attention, enjoyment, and understanding of the music. While previous studies might suggest that the story condition would lead to greater enjoyment because of empathy, the reverse was true: subjects in the mental imagery condition experienced greater enjoyment.[52]

The details of the distributed story once again reveal a lack of personal, *human* entry points that would help subjects build empathy. It is less of a story and more of a discussion of

[52] However, subjects in the story condition *did* experience higher levels of understanding.

themes and musical aspects of the piece, similar to Halpern's analytical condition. Here is an excerpt:

> A young musician in a delirious sleep caused by an overdose of opium dreams that he has killed his beloved and has been condemned to death. As he is led to his execution, the procession advances to the tones of a march that are at first somber. Two more robust melodies follow the first simultaneously in the brass and woodwinds. The three melodies are then worked out into a loud and dramatic climax. After a sudden pause, a musical theme representing his beloved appears briefly in a solo clarinet, somewhat like a last love-thought. (45)

While this story *does* begin with a human connection (the young musician), it focuses on analytical, music-specific information that does not foster empathy.[53] In the imagery condition, by contrast, the imagery was by nature personal because it was unguided. Directing listeners to create their *own* associations is also reminiscent of an empathy-building intervention through verbal instruction, in which participants are specifically directed to empathize with the target. Imagery's ability to increase participants' enjoyment in this study, then, aligns with previously discussed findings that empathy can be increased by simply directing individuals to place themselves in an other's shoes (or to place the other in their own shoes).

Bennett and Ginsborg (2018) more directly compared listeners' self-driven interpretations to program notes. In this study, listeners aged 16-74 (most of whom had some amateur music-making experience) listened to two short settings of poems by Rudyard Kipling for mezzo-soprano and viola, composed by Boris Tchaikovsky. For the initial listening experience, participants received only the title of the piece (which directed but did not prescribe their self-created narratives and associations). The second time, they received orally-delivered

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[53] It is worth noting that Zalanowski believes that the *guided* nature of the program's imagery was responsible for understanding while the *unguided* nature of the imagery condition caused enjoyment. I am skeptical about the level of imagery induced in the programmatic condition, however, for the same reason that I am skeptical of the storytelling nature of the notes.

program notes about both pieces, which included information about the performers' relationship to the music, text translations, and liberties taken in those translations. The results of the study were mixed in that 39% reported a positive impact from the program notes while the rest did not.

The authors' analysis of participants' free responses reveal that listeners whose experience worsened after hearing the program notes had formed a different and incompatible interpretation of the music when they heard it for the first time. In effect, the program notes created a disparity between listeners' initial empathic connections with the music and the interpretation provided in the program notes. Such an experience was unwelcome, I posit, because their initial empathic engagement with the music was presumed incorrect and irrelevant. The agency to choose their own interpretation was called into question, then, and even disregarded. However, listeners who had a positive experience largely reported similarities between the program notes' and their own initial interpretations, or gratitude for being able to better connect with the music by relating to the text. We can understand the conflicting power of post-listening program notes, then, to be modulated by their ability to conform to or reject a listener's initial empathic engagement; if a listener has trouble engaging with the music in the first place, program notes may provide a possible avenue of empathy that helps them. If not, they may function more readily as a deterrent.

In conclusion, while studies of program notes have brought about seemingly disparate results, empathy, fostered by the perception of similarity between self and music, shows remarkable promise in explaining these differences. When program notes introduce a narrative in the specifically human domain, "instructing" listeners about the connections between a narrative and music (and thus encouraging them to perspective-take), the result was enjoyment and

engagement.[54] Margulis et al.'s study also reveals the importance of choosing a narrative that is as similar as possible to the experiences of the target audience. Future research can benefit from an understanding of empathy by testing various components of these storytelling and instructional factors to better determine the cause of increased listener enjoyment.

*Synchronization*

Program notes implicitly invoke empathy through psychology-based interventions; other techniques, by contrast, have implicitly invoked empathy through physical movement. "Synchronization" with music is one such example, and refers to a technique that has been primarily used to increase listeners' empathy *with each other* via a *conduit* of music. A listener who physically mimics some aspect of the music and who sees other listeners sharing this experience will empathize more with these listeners *because* of their shared experience. Thus, I argue that allowing listeners to experience how they would feel if they were (some aspect of) the music in this physicalized way enacts the role-playing form of empathy-building interventions in a concert hall setting.

Synchronization as "role-playing" can be understood as a physicalized version of self-oriented perspective-taking. Listeners project themselves more literally into the music's "shoes" by enacting some aspect of it within their own bodies. Synchronization, then, can be seen as an extension of Walton's theory of "thoughtwriting," in which listeners adopt the music they hear as their own personal expression (see Chapter 3). While Walton's examples focus on vocal synchrony (singing along with the performer(s)), synchronization with elements such as

[54] While I have focused on explaining the diverse successes and failures of verbally- or textually-instructed program notes for increasing listeners' enjoyment, note also that listeners' internal associations *apart* from any specifically-instructed program notes often include narrative components and have *also* been shown to increase enjoyment. See Margulis et al. (2019) and McAuley et al. (2021).

tapping along with a rhythm or moving one's arms up and down with the rise and fall of dynamics is also possible. What remains constant is the expression of music in the listener's body as their own expression, presenting their thoughts and emotions through musical forms and structures.

By synchronizing and thus empathizing with some element(s) of the music, Rabinowitch (2015) also found that listeners experienced an overall increase in ("real-world") empathy with other listeners.[55] These findings were present when subjects synchronized with a number of different musical elements, such as rhythm, contour, etc., leading Rabinowitch to the conclusion that

> it might actually be more advisable to encourage [listeners] to engage in musical group interactions of whatever music they prefer. If they enjoy complex rhythms, then there is a good chance that repeatedly experiencing such rhythms during a joint musical activity will boost their ability to synchronize with others, equipping them with the kind of cognitive tools and attitude that are most beneficial for empathy (97).

As a result, it is the *act* of synchronizing with music, not the *aspect* of the music with which one is synchronizing, that causes an increase in listeners' real-world empathy with others.

Other studies outside of music corroborate the link between empathy and synchronization: for example, Hove and Risen (2009) show that the greater the synchrony between listeners who tap along with music, the greater the feeling of group membership with one another (and group membership is an important precursor to empathy). Similarly, listeners who rock their chairs in synchrony with music have been shown to experience a stronger sense of group membership (Demos et al. 2011). Synchronization is thus a useful tool for increasing (at least the potential for) empathy between listeners; yet the use of music as the direct target with

[55] Intriguingly, Zelechowska et al. (2020) has shown that listeners who score higher on measures of dispositional empathy are more likely to move to the rhythm of the music than others; thus, the effects of empathy on synchronization and vice versa would seem to be mutually supportive.

which listeners are empathizing suggests that the conduit by which such real-world empathy occurs is empathy with the *music itself.* The power of empathy to shift listeners' experiences is once again crucial for understanding what makes synchronization effective.

In summary, synchrony with music has been shown to increase empathy and prosocial benefits in a live concert hall with other listeners. Yet far from understanding synchrony as an isolated way in which we can achieve this result, we should understand it as an empathy-building intervention which makes use of shared experiences with music to build shared experiences between listeners, causing them to see each other as part of the same in-group. Finally, future research should also explore whether there might be ways to alter perceived in-group and out-group status for listeners outside of a live performance context, since: 1) it is unlikely that people will attend a concert featuring music with which they are unfamiliar, due to a risk of failed entertainment (Kolb 2000; see also Dearn and Pitts 2017, which reports major difficulties recruiting nonmusicians to attend classical concerts, even when admission was free); 2) the majority of music listening happens outside of concert attendance (Lamont, Greasley, and Sloboda 2016); and 3) listening at home in recorded contexts away from other listeners may decrease the impact of social pressure on listening preferences, providing one less barrier for listeners to explore new genres—even when listeners are interacting with other listeners through online discussion boards and other relatively anonymous social media networks (Keown 2016).

*Interactive Performances*

Synchronization has also been part of a broader engagement strategy for interactive classical music performances. In his highly acclaimed book *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance,* violist, teaching artist, and chair of Berklee College of Music's String Department David Wallace outlines a number of strategies for leading

engaging performances that involve a direct interaction between performer(s) and listener(s). I once again argue that these strategies implicitly tap into an audience's ability to empathize with music and/or the performer(s) by providing them both with verbal "instructions" to empathize and an opportunity for synchronization. The remainder of this section will address a number of these techniques in more detail.

Wallace proposes six principles for audience engagement that he considers to be crucial for every interactive performance, many of which actively build empathy. For example, the musician is encouraged to "engage [the audience] through experience…would knowing Béla Bartók's birth and death dates help me to hear counterpoint in his quartets?...Would facts about Bartók's life enable my ears to digest chords and timbres that sounded painfully caustic?" (12). The information rejected in these examples is strikingly similar to that which was provided in the failed historical and analytical program notes discussed above. Wallace goes on to say that "informed audience members may feel successful on an intellectual level, but without an experience, their ears remain fundamentally unaltered" (ibid.). The "altered hearing" described here is an empathic one, enabled through opportunities to physically synchronize with the music.

Another principle, "tap your audience's competence," is even more empathic in nature. Wallace writes, "when we get an audience to sing a theme, clap a rhythmic accompaniment, or make creative and interpretive decisions about music, we put the listeners in our shoes. They become performers and creators" (14). The language of listeners being put "in the performer's shoes" is specifically empathic (a self-oriented perspective-taking approach), and once more a physicalized version of Walton's "thoughtwriting." This raises an important point: Wallace, like other proponents of synchronization, is primarily engaged with fostering empathy between the listener and *performer*, rather than between the listener and music directly. Empathy between the

listener and music is, however, enabled secondarily through empathy with the performer in a way that is similar to synchronization. In fact, these two approaches mirror one another: while synchronization fosters empathy directly with elements of the music in a way that leads naturally to empathy with other listeners, interactive performance fosters empathy (in part) with human performers in a way that leads naturally to empathy with the music. Empathy offers a means of navigating these two sets of agencies (virtual human and virtual musical) and understanding how one set affects the other.

Wallace's final principle, "project your personality," once again encourages empathy with the performer(s). While he does not provide evidence for the assertion that "our passions and personalities can inspire listeners in ways that recordings and textbooks cannot" (21), I propose that this inspiration invites the listener into the musical experience by connecting them to a real-life human being, similar to the empathy-building interventions found in successful program notes. Yet even as Wallace encourages performers to tap into listeners' personal and metaphorical experiences, he warns against becoming *too* metaphorical and veering away from the music "itself." He writes, "you will have the most success if your extra-musical agenda provides a metaphor with *clear musical manifestations* (emphasis mine)" (71). In other words, the agency/actancy of the music "itself" must be the main point of connection for the listener. Even when the listener is physically identifying with the performer, then, they are also identifying with the music. Empathy explains how the listener and music are intricately connected and how they influence each other in this way.

Traces of empathy can be found scattered throughout the rest of Wallace's book, as well. For example, when designing activities, Wallace invites his readers to ask the questions: "in what ways does this concept manifest itself in my audience's everyday life? How can this concept be

experienced[?]" Such questions directly engage empathy by seeking to maximize the perception of similarity between the music and listener. However, Wallace distinguishes between different types of "entrypoints" for listeners: metaphorical entrypoints (e.g., exploring consonance and dissonance through the audience's physical tension and release), personal/emotional entrypoints (e.g., inviting the audience to identify their own personal stresses and the ways in which they find relief), and purely musical entrypoints (e.g., inviting the audience to think like a musician). While it may appear as though empathy is only engaged in the second "emotional" entrypoint, different types of empathy are invoked in each category. If the listener is encouraged to think like a musician, then empathy with the musician results; when a metaphor is physically manifested in the body, there is a physically simulated empathic response. Hence, each of these tactics enables the listener to engage with different types of empathy or empathy with different targets. In fact, the very term "entrypoint" communicates a sense of empathic identification, in which the listener *enters into* the music. Thus, just as listeners can empathize with different agencies, so too can they enter into the music through a physical/active similarity, emotional similarity, or personal/human similarity.

To illustrate these points, let us consider a more detailed, multifaceted example of a positively-received interactive performance described in Wallace's book:

> At one of the [Cooperstown Chamber Music] festival's family concerts featuring Copland's complete *Appalachian Spring* for thirteen instruments, the musicians offered a one-hour, multi-station preparatory workshop. The walls were covered with mural paper and the audience was invited to add their own drawings to create a panoramic picture of the rural American landscape. Folk dancers taught people dance steps for the Shaker melody "Simple Gifts," as a violinist from the ensemble performed it. At another station, the concertgoers made 'musical quilts' by gluing leather musical notes, fabric, and symbols to muslin sheets. Once a quilt was finished, it could be taken to a musician who would perform the notes. After the concert, children

> took their quilt squares home as souvenirs. The musicians also held a 'musical Olympics' where they competed to see who could play the loudest, the fastest, the softest, and so forth (79).

This set of experiences builds empathy in a variety of ways. Listeners are invited to draw, dance, and quilt, which provides them with an opportunity to experience and express *their own* agency in ways that are similar to the *music's* agency (an example of both physical/active similarity and emotional similarity). In addition, the "Olympics" event offers an explicit similarity between competitive sports, which many people have already experienced, and music-specific features. The result is an engagement of personal/human similarity.

Of course, this program may have been effective for other reasons, as well. It is not my intent to argue that empathy is the *only* reason that listeners enjoy music or that it is the *only* mechanism by which performances can be successful. Instead, I seek to reveal the power of empathy to explain why a variety of techniques increase audience engagement and enjoyment. Once empathy is identified as the thread connecting these successful interventions, it can inform future research that seeks to better understand the individual factors that build or detract from empathy.

### Approach and Avoidance Motives: The Role of Personality and Musical Attributes

Program notes, synchronization, and interactive performances are all means by which empathy has been (largely unknowingly) induced in the classical concert hall setting. However, individual approach and avoidance motives must also be considered. If an empathy-building intervention does not address individuals' avoidance motives, after all, it may remain largely unsuccessful. Increasing approach motives is a further opportunity to increase the impact of an intervention.

Personality can affect both approach and avoidance motives, as it plays a strong role in listeners' enjoyment of particular genres. Studies have consistently shown that music is used and enjoyed for its ability to express individual aspects of the self, including personality traits (e.g., Greenberg et al. 2015; Dobrota and Reić Ercegovac 2014; Rentfrow et al. 2009, 2011, 2012; Rentfrow and Gosling 2003, 2007; Kopacz 2005). Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) have more specifically discovered four overarching genres of music for which listeners' preferences are predicted by individual differences: Upbeat & Conventional styles were correlated with Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness; Extraversion was further correlated with Energetic & Rhythmic styles; and both Reflective & Complex and Intense & Rebellious styles were correlated with the trait Openness to Experience. Research has also shown that listeners are aware of how genre preferences express individuals' personality, especially for religious, classical, and rock music (Rentfrow et al. 2009).[56]

While Neuroticism was not found to predict preferences for any particular genre of music in this study (a finding replicated by Ercegovac, Dobrota, and Kuščević 2015), other studies have shown that individuals who exhibit high levels of Neuroticism prefer negatively-valenced music (Greenberg et al. 2015; Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham 2007). Neuroticism has also been shown to negatively correlate with preferences for fast music and music in major keys (Dobrota and Reić Ercegovac 2014). Dispositional empathy itself has also been found to correlate with the enjoyment of negatively-valenced (specifically, sad) music (e.g., Sachs, Damasio, and Habibi 2021; Vuoskoski and Eerola 2017; Vuoskoski et al. 2012).

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[56] Trait Openness to Experience has been found to correlate with preferences for music more generally (Vuoskoski and Eerola 2017; Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham 2009); hence, it makes sense why this trait is less predictable through individuated musical preferences.

Findings regarding preferences for tempo and key area are representative of a more recent trend towards measuring the impact of personality traits on the preference for specific musical attributes. Rentfrow and Gosling's initial study, while revealing strong individual differences in musical preferences across four broad genres, faced criticism for basing participants' ratings on genre *labels*, rather than on actual music. This has been considered problematic due to the fact that participants may not have the same inner conceptualizations for genres, pieces may not comfortably fit into a single genre, individuals may not be able to rate their preferences for genres with which they are not already familiar, and genre labels may be associated with social stereotypes outside of any individual piece of music (for a discussion of these criticisms, see Rentfrow et al. 2011).

In response, Rentfrow et al. (2011, 2012) produced what they call the MUSIC model, based on participants' ratings of unfamiliar musical excerpts from a variety of genres. This model found evidence for musical preferences being divided into five dimensions: Mellow (e.g., relaxing, slow, sad, and quiet), Unpretentious (uncomplicated, relaxing, acoustic, sad, and quiet), Sophisticated (intelligent, complex, and dynamic), Intense (loud, aggressive, distorted), and Contemporary (electric, percussive, and not sad). These dimensions were not mutually exclusive; for example, a participant's preference for Intense music did not predict their preference or distaste for any of the other dimensions. Moreover, these dimensions showed significant overlap in terms of their corresponding musical attributes, often with differences displayed across just one dimension.

These dimensions, which have been replicated in Greenberg et al.'s (2015) study, predict musical preferences *over and above* other individual difference factors (including personality traits) when participants rated their preference for musical excerpts across genres. Greenberg et

al. identify these factors as follows: arousal (high arousal = "intense, forceful, abrasive, and thrilling;" low arousal = "gentle, calming, and mellow"), valence (high valence = "fun, happy, lively, enthusiastic, and joyful;" low valence = "depressing and sad"), and depth (high depth = "intelligent, sophisticated, inspiring, complex, poetic, deep, emotional, and thoughtful;" low depth = "party music and danceable"). In addition, correlations were measured not only between traits and these three dimensions, but also between their individual components, providing a more nuanced understanding of which *aspects* of traits may influence musical preferences the most. Thus, while personality traits are one mechanism by which we can understand a listener's tendency to approach or avoid a piece of music (and hence their tendency to approach or avoid *empathy* with a piece of music), individual features of the music are (unsurprisingly) crucial to consider, as well.[57]

Thus, the music we choose to hear reflects our personalities and self-concepts, in that we are driven to *approach* music that aligns with our self-concept and to *avoid* music that does not. The importance of musical features for driving enjoyment reveals an additional and intriguing potential for the development of cross-genre approach motives: while an individual may seek out pop music because it is highly arousing, positively-valenced, and low in depth, if a classical piece is similarly "advertised"[58] as highly arousing, positively-valenced, and low in depth, this might introduce an approach motive for empathy with an otherwise unfamiliar and disvalued genre. In addition, if a piece of classical music is advertised as relaxing and uncomplicated,

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[57] Another important approach or avoidance motive is the listener's values and uses of music (Manolika and Baltzis 2021); however, in this dissertation it is assumed that listeners are using and valuing music as a way of expressing and conceptualizing the self.

[58] I use the word "advertise" here loosely to reference how music is being presented to an audience. This might take place before a concert through flyers and other distributed information, or during the performance through program notes and other interventions.

individuals who preferred Unpretentious music in Rentfrow et al.'s study may be more willing to approach and empathize with a piece of classical music, which was more typically associated with the Sophisticated dimension.

Cross-genre approach motives may benefit arts organizations by helping them garner new audiences, but they may also increase empathy with others in the "real world." As research on synchrony has shown, empathizing with a piece of music enables listeners to empathize with other audience members, as well. By using personality-based approach motives to counteract avoidance motives, then, listeners may find themselves better motivated and able to empathize with "dissimilar" others, such as older, more traditional classical music audiences in the case of younger listeners.

*Avoidance Motives of Young Adults in the Concert Hall*

Empathy-building interventions in the concert hall must also consider avoidance motives faced by individual demographics. In recent qualitative studies, researchers have sought to understand these motives among young adults, specifically—aged 18-22 (Kolb 2000), 24-36 (Dobson 2010), 21-35 (Dobson and Pitts 2011), and "under-25" year-olds (Dearn and Pitts 2017)—including first-time or relatively new attendees of a classical music concert. Studies have commonly conducted focus groups (in addition to interviews and surveys) to discover what leads to and detracts from enjoyment for these listeners. Key findings show that participants: 1) attempted (though sometimes failed) to connect to the music emotionally; 2) believed an in-depth knowledge of classical music was needed in order to truly appreciate the music (a knowledge that they could not claim); 3) assumed tickets were expensive; 4) believed that others in their social group would not attend the performance with them; 5) felt a difference between themselves and other audience members (because of age, beliefs about "good" music, and level

of expertise); and 6) were searching for a connection that they largely did not feel with the performers, conductor, and/or composer. The first finding reveals a gap between these listeners' *desire* (to connect to the music) and their *ability*. Against their will, empathy was stifled. The latter five findings, however, reveal a number of avoidance motives which could explain the suppression of empathy in these listeners. In what follows, I explore each of these motives and how they might be challenged in the concert hall setting.

First, participants believed that an in-depth knowledge of classical music was needed in order to truly appreciate the music, but that they did not possess this knowledge (e.g., Dearn and Pitts 2017; Kolb 2000). By contrast, musicians do not express this concern, although they do seek *further* knowledge about music (Dearn and Pitts 2017). This suggests that musicians (or at least the undergraduate music students who were used in these studies) remain convinced that knowledge is crucial for appreciating classical music after having undergone formal learning. On a related note, some participants believed that all classical music is by nature "perfect," causing them to be confused or frustrated when they did not enjoy it (Dobson 2010). Some reported additional anxiety over not knowing how much to applaud; they believed they could not judge whether or not the music was good, and just how good it was if so (ibid.). Again, this reveals a perceived lack of musical knowledge since they considered *other* audience members to be reliable judges on whether the music was worthy of applause or not and in what quantity, but not themselves.

Yet even the musicians in Dearn and Pitts' study experienced "boredom" and "drifting off" at times, revealing that knowledge is not always enough to cause enjoyment (53). In addition, providing more information did not always increase enjoyment for nonmusician listeners. Dobson (2010), in fact, discovered that the information provided by a conductor before

performing actually served to alienate these young participants even *more* because the use of musical jargon solidified the view that specialized knowledge was necessary in order to enjoy the music. Dobson and Pitts (2011) found similar results when using highly technical program notes.

Thus, classical music can be experienced as boring and inaccessible even for those who *want* to enjoy the music (Dobson 2010), despite Thompson's (2007) findings that expectation is a strong factor in musical enjoyment. Training and expectation cannot, therefore, be sufficient for an experience of musical meaning—nor are they necessary at all. Anecdotal evidence makes it clear that listeners do not need specialized knowledge in order to enjoy music, as well. Consider, if you will, the first time you heard a piece of classical music that impacted you: did you hear Roman numerals, understand how the composer employed each distinct timbre, or have a complete formal understanding of the piece? Most likely, the answer is no. Gabrielsson's (2011) interviews with listeners who had strong experiences with music were similarly not limited to those with formal knowledge. For example, a number of individuals experienced strong emotions for music of other cultures that they had never heard before. One middle-aged woman wrote of a visit to China,

> What I want to describe is the first time I heard such a [small, presumably very propagandistic flute] piece...From blaring loudspeakers suddenly this for me completely overwhelming flute music pours out. It is happy but with a touch of melancholy, fast and exciting, melodically simple for me as a Westerner to take in and yet in its construction quite distinct as to its country of origin, this is China that pours out to me in the form of music. I become happy and tears come to my eyes, and I am filled with the harmonies, the notes, long after we have chugged out of hearing (24N, 301).

Some participants even reported strong experiences with music they had expected to *hate*. Similar findings are presented in Kolb's (2000) study, in which two young men say they would have refused to attend a concert if they had known it would feature operatic singing, but that they ended up enjoying it, instead. Hence, the idea that one cannot enjoy music without specialized

knowledge is incorrect and may serve as an unnecessary avoidance motive for empathic engagement with unfamiliar music.

Future interventions for would-be listeners should seek to emphasize that knowledge can be useful, but is not necessary, for enjoying the music at hand. Just as a conductor using jargon decreased listeners' connection with the music, a conductor who emphasizes features of the music or setting that *anyone* may understand could have the opposite effect (like in the interactive performance examples given above). Before the concert, advertisements might similarly find ways to emphasize the openness of the music to audience members of all backgrounds and types. Listeners might be encouraged to attend, in fact, based on the *merit* of not knowing anything about the genre (e.g., "explore something new!"). Marketing materials might also include statements such as "no prior knowledge needed," or advertise a pre-concert experience that seeks to prepare listeners for what they are about to experience. These pre-concert experiences do not need to be knowledge-based; they can, in fact, prepare listeners for the music in other ways as described in Wallace's book. However, encouraging listeners that they *will* be prepared for the music when they hear it might help alleviate underlying avoidance motives of this type.

Next, multiple studies showed that participants were surprised by how cheap student tickets were for classical music concerts. Students were shown to be performing a cost-benefit analysis, where they compared the price of attending a concert to that of other social activities, such as attending a movie or even getting drunk (Dearn and Pitts 2017). However, concert prices are *not* always more expensive than these activities. In addition, university non-music students reported being willing to pay more money to attend a classical concert after hearing the music in advance and experiencing a strong emotional reaction to it; stronger emotional reactions were

also positively correlated with higher enjoyment ratings (Kawase and Obata 2016). Ultimately, then, the avoidance motive of cost may disappear if listeners experience greater enjoyment and emotion of the music outside of a live setting, and hence may not need to be modulated directly. Emphasizing the low cost of a performance (when applicable) and even directly comparing this cost to the price of another social activity may help, though, as well.

Third, participants expressed a desire to attend concerts alongside their peers, who they often believed would not be willing to attend (Dearn and Pitts 2017; Dobson and Pitts 2011). This relates to the sixth and final finding: that participants perceived a difference between themselves and other audience members due to factors such as age, difference in knowledge, and differences in musical valuation and preference (a factor in all of the live concert studies reviewed here). While not explicitly negatively valenced from an overt dislike of these people, an "othering" of the primary audience by the younger demographic had a negative impact on their experience.

Dobson (2010) discovered a way to ameliorate this "othering" through what was called a "Night Shift" performance. Participants' experience of music performed at this nontraditional and casual concert venue explicitly encouraged attendees to talk to and interact with the performers during the show. The concert was enjoyable in part because of the analogue drawn between the music to be performed (Mozart) and "modern" music that was judged to be more familiar and relevant to the participants' lives—in this case, jazz. Robert Levin, the pianist/performer at the concert, created an explicit link between these two genres by improvising on a single Mozart passage in different ways, communicating to the participants that the music was not a "perfect" structure, but malleable. By introducing a jazz lick into one of his renditions, the link between genres became even more palpable.

In summary, in order to encourage an empathic connection with (unfamiliar) classical music, one might seek to adjust listeners' conceptions of *who* listens to classical music by emphasizing the presence of an "in-group" which is judged to be similar to themselves. One way to do so is to create more concert environments that blend classical music with other features; for example, the internationally-acclaimed chamber group Fifth House Ensemble's *Luna de Cuernos* program joined fans of classical music with fans of graphic novels by pairing the work of a freshly-commissioned multimedia artist with contemporary classical music. In settings such as these, younger listeners may find it easier to connect to the music and attend with their friends due to the introduction of an already-present shared interest. Shared goals can also be used to build larger or different types of in-group membership. For example, individuals who may have never attended a classical music concert before, but who cared deeply about the environment, could discover a shared group membership with other audience members and even the composers in Fifth House Ensemble's *Rivers Empyrean* program, which celebrated and sought to educate listeners about Chicagoland's natural environment. Once again, there are many ways to build in-group membership, but recognizing its importance is the first step toward more comprehensively addressing the issue.

Finally, participants were searching for a connection that they could not feel with the performers, conductor, and/or composer in a traditional concert hall setting (Dobson and Pitts 2011; Dobson 2010). For example, some participants were offended that a composer did not acknowledge the audience's applause in a concert of sci-fi film music (Kolb 2000), revealing a different social code in classical music concerts compared to the popular music concerts with which these participants were familiar. Thus, another key reason for the Night Shift concert's

success was that the performers engaged with the audience and shared comedic stories, actively building a connection between stage and seats.

Overall, a successful empathy-building intervention for young adult audiences of classical music must address listeners' fears, such as not having enough knowledge to enjoy the music or that the concert will be too expensive. Interventions should also foster more engagement between listeners and performers, as well as provide a space in which younger audiences feel naturally comfortable among their peers. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing these motives, but without addressing them at all our attempts to build empathy with music may be unsuccessful. In addition, while interactive performances like those described by Wallace are one way of counteracting these avoidance motives, a recognition of how these motives are directly tied to empathy may also help us create additional strategies that are less "invasive," such as choosing a particular means of advertising rather than changing the structure of the concert itself.

## Conclusions

Empathy is not simply biological; rather, it can be built through a variety of interventions. From instructions to take the perspective of another (including but not limited to the introduction of role-playing), to storytelling and the alteration of approach and avoidance motives, empathy has been effectively and consistently manipulated in psychological studies. As a result, it might reasonably be assumed that empathy can be manipulated in musical contexts, as well. In this chapter, I have suggested that the ability to manipulate listeners' empathy with music is already apparent. Research surrounding listeners' enjoyment and engagement with classical music in a live setting has further served as a case study for showing that empathy underlies successful performance interventions.

I have considered three main areas of research to construct this argument: program notes, synchrony, and interactive performances. While research on the efficacy of program notes has led to seemingly conflicting results, I argue that these results are coherent when considered within an empathic-interpretive theory. Narrative or personal program notes successfully increase enjoyment because they build empathy with music through perspective-taking and storytelling "interventions." In addition, it has been shown that when program notes are contradictory to listeners' prior perspective-taking or storytelling experiences, they are ineffective. Next, synchronization is effective at increasing listeners' enjoyment because it allows them to experience the music in their own bodies, or "role-play" (some aspect of) the music. In effect, synchronization allows listeners to experience a physicalized form of thoughtwriting. They also experience a stronger sense of group membership with other listeners, which may in and of itself encourage empathy. Finally, interactive performances have (perhaps unknowingly) used a variety of empathy-building techniques, including perspective-taking, synchronization, and other overt opportunities to allow listeners to express their own agency alongside music.

Approach and avoidance motives have an additional effect on empathy among concert hall listeners, and include factors of personality, cost, and in-group perceptions. Listeners approach music that they believe reflects an idealized version of themselves and avoid that which does not; hence, any features of music that are advertised or assumed by the listener may greatly influence who attends a concert. Young adults in particular have been shown to approach and avoid music for these reasons, and to avoid classical music concerts in particular due to perceptions about cost. By making tickets cheaper, or by better communicating the low cost of an event, these avoidance motives can be successfully overcome. Similarly, by "instructing" young

listeners (whether through advertising or other means) that they do not need specialized knowledge to enjoy classical music and that they will be attending alongside others who are like them in terms of age and interest, approach motives can be further increased and avoidance motives decreased.

In conclusion, more research is needed to understand the extent to which these interventions affect empathy in music-listening contexts and which methods are the most effective. Music therapy, interactive storytelling with music, and other activities may also see an equal or greater benefit from using empathy-building tactics. Yet overall, empathy can already be seen to drive enjoyment and engagement in a variety of concert interventions and it presents a strong rationale for a deeper exploration of empathy-building interventions for music in the future.

# Chapter 6: Conclusions and Future Directions

At the beginning of Chapter 2, Shostakovich's Prelude No. 1 in C Major Op. 34 served as an example of how virtual musical agency can be experienced as though it were the listener's own personal agency. The music and the listener (myself, in this case) shared playfulness and joy, allowing me to identify and even *merge* with the music so that my human agency became projected into it. This dissertation has sought to emphasize the importance of this type of musical experience and explain its effects on musical interpretation more broadly.

## Summary

What we hear in music will always depend on who we are as listeners and who we are as people. In this dissertation, I have argued that Western-enculturated listeners who identify with Western-styled classical music do so through an experience of empathy with virtual musical agents. This "empathic identification," which results from a listener's perception of strong similarity between their own human agency and the music's ascribed virtual agency, results in a phenomenal merger of the listener and music that introduces a virtual human (as opposed to virtual musical) agency "within" the music. I call this agency "the agential listener," and present it as a holographic projection of a human listener's agency into the music.

After introducing the main questions and concerns of this dissertation in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 defined virtual musical agency as a musical gesture which is perceived to be human-like—and which acts or feels with intentionality. Compositional structures can encourage such interpretations when (parts of) the music move in contrast to implied passive musical forces (i.e., the gravity of lower notes, the magnetism of the tonic pitch, etc.). Agency can further arise either diachronically (across-time) or synchronically (comparing different elements within a

simultaneity). However, a listener's personal human agency also affects agential ascription. While the listener can identify with any hierarchical level of virtual musical agency, from the individuated element to the piece as a whole (thus introducing the agential listener), the presence of the agential listener in fact parses and determines the level at which agency is identified. In other words, depending on which elements of the music are perceived to be similar to the listener's agency, the listener will group these elements together into cohesive agents, which may or may not correspond to the groupings heard by other listeners with different human agencies.

Empathy is the mechanism by which such connections between self and music arise, and in fact requires the presence of two agents between which similarity occurs. It consists of a simulation wherein the subject (either consciously or nonconsciously) takes the perspective of an "other" by projecting themselves into the other's shoes and/or mirroring the other's experiences within their own body and mind. While many conscious and nonconscious forms of empathy, compassion, and emotional contagion have been discussed by scholars, with terminology signifying different things to different people, I limit my discussion to conscious forms of empathy, whether imaginatively projected or internally assimilated.

Next, Chapter 3 considers the empathic merger between listener and music to be, more specifically, an experience of "empathic identification." Because agency can be experienced as either a *desire* or the *expression* of a desire, empathic identification can allow a listener to achieve either the expression of a desired agency or a reinforcement of their already-expressed agency. As a result, we must reject the two most common, yet extreme approaches to subjective interpretation taken within the field of music theory. Empathic identification is not a subjective free-for-all, but it can also not be explicitly determined by musical structure. Rather, a theory of empathic identification and the agential listener confines the field of possible agential

interpretations while leaving room for, and even *explaining,* the subjectivity of a listener's experience. Since each listener experiences a different set of human agencies (compared both to others and to the agencies which they experience at other times), a virtual musical agent that is similar to one listener may not be similar to another, resulting in the absence of the agential listener. Thus, the perception of similarity or difference in relation to a particular (potential) virtual musical agent depends closely on a listener's individualized human agency and can only be explained to the extent that this agency is known.

Chapter 4 illustrates the analytical applications of the agential listener by studying Chopin's Fourth Ballade, using Robert Hatten's agential analysis in his (2018) book as a grounds from which the agential listener can arise. For example, Hatten describes the introduction as an actant (i.e., a musical entity perceived to lack intentionality and human-like characteristics) in relation to the subsequent primary theme (through retrospective interpretation and/or anticipation of stylistic norms). I note that the introduction may also, however, be heard as agential if the listener is *either* desiring to experience, or *currently* experiencing, a pastoral and calm human agency that they wish to express or continue expressing, respectively. In such cases, an empathic identification with the calm introduction introduces the agential listener, merging the music and listener into a new virtual human agency that becomes the locus for comparison across subsequent musical gestures. Yet a listener who does not *desire* to feel a pastoral calm does not experience empathic identification and does not introduce the agential listener. Subsequent gestures and themes will thus continue to be heard in relation to the listener's personal human agency—at least for those listeners who use music as a means of self-expression and self-definition. The result may either be a series of unique interpretations for each successive hearing and state of human agency, or similar overarching interpretations even when different

empathic identifications are in play. Nevertheless, rather than defining a particular musical gesture as inherently agential or actantial, analysts will do better to recognize the power of human agency on interpretation and the varied effects that can arise.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores some of the practical implications of empathic identification. From the field of social psychology, we see that empathy can be built through a variety of interventions, including instructions to take on another's perspective, meditation, storytelling, and adjusting avoidance and approach motives that discourage or encourage individuals to empathize with others, respectively. In fact, these interventions can be shown to underlie and explain findings on listeners' engagement and enjoyment of classical music in a concert-hall setting. Listeners' personalities and the unique attributes of different genres and pieces also play a role in how likely it is for a listener to empathize with the music as approach and avoidance motives in their own right. Finally, factors such as cost, beliefs about the importance of genre-specific knowledge, and social approval can become avoidance motives for younger listeners' empathy with music in the concert-hall setting, more specifically. By understanding the role of empathy on listeners' real-world experiences of music, then, we can better understand and predict which "interventions" will encourage listeners to identify with music in the future.

## Future Directions

### *Rejecting Empathic Identification*

In this dissertation, I have presented empathic identification as a positively-valenced experience—one that can even foster a strong sense of personal human agency as a result of a listener's expression through and within the music. However, empathic identification is not always a positive experience; listeners may, in fact, actively avoid it in certain cases. For example, when a listener experiences contradictory agencies within themselves, they may

achieve self-expression of *one* agency but fail to express *another* that is more valuable at that time (see Chapter 3 for more on contradictory agency). Consider a listener who finds themselves able to empathically identify with a "sad" virtual musical agency because they are currently experiencing a similar feeling of sadness: despite the perks of empathic identification, if they do not *wish* to be sad, then such an experience becomes undesirable. To consider another example, a listener who hears an "obstinate" melody may be able to empathically identify with their *own* obstinance in day-to-day life. Yet if the listener does not *wish* to identify as a stubborn person, believing such stubbornness to be a negatively-valenced trait, they may resist empathic identification. The analyses undertaken in this dissertation have focused on the drive to identify with one type of virtual agency or another, but these examples reveal a potential for *avoiding* particular virtual agencies, as well. Thus, when a listener's *expressed* agency is different from their *desired* agency, the degree of unwelcomeness of empathic identification should be explored (for a more detailed discussion of listeners' rejection of musical agency, see Peltola and Vuoskoski 2022).

Empathic identification may also be undesirable due to the social setting of the listener. In the first example above, a listener who feels extreme sadness may wish to empathically identify with a sad virtual musical agency when they are *alone*, but not when they are with friends or in a concert hall if they suspect it would cause a less than socially acceptable physical reaction in them, such as crying. A listener who hears a joyful song on the radio while on their way to comfort a grieving friend may similarly feel the *desire* to feel joyful, yet consciously repress empathic identification in order to appropriately respond to the setting. Future research should explore when and to what extent listeners are able to thwart or choose against their own empathic identification in such ways.

*The Impact of Genre, Experience, and Enculturation*

The presence and effects of empathic identification in other genres of music should also be explored. Empathic identification, after all, does not depend on the content of any one musical domain, but on relational components. In other words, it is a perception of relational similarity between two entities that does not require those entities to have any particular features in and of themselves. Thus, while I have focused my discussion on instrumental Western Art Music, this theory should be considered in relation to other genres such as pop, jazz, gamelan, or any others with a potential for hearing virtual musical agency. In each case, analysis will need to be handled with an attention to the unique features of each individual genre, particularly when expanded to include music with lyrics, since the direct presence of a human voice will undeniably affect a listener's empathic identification. It may even be possible for a listener who would otherwise empathically identify with certain musical features to not identify with the music at all if they do not identify with the vocalist (or vice versa). Voice studies' interest in where the overall musical "voice" *resides* and *comes from* will certainly interact with the agential and empathic considerations of this dissertation, as well (see e.g., Eidsheim 2015, Abbate 1991). Thus, music theorists with different backgrounds and specialties will need to consider empathic identification as it relates to individual genres and sub-disciplines in the field.

In addition, how a more direct human presence impacts social roles, gender dynamics, and racial stereotypes that may enter into empathic identification should also be considered. This dissertation has focused on music from the Western Art Music canon, which is largely limited to music composed by straight white men. What kinds of empathic identifications arise with music of more diverse composers? How do such identifications interact with our experiences of diverse people in the "real world?" And is it ever *dangerous* to attempt empathic identification with a

compositional voice that, through virtual musical agency, presents an experience that is drastically different from one's own? Music by diverse composers *must* be considered moving forward in order to fully display the power of empathic identification to represent and respect a multitude of agencies and voices.

In addition, I have limited my discussion to Western-*enculturated* listeners; listeners who are otherwise enculturated should also be considered. Future questions might include, does musico-cultural experience affect which musical features a listener is most likely to interpret as agential and thus how they are likely to empathically identify? Do non-Western-enculturated listeners use music for self-expression via packaging and repackaging as readily or in the same way as Western-enculturated listeners? How do Western-enculturated listeners perceive agency in the music of other cultures, and how does that differ from how locally-enculturated listeners experience it? These questions will need to be addressed through a variety of analytical methods.

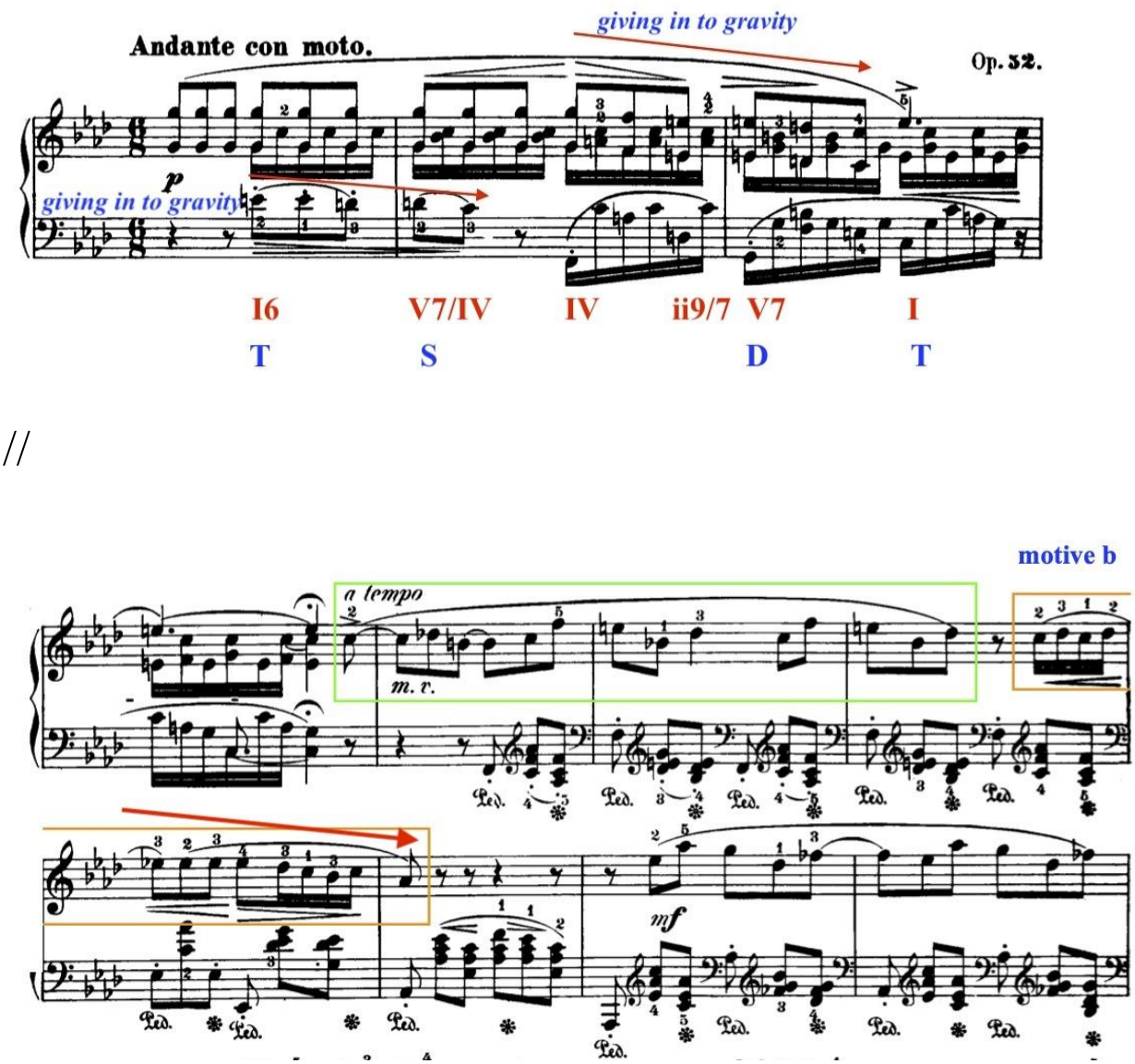
*Consciousness and Empathic Identification*

The role of the listener's consciousness is another important field of research to consider in the future. In this dissertation, I have limited my discussion to *conscious* forms of empathic identification. However, emotional contagion (the nonconscious form of mirroring) is a closely-connected component of empathy that deserves further consideration. *Must* a listener be aware of how they are identifying with music in order to experience the effects of the agential listener? Do nonconscious empathic identifications affect a listener in the same way as conscious forms? Emotional contagion has certainly been lauded as a nonconscious means through which emotion is brought about in music, but how does nonconscious empathic *identification,* more specifically, play a role in the listener's experience? For example, nonconscious empathic identification may lead to a nonconscious understanding of analytically-uncovered similarities.

To briefly illustrate this point, I will return to Chapter 4's analysis of Chopin's Ballade in F Minor.

Intriguingly, while a listener may not *consciously* hear the similarity in contour between the primary theme's motive *b* and the introduction in m. 1-7 when motive *b* is first introduced, a nonconscious experience of empathic identification may still connect these gestures via emotional similarity, since they can both be attributed with calmness (shown through the arrows in **Figure 6.1**). This was my own experience of the piece before I had considered it more analytically. Similarly, in mm. 38-57, I did not consciously recognize the connection between these materials at first. However, because I identified with the ruminating character of motive *a*, I also identified with the meandering key areas. Later, I discovered that the winding nature of motive *a* was replicated on a larger scale via the rapidly changing key areas in this section.

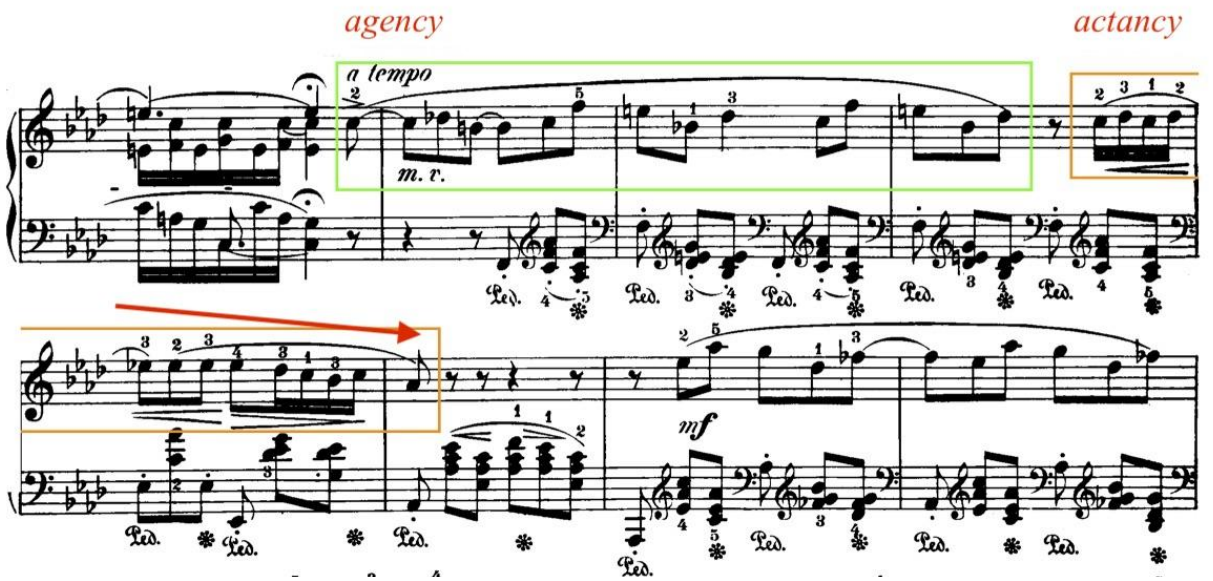
**Figure 6.1: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, m. 1-3; m. 7-14**



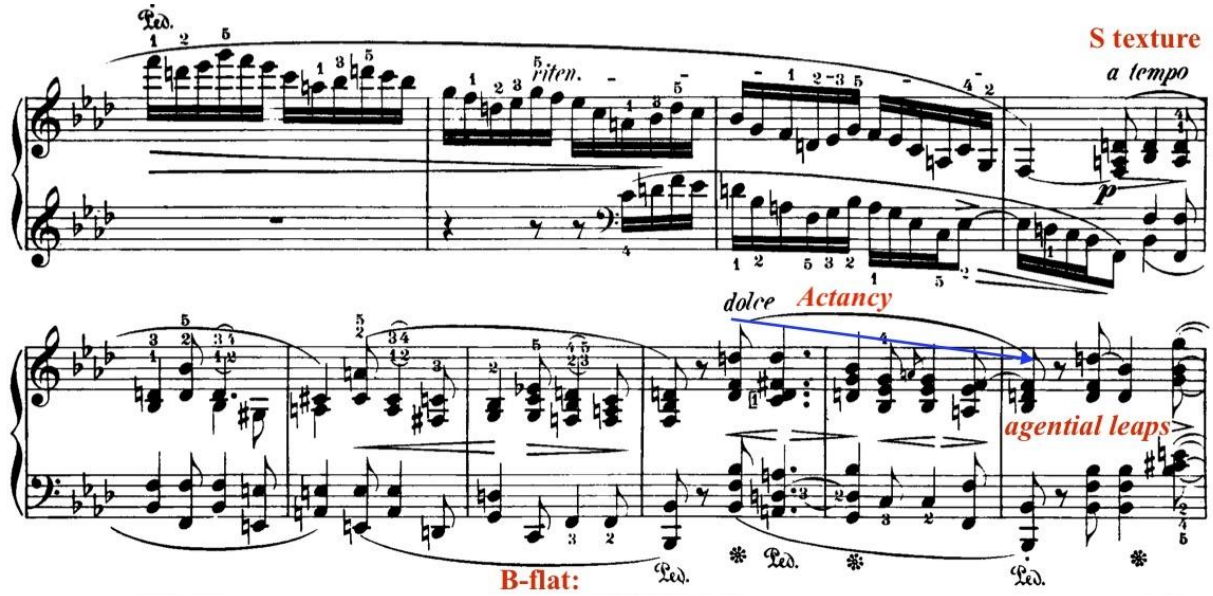

One final example will be useful. The manner in which the secondary theme's contour mirrors the primary theme (ending or beginning with a descending contour, respectively) may not be immediately apparent to the untrained listener **(Figure 6.2)**. Yet a listener who is not consciously aware of the relationship between the beginnings and endings of the themes, if they have nevertheless *identified* with one or the other (either the agency or actancy), are likely to

continue identifying with this component in the secondary theme and experience a contrast of empathic identification in the opposite order. As a result, empathic identification may enable nonmusician listeners to experience deep connections with the piece that are normally understood to be restricted to professional musicians. While they may not be consciously aware of hearing a connection between musical gestures or be able to put such an understanding into words even if they *were*, they may achieve a similarly rich experience. Future analysis, then, should explore in more detail how, and to what extent, empathic identification can inform a listener's interpretation.

**Figure 6.2: Frédéric Chopin, Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, m. 7-14; m. 81-92**




//



*Other Applications of Empathic Identification*

Music theory is not the only field in which empathic identification may provide explanatory power. Beyond listeners' subjective experiences, it may also prove useful to the study of music therapy, for instance. Since this field often seeks to understand and affect the individual's well-being, and since a personal sense of agency is necessary for such well-being to take place (McAdams 2015), a more nuanced understanding of how such agency arises between music and listener will be directly beneficial. Especially in the realm of social functioning, an understanding of how listeners interact with music through empathy as though it were a social "other" might inform approaches for better connecting listeners with "real-world" others.

Qualitative studies of the listening experience should also include studies of empathic identification. The better we are able to grasp the phenomenology of the listening experience from different listeners' groundings of personal human agency, the better we will be able to understand how music becomes meaningful at both subjective and intersubjective levels. Researchers might compare Western-music-enculturated listeners' experiences with the same Western-style piece, for example, or the experience of listeners who are enculturated in a variety of ways within the same piece. Researchers might also consider listeners' empathic identifications with music in a genre which they typically *dislike*, in a genre which they typically *like*, and/or in a genre with which they are unfamiliar. More specifically, future research should explore the hierarchical level at which the agential listener most frequently enters (if applicable), similarities between listeners' empathic identifications, and how/whether the specific hierarchical level of agential engagement at the beginning of a piece does, in fact, affect hierarchical engagement with the rest of the piece. Such qualitative research, of course, poses distinct challenges. Nonmusicians may not be able to articulate as clearly or fully the level at

which they are ascribing agency to the music, while musicians may listen in a more analytical (and thus less common) way than most. However, to the extent that such work can be accomplished, an understanding of the effects of empathic identification will be greatly increased.

## Conclusion

Listeners' interpretations of music will always be, to a certain extent, subjective. Rather than allowing this fact to derail our attempts to present a functioning theory of agency (specifically) and music (more broadly), it is my hope that a theory of the agential listener via empathic identification will enable current and future scholars to embrace their own subjectivity and the subjectivity of the listeners they consider. Empathy is a powerful tool with which humans engage the world; it is time for it to be established within our theories of music, as well.

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