EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMAN IDEALISM AND
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN BEETHOVEN’S
EROICA VARIATIONS, OP. 35

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that the dialectic and the metamorphosis of the basso del tema and tema in Beethoven’s Eroica Variations, Op. 35 mirror the stages of the philosophical thought of German Idealism. The philosophical systems of the post-Kantian generation were housed in the values of the Goethezeit, in which the concept of self was regarded as fundamental for the worldview. In Germany these systems generated a new intellectual ethos that merged cultural nationalism with the glorification of the self (Burnham). Beethoven’s music gave reliable expression to the values of the Goethezeit, depicting the self as a spiritual entity with a constitutive autonomy, a possibility for self-transcendence, and a fundamental condition of struggle for freedom. While research has focused on Beethoven’s heroic style (Broyles) and the philosophy of his music (Adorno), there is very little literature on the relationship between Beethoven’s music and the philosophical thought of the time. In 1930 Schenker discussed the use of the Eroica theme in the Eroica Variations (Marston): first, the material is stated in its simple form; then, rhythmic structure, dynamics, tempo, texture, and key transform it. Schenker considers the large-movement form rather than the theme, giving emphasis to the basso del tema.

This study proposes an analysis of Op. 35—focusing first on the first fourteen variations and then on the fifteenth variation and on the fugue individually—as the musical statement of the philosophical thought of the Goethezeit and offers a discussion on the historical perspectives in Op. 35. Then, the study applies the proposed philosophical and historical analysis of the Eroica Variations to explain how an interpretation based on critical theory can help concert performers develop a deeper understanding of such a demanding piece.
of repertoire. Finally, the study examines the *Eroica Variations* as one of the most substantial concert pieces for piano by Beethoven and of the beginning of the nineteenth century, and offers suggestions on how to meet the musical and technical challenges of the piece.
To all the musicians

who strive in the difficult field of classical music

in the twenty-first century.
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CHAPTER 1

READING PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY
IN BEETHOVEN’S EROICA VARIATIONS, OP. 35

All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*)

Nature knows no pause in progress and development, and attaches her curse on all inaction (Goethe, *Scientific Studies*)

The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom (Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*)

Music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend (Beethoven, *Letters*)

Immanuel Kant’s postulates of practical reason have an important significance for the development of German Idealism\(^1\)—a speculative philosophical movement that emerged in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a response to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and linked with both Romanticism and the revolutionary politics of the Enlightenment. These postulates, indispensable presuppositions for the representation of the highest good, are 1) the assumption of the immortality of the person, 2) the assumption of freedom in a positive sense as the determining feature of an entity existing in the intelligible world, and 3) the assumption of the existence of God as the

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\(^1\) The most notable thinkers in the movement were Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, while Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Gottlob Ernst Schulze, Karl Leonhard Reinhold and Friedrich Schleiermacher also made major contributions.
moral cause of the world. Kant conceives a “theoretical, but as such indemonstrable proposition, as it is inseparably linked to a practical law that is unconditionally valid a priori” (Kant 1968: 122). He explains that the highest good is thought to be possible, but not objectively known to be possible. Hence, the possibility of the highest good is solely a subjectively practical presupposition conceived by someone with a finite will for the sake of projecting and carrying out ethical purposes, a presupposition by means of which that individual assumes that these purposes can also be successful in the world and produce happiness or better conditions. Kant put many Christian images into his theory of the highest good; yet, he transformed their meaning in the context of his moral philosophy (Bauer and Dahlstrom 1999: 201-203). In the earliest drafts of their philosophies, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel tried to develop their own thought mainly by critically engaging Kant’s doctrine of postulates: Hegel’s idea of absolute freedom is contained in the “representation of me myself”—it is the content of the consciousness of the self-conscious entity that represents its very self (ibid.: 230). German Idealism made freedom its principal value; a transcendental subjectivity took shape as absoluter Geist, and it is this Spirit that carries this distinctive freedom within itself as a cosmic force. It is the freedom to make, to shape, to create (ibid.: 188).

The primary problem of philosophy is the dialectical tension between being and becoming. Plato’s classical solution was the dualistic theory of the forms, where he integrated Heraclitus’s dynamic theory of reality as becoming and Parmenides’s static

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2 Freedom is both the condition of the possibility of the highest good and also the ratio essendi of the moral law: this problem has its roots in the history of the development of Kant’s practical philosophy.

3 Several times in his Critique of Practical Reason Kant named the highest good “kingdom of God.”
world of being. Following Plato’s thought, the supposition of philosophers was that being and becoming were completely in opposition. Two thousand years after Plato, Hegel proposed a new and fundamentally diverse solution to the classical dialectic. Like Plato, Hegel combined being and becoming. While the theses of Heraclitus and Parmenides seem incompatible because being and becoming are in opposition, Hegel’s novelty is that the antithesis of being is not becoming but non-being or nothing. Hegel asserts that being and non-being are in a state of dynamic tension and what emerges from this tension is becoming. Differently from Plato, who gave priority to the world of being in his theory of the forms, Hegel puts emphasis on the higher reality of becoming. According to Hegel, the essence of nature is process. For him, the analysis of a thing discloses its internal contradictions. Through the dialectical process of being-non-being/nothingness-becoming, the initial idea of that thing is reshaped into a more compound comprehension, which terminates the contradictions. Hence, the Hegelian world unfolds through dialectical analysis, leading to a more complete understanding of the cosmos.

In her study on the Hegelian dialectic and Beethoven’s music, Janet Schmalfeldt discusses the main substance of her theory of musical “becoming,” which considers form as a process. She expands a processual-form theory designed in an analysis of Beethoven’s *Tempest Sonata* where she sees the formal functions emerging as the process itself and the formal unit as the span during which this process occurs. Schmalfeldt places her research within what she calls “the Beethoven-Hegelian tradition,” taken from Adorno’s understanding of Beethoven’s music as intrinsically Hegelian (Schmalfeldt 2011: 29-32). Considering this study and proposing a further philosophical and historical investigation of Beethoven’s music, this work argues that the dialectic and the
metamorphosis of the *basso del tema* and the *tema* in Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations*, Op. 35 mirror the stages of the philosophical thought of German Idealism and the historical perspectives of the early Nineteenth century, represented by the political acts and by the personality of Napoleon Bonaparte. The philosophical systems of the post-Kantian generation were housed in the values of the *Goethezeit*, in which the concept of self was regarded as fundamental for a worldview. Scott Burnham claims that in Germany these systems generated a new intellectual ethos that merged cultural nationalism with the glorification of the self. Beethoven’s music gave reliable expression to the values of the *Goethezeit*, depicting the self as a spiritual entity with a constitutive autonomy, a possibility for self-transcendence, and a fundamental condition of struggle for freedom (Burnham 1995: 112-113). While research has focused on Beethoven’s heroic style and on the philosophy of his music—Michael Broyles’s *Beethoven: The Emergence and Evolution of Beethoven’s Heroic Style* and Theodor Adorno’s *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music* are two strong works on these two topics—there is very little literature on the relationship between Beethoven’s music and the philosophical thought of the time and on how his music moves and transforms to portray it. In the totality of its form, Beethoven’s music represents a social process: it shows how each individual moment—in other words, each individual process of production within society—is made comprehensible only in terms of its function within the reproduction of society as a whole (Adorno 1998: 13).

The heroic style—a label traceable to the florid writings of Romain Rolland—has come to describe not only Beethoven’s music in its most triumphant vein, but also the

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4 The Age of Goethe is widely viewed as the apogee of German culture. Its writers and thinkers, especially Goethe, have been exalted as role models for life and art.
cultural triumph of this music (Mathew 2006). For Rolland, the term heroic style describes especially the “grand, exhortative tone of Beethoven’s public music (particularly the odd-numbered symphonies and the overtures) from the first decade or so of the nineteenth century” and it announces a new musical epoch (Mathew 2013: 18). The idea of the heroic style is thus inseparable from Beethoven’s most canonical works, the dramatic and often densely thematic pieces that were composed in or around the first decade of the nineteenth century. The rise of the heroic style has its origins in Beethoven’s acceptance of his deafness and in his determination to overcome it and to triumph with his music as an artist, as the letters of 1801 and the Heiligenstadt Testament elucidate (Burnham and Steinberg 2000: 37-38). As a result, Beethoven’s personal crisis generated a spiritual development that gave life to powerful works manifesting his will to overcome his sufferings and to arrive at a personal victory. In Beethoven’s works, we can read at least three varieties of heroism: 1) the emphasis on the fallen hero, his death, and the solemn celebration of his life (as in the funeral marches of Op. 26 and of the Eroica Symphony slow movement); 2) the emphasis on the imaginative heroism of the triumphant inner will (as in the first movement of the Eroica Symphony and in the Fifth Symphony); and 3) the silent heroism of tolerance (as in the representation of Florestan throughout the opera Fidelio) (ibid.: 43). The Eroica Variations, Op. 35 are a part of Beethoven’s heroic style and part of the three varieties of heroism can be read in the different sections of this piece. Yet, the real hero of this piece is the history of the beginning of the nineteenth century generated by German Idealism, captured in his advent and depicted by the hope of its triumph: the hero as represented in the Eroica
Variations accords powerfully with what Beethoven felt in the idea of the “heroic” in his life as well as in his art.

Beethoven wrote in a letter to the publishers Breitkopf und Härtel that Op. 35 is “worked out in quite a new manner (neue Manier)” (Anderson 1961: no. 62/I: 76). This supports what he told his friend Krumpholz after completing his Piano Sonata Op. 28, according to an anecdote recounted by Carl Czerny: “I am only a little satisfied with my previous works. From today on I will take a new path” (Solomon 1977: 117). It seems clear that Beethoven was consciously abandoning some of the models set by his predecessors. In the Eroica Variations the new manner is notable: Beethoven begins not with a melody, but with a bass line alone in octaves (the basso del tema in the score). Then, he adds contrapuntal voices to this bass and expands the register to form the theme (the tema in the score). However, the neue Manier of Op. 35 is not completely revolutionary because it incorporates traditional and innovative compositional procedures. For instance, the figurative variations (I, II, and IV), the Minore Variation XIV, the use of a canon in Variation VII, and the return of the theme at the end of the cycle can be considered traditional ideas. Yet, the gradual development of the theme from the bass line, Variation VI in C Minor, and the fugal finale are innovative practices (Sipe 1998: 17-19).

The main “musical ingredient” of the Eroica Variations comes from the allegorical ballet The Creatures of Prometheus (Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus of 1801) (Kinsky and Halm 1955). According to Greek mythology, Prometheus is a titan, the deity who was the creator of mankind and its greater benefactor, hence, a hero. Using the theme of another hero, Beethoven builds Op. 35 to depict the philosophy and the history
of a nineteenth century hero, Napoleon Bonaparte. With the *Eroica Variations*, the hero Prometheus enters the nineteenth century as Napoleon, another Promethean figure, the only man in Europe who seemed to deserve that description as benefactor of humanity (Swafford 2014: 333). The historical and social order is changed, yet the features of the hero are the same: Beethoven saw Prometheus not only as a titan who suffered under the authority of Zeus, but also as an “aristocrat” who taught morality to humankind (Sipe 1998: 20), and saw Napoleon as the new titan of the nineteenth century who had to make Europe free from the monarchic obscurantism, making the ideals of liberty and brotherhood triumph in history. Napoleon had just started his self-willed ascent and, when Beethoven was composing his Op. 35, was the conqueror and benevolent despot who proposed to bring Europe peace, republican governments, the rule of law, and an end to ancient tyrannies. Hegel himself declared Napoleon a “world spirit on horseback” (Swafford 2014: 333). Moreover, behind the figure of the hero Prometheus/Napoleon, in the *Eroica Variations* is the hero Beethoven. Many critics have seen in Beethoven’s victory over the Heiligenstadt crisis an achievement of Promethean dimensions—the Heiligenstadt Testament marks “a watershed in the creative life of Beethoven which is hard to parallel in the life of any other composer” and is deeply spiritual (Downs 1970: 585). The Promethean works composed after the Heiligenstadt Testament—the *Eroica Variations* and the *Eroica Symphony*—show the triumphant side of his crisis, and Beethoven thought of himself as something of a Prometheus/Napoleon: his mission was the edification of humankind through art. He wrote: “Compelled to be a philosopher as early as my twenty-eighth year;—it is not an easy matter,—more difficult for the artist than any other man” (Beethoven 1964: 81).
The Promethean image of Beethoven has been supported in recent scholarship by the idea of the “heroic.” I believe that Beethoven’s Promethean identity will most probably continue to be investigated because it incorporates the ethical values of the force of humanism. According to Theodor Adorno, the power of Beethoven’s music lies on two strains of Enlightenment thought, *humanity* and *demythologization* (Adorno 1998: 142). This characteristic claim aims at lining up the composer’s profile with that of the modern subject, because humanity and demythologization can be interpreted as the propelling forces of the Enlightenment itself. The human being who “dares to know” (*Sapere aude!*), as Kant popularly elucidates the motto of the *Aufklärung*, is an agent who demythologizes (Kant 1983: 41). The “dare” of this knowing is in fragmenting every mythical prohibition under the voice of reason, changing a being who was once controlled by myth into a subject that controls itself. Hence, demythologization is the process of Enlightenment freedom and, as such, it shapes the exact definition of what to be human signifies in the modern world. For Adorno, Beethoven’s humanity generates exactly from this definition: by liberating music from the cultic responsibilities of the past, the composer reflects the human being who “dares to know.” In this way, demythologization is the mechanism that makes the autonomous subject and an autonomous music recognize themselves as brothers of a new humanity. Paradoxically, however, according to Daniel Chua, the emancipation of music from cult corresponds historically with its elevation to the status of cult: “Far from secularizing music,

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5 Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and prefers critical thinking and evidence–rationalism, empiricism–over acceptance of dogma or superstition. The meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it.
demythologization tends to convert the means into an end, making a religious art an art religion. This dialectical reversal is not so much a failure intrinsic to music as a condition of the Enlightenment itself” (Chua 2009: 572).

As Adorno suggests, “The Enlightenment reverts to mythology” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1999: xvi). This happens because the human being, since he has become the controller of himself through knowledge, is not the image of God anymore, but has become a god who generates his own certainties as it demythologizes the past. Theologically, God is replaced by man. In a similar way, Beethoven’s music replaces its cultic functions instead of breaking them out: his music functions as the worship of secular humanism, ratifying the profane rituals of the Enlightenment. Hence, what is temporal asks the sacred to legitimate its potential, and it is exactly this contradiction that Adorno sees in Beethoven’s demythologizing force. Adorno asserts that Beethoven’s “powers of subjective production are heightened to the point of hubris, to the point where man becomes Creator” (Adorno 1998: 151). His music, by “gaining-power-over-[it]self,” is free to combat myth, “to stand firm against fate,” and to resist “hope without the lie of religion” (ibid.: 169 and 174) It is “the this-wordly prayer of the bourgeois class, the rhetorical music of the secularization of the Christian liturgy.” “Thy will be done,” it prays with the exception that the will it implores is not the will of God, but the spirit of man, entrusted with the duty of rendering the world as it “should be” (ibid.: 163). Therefore, the Beethoven of humanity and demythologization is the Promethean/Beethoven, and the human being in the German composer is a version of a mythic figure, whose personal qualities shaped by the Enlightenment originate from his rebelliousness against the divine order. Prometheus “dares to know” by thieving fire from
Zeus to make mankind free from despotism. He is the myth of demythologization itself, the exact symbol of the new humanity of the Enlightenment thinkers.

Each great epoch of humanity has its own human archetype. The whole being of Beethoven—his intelligence, his will, his ideology his sensitivity, and his conception of the world—represents the European epoch of his time. Beethoven’s music in the *Eroica Variations* is the music of a new society. However, before the new can emerge, an emancipation of the man as individual has to occur (Rolland 1964: 2). Beethoven belongs to the first generations of those “young Goethes” who, sons and daughters of the ideals of the French Revolution, discovered the concepts of the individual and liberty and strenuously fought for them. As a musician, he combats through his art: his music becomes for him the field in which to locate the thoughts, the battles, and the desires of his time. In history, after the French Revolution, comes Napoleon: Beethoven bears him within himself, and the course of Napoleon runs in his veins as the circulation of the blood of history itself. In the *Eroica Variations* Beethoven begins from the theme of an old hero (Prometheus) and portrays the triumph of new philosophical ideals of his time through a new hero (Napoleon), who proposes a historical plan nurtured by those ideals that he embraced and supported through his art. In Op. 35 Prometheus’s fashionable dance is reworked in a philosophical way in the first fourteen variations and in the *Largo* variation, while in the fugal finale the historical order emerges, filled with a new, heroic character.

Departing from all the above considerations, I will first address the transformation of the musical material throughout the dialectic *tema-basso del tema* in the first fourteen variations, investigating the Hegelian dialectic; I will propose an analysis of the fifteenth
variation as the musical statement of the philosophical thought of the Goethezeit; I will read the fugue from a philosophical and historical perspective; I will present an examination of the Eroica Variations as one of the most substantial concert pieces for piano by Beethoven and of the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, performed in recital by renowned concert performers of the past and present like Schnabel, Kempff, Gilels, Richter, and Brendel, to name a few; and I will suggest that the philosophical and historical reading of the Eroica Variations is an example to explain how a critical theory interpretation can help concert performers towards a correct rendition of a demanding piece of repertoire.
CHAPTER 2

TEMA, BASSO DEL TEMA, FIRST FOURTEEN VARIATIONS, AND THE HEGELIAN DIALECTIC IN OP. 35

I will follow Schenker’s approach in my analysis of the piece, addressing it “variation by variation” and considering both the tema and the basso del tema (see Table 1). In 1930, Schenker discussed the use of the Eroica theme in the Eroica Variations in an unpublished study (Marston 1997) and analyzed one variation at a time, giving emphasis not only on the tema, but also the basso del tema. Example 1 shows the basso del tema in the opening measures of Op. 35 in the Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel edition.

Table 1: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35—Overview of the piece.

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<td>Tema</td>
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<td>Variations I to XIV</td>
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<td>Variation XV—Largo</td>
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<td>Finale. Alla fuga</td>
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<td>Coda</td>
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*This study is a private, unpublished analysis of the piano variation cycle Op. 35. It was an appendix to one of Schenker’s most extensive and mature essays, his study on Beethoven’s Eroica Symphony. Marston translated it for the first time in 1997. Schenker’s study of Op. 35 is preserved today as part of the Ernest Oster Collection at the New York Public Library.*

*All the musical examples of Beethoven’s Op. 35 in this study are taken from the Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel edition. For a comparison with the composer’s manuscript visit the International Music Score Library Project webpage http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/1/1e/IMSLP51108-PMLP05827-Op.35_Manuscript.pdf*
Example 1: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–
_basso del tema_.

As Example 2 shows, the material of the theme is stated in its simple form. Then, in each variation this material is transformed and developed through rhythmic structure, dynamics, tempo, texture, and key. In the first fourteen variations, Beethoven transforms the _tema_ and _basso del tema_ in many ways; however, he adheres to binary form and does not move from the four plus four phrasing, except in the _Presto_ cadential area before the last four measures in Variation II. The _basso del tema_ is first presented in octaves and in the middle register in the Introduzione, then it is stated in different textures: in the _A due_ it is in the bass line of a duet, in the _A tre_ it is in a dialogue between parts and moves between notes in the treble and bass registers; and in the _A quattro_ it moves to the upper voice in a march-like presentation. The _tema_ is stated in its simple version from bar 68 onward.
Example 2: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–tema.

\[\text{TEMA.}\]

Table 2 shows bar numbers, key, character (considering that the tempo marking remains that same Allegretto vivace of the Introduzione col Basso del Tema), and main features of each of the first fourteen variations. In Variation I, the tema is ornamented, yet it conforms strictly to the pre-existing design. The version of the tema in Variation II presents arpeggiated passages in triplet rhythmic figures, while Variation III is a fast-paced section: in these two variations both the tema and the basso del tema are difficult to capture in some spots, even if the harmonic scheme is intact. Variation IV is, according to Tovey, “a running etude for the left hand,” presenting a skeleton of the tema played by the right hand and a virtuosic display of the left hand passage (Tovey 1935-39: 32).
Table 2: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35—Features of Var. I to Var. XIV.

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<th>Variation</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>85-100</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>graceful</td>
<td><em>tema</em> is embellished, <em>basso del tema</em> keeps its harmonic scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>101-116</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>heroic/brilliant</td>
<td><em>tema</em> is in arpeggiated in triplet rhythmic figures, <em>basso del tema</em> keeps its harmonic scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>117-132</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>playful</td>
<td><em>tema</em> and <em>basso del tema</em> are difficult to capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>133-150</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>etude-like</td>
<td><em>tema</em> is in fragments, LH virtuoso passage replaces <em>basso del tema</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>151-166</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>intimate</td>
<td><em>tema</em> in cantabile style, <em>basso del tema</em> is missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>167-190</td>
<td>C Minor</td>
<td>dramatic</td>
<td><em>tema</em> is re-harmonized in C Minor; E Flat Major returns in the last two measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII–<strong>Canone all’ottava</strong></td>
<td>191-208</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>witty Baroque canon</td>
<td>two-part canon at the octave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>209-227</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>Romantic</td>
<td>singing style, blurred harmonies due to pedaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>228-247</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>virtuoso/bold</td>
<td>focus is on the <em>basso del tema</em>, which is presented the grace notes of the bass line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>248-265</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>dance-like</td>
<td><em>tema</em> and <em>basso del tema</em> are indistinguishable; shift to C Flat in mm. 9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>266-284</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>improvisatory-like</td>
<td>new melodic idea with different contour from the original <em>tema</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>285-300</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>etude-like</td>
<td>contrary motion, contrasting dialogue, and dynamic changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>301-318</td>
<td>E Flat Major</td>
<td>humorous/heroic</td>
<td>use of intervals of a second contrasting with tonic and dominant chords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV–<strong>Minore</strong></td>
<td>319-350</td>
<td>E Flat Minor</td>
<td>dark</td>
<td>change to the parallel minor; <em>basso del tema</em> in the upper part in the first eight measures</td>
</tr>
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The graceful statement of the \textit{tema} in cantabile style of Variation V contrasts with the energetic, racing figures of Variation IV: the upper line provides the main material of the melody, and the part played by the left hand is in dialogue with the melodic material, at times like a countermelody. The \textit{basso del tema} is not in this variation, and here the ambiguity of whether the \textit{tema} or the \textit{basso del tema} is the fundamental element of the work returns. Following Beethoven’s practice of surprising audiences with unexpected changes, Variation VI shifts from the key of E Flat Major into the relative key of C Minor. This is the first variation in which the \textit{tema} can be clearly heard again–it is re-harmonized, not transposed, in C Minor. In the first section of this variation, the melodic theme is presented un-transposed, that is in E Flat Major, and almost unchanged (in bar 7 the note E flat is altered to E natural) and functions as the upper voice of the harmonic progression that begins in C Minor and modulates to F Minor, hence it is alienated in harmonic-tonal terms (Dahlhaus 1991: 172). The change of key lasts for thirty bars before returning to the tonic in the last two bars of the variation. Variation VII is a two-part canon at the octave: Beethoven’s decision to use the idea and the technique of the canon–a form of the past in a new work structured in variations–brings to the piece an element of wit. Contrasting with the structure and strict order of Variation VII, Variation VIII is one of the most “Romantic moments” in the piece. This section presents a free and singing style of piano writing, where the use of the pedal extends and blurs notes.

While in the first eight variations Beethoven deals with the modification of the \textit{tema}, in Variation IX he shifts the focus back to the \textit{basso del tema}: this variation shows the bold and brilliant style of the piano writing first introduced in Variation II.
Beethoven’s way of using the *basso del tema* in this variation is artful. A series of repeated B-Flats (a dominant pedal point) is set in the rhythm of the *basso del tema*. Each repeated B-Flat is preceded by a grace note, all of which, taken together, present the notes of the *basso del tema*. The *tema*, difficult to recognize since Variation VII, is also undistinguishable in Variation X, which presents only its basic binary structure. While the musical motion in the first eight measures of this variation is predictable, measures 9-12 show flexibility and novelty: here Beethoven, instead of moving from E-Flat to B-Flat, shifts the pitch up a half-step from B-Flat to C-Flat in a sudden change of character. Moreover, the texture in this variation is light and playful. A new melodic idea of Baroque style, with the contour differing from the original *tema*, is presented in Variation XI, while the basic rounded binary structure is retained. Both Variations XII and XIII are other examples of Beethoven’s playful character: Variation XII features contrary motion, contrasting dialogue with dynamic changes between the right and left hand passages, and Variation XIII features the use of intervals of a second contrasting with the basic tonic and dominant chords. The character of the piece changes again at the beginning of Variation XIV where, with the sudden change of tonality to E Flat Minor, the role for the *basso del tema* also changes. In the first measures of this variation, the *basso del tema* appears in the right-hand part, and thematic material also appears below it. In the repetition from bar 8, the *basso del tema* returns in the lower staff, and melodic material from the *tema* is above (Abbazio 2010: 47-51).

While in each of the first fourteen variations of Op. 35 the material of both the *tema* and the *basso del tema* is artfully modified, nothing unexpected happens in their musical motion. Yet, the *tema* and the *basso del tema* move dialectically, each trying to
establish supremacy over the other, as will be clear in the following discussion. I read the Hegelian dialectic in the musical motion of the *tema* and the *basso del tema* in the first fourteen variations. Hegel’s metaphysics is based on the dialectic method, which is a series of integrations of ideas and their negations that eventually result in the “Whole” or totality of the world, which is the final integration of everything (the model of thesis-antithesis-synthesis). Theodor Adorno considers form in Beethoven’s music as this type of dialectic process: he claims that moments, taken individually, seem to contradict each other; yet the meaning of Beethovenian form as process lies in the continuous mediation of these contradictions:

*The special relationship between the systems of Beethoven and Hegel lies in the fact that the unity of the whole is to be understood merely as something mediated. Not only is the individual element insignificant, but the individual moments are estranged from each other... By contrast, the Beethovenian unity is one which moves by means of antitheses...* (Adorno 1998:13)

The Hegelian dialectic, commonly represented by a triad, consists of three dialectical stages of development: a *thesis*, which produces a response, an *antithesis*, which is in contradiction with the thesis, and a *synthesis*, which resolves the tension between thesis and antithesis. While this terminology is usually referred to be Hegelian, Hegel attributed it to Kant. Following Kant’s work, Fichte also expanded the triadic model, and made it popular. Hence, as Limnatis asserts, it is German Idealism (specifically Hegel) that has made remarkable contributions to define the meaning, scope, and use of dialectic, making it the focal point of the philosophical discourse (Limnatis 2010: 2). Hegel employed a triadic logical model that is homologous to the thesis-antithesis-synthesis one, but he used three different terms: abstract-negative-concrete. While the formula thesis-antithesis-synthesis does not make clear why the thesis needs
the contradictory antithesis, the formula abstract-negative-concrete, presupposes a defect—incompletion—in any thesis (the abstract lacks the negative of the experience). For Hegel, the concrete, the synthesis, the absolute, has to experience the phase of the negative towards completion, that is, mediation.

Table 3: The Hegelian triadic model in the first fourteen variations of Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35. The triadic model is presented entirely two times. The third time it is presented incompletely: only the thesis (Variation XIII) and the synthesis (Variation VIX) are represented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CYCLE 1</th>
<th>CYCLE 2</th>
<th>CYCLE 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THESIS</td>
<td>I, II, III</td>
<td>IX</td>
<td>XII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTITHESIS</td>
<td>IV, V, VI</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNTHESIS</td>
<td>VII, VIII</td>
<td>XI, XII</td>
<td>XIV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading the Hegelian dialectic in the first fourteen variations of Op. 35 (see Table 3), the thesis is represented by the variations where the *basso del tema* (which in the piece is stated first) has the supremacy over the *tema* (Variations I, II, III, IX, XIII) the antithesis is represented by the variations where the *tema* has supremacy over the *basso del tema* (Variations IV, V, VI, X) and the synthesis is represented by the variations where both the *tema* and the *basso del tema* have the same importance in the musical motion (Variations VII, VIII, XI, XII, XIV). In the first fourteen variations, the triadic model is represented entirely only two times: the first time the thesis is stated in Variations I, II, III, the antithesis in Variations IV, V, VI, and the synthesis in Variations VII and VIII; the second time the thesis is stated in Variation IX, the antithesis in Variation X, and the synthesis in Variations XI and XII. The third time the triadic model is presented incompletely: only the thesis (Variation XIII) and the synthesis
(Variation VIX) are represented. I read the lack of the antithesis in the third iteration as Beethoven’s way to represent the imperfection of the thesis. The Hegelian mediation (the synthesis), however, even without the antithesis, is reached in Variation XIV, where in the first two phrases the first four bars of the *basso del tema* are completed by the last four bars of the *tema*. This happens twice, in both the treble and bass parts (see Example 3, bars 1-16). For Beethoven, mediation lies in having the two parts share the *tema* and the *basso del tema*.

The relationship between the systems of Beethoven and Hegel is in the unity of the whole to be understood as something mediated. The Beethovenian unity moves by means of antithesis: its moments—in the first fourteen variations of Op. 35, the *tema* and the *basso del tema*, taken individually—seem to contradict each other. Yet, the meaning of the Beethovenian form as a process lies in the incessant mediation between these individual moments, and, through the consummation of the form as a whole, the antithetical motifs are captured in their identity. Only the whole proves their identity; as individual elements they are as antithetical to each other as is the individual to the society confronting him (ibid.: 13).

Sara Eckerson argues that *psychological coherence* points at creating strong relations between performance practice, significant material in a piece of music, form, and the inventive process (Eckerson 2015: 429-422). She asserts that the discussion of
psychological coherence by Adolph Bernhard Marx relates to Hegel’s conviction that art “should disclose an inner life, feeling, soul, a content and spirit, which is just what we call the significance of a work of art” (Hegel 1975: 20). What we search for in a piece of art (and in particular in a piece of music) is the material object, therefore psychological coherence does not depend only on the composer’s personality as the fount of explanation. The notion of psychological coherence goes beyond feeling because it consider intellect and intuitiveness. Marx, in his theoretical analysis and in his writings, gives a particular consideration to the part of performance as a perceptible reproduction of meaning. All this makes the perception of meaning broader, as we are tested to both hear and see it in analysis. Marx discussed this issue in his treatise on the correct performance of Beethoven’s music for piano: he identified the unusual nature of the content of Beethoven’s music in comparison to the music of other composers. According to Marx, a proper interpretation of Beethoven’s music for piano demands to the pianist to capture and understand the underlying meaning or thought within the music:

[A correct performance of meaning in Beethoven’s music] is not reached by a general subjective feeling (Gefühl) as would suffice for the pianoforte works of...Haydn, Mozart, Dussek, Hummel, Chopin, Mendelssohn...The peculiar content of Beethoven’s style manifests itself in the fact that through his works, instrumental and more particularly pianoforte music, attained to idealism and became the expression of determined ideal thought (idealen Inhalts). (Marx 1895: 15)

8 The interpretation of psychological coherence addressed here comes from a Hegelian interpretation of psychology.
9Adolph Bernhard Marx (1795–1866) has a notable place in historical musicology, aesthetics, and criticism as one of the early supporters of Beethoven’s music. He is regarded as a predecessor to Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935), who advanced revolutionary ideas in music theory while keeping a sharp awareness for aesthetic properties and meaning that are caught in performance.
Psychological coherence is useful to give a solution to the complexities of meaning in a piece of music when the material varies from a singular and principal thought throughout the whole (for instance, the concept of departure and return in the Sonata, Op. 81a, Les Audieux); however, it can explain works that present concurrent ideas that are in contrast or in conflict with each other, as it happens with the *tema* and *basso del tema* in the first fourteen variations of Op. 35. Marx’s discussion of psychological coherence applies to my analysis of the first fourteen variations of Op. 35 for two reasons: 1) the task of psychological coherence, which makes contrasting ideas (*tema* and *basso del tema*) comprehensible in the same work in a sense of progress toward the establishment/representation of an idea (in my reading, the Hegelian dialectic), imitates an action in thought—fundamentally psychological—of dialectic itself; and 2) in accordance to the Hegelian definition of dialectic regarding comprehension, where a thesis and antithesis interact in contradiction in the process of sublimation towards the absolute, the two components (*tema* and *basso del tema*) of the musical work are not negated in the organic process of the first fourteen variations. Even though these two components of the *Eroica Variations* are apparently in contradiction and act as two separated identities, I see in the interaction of these parts a process to arrive at the final conclusion, to represent the whole, to express the idea that lies within the musical motion of the *tema* and the *basso del tema* in the first fourteen variations of Op. 35, which is in my reading the Hegelian dialectic. Hence, I agree with Eckerson that psychological coherence functions as an essential driving energy of meaning of the whole that directs the attention away from the common subjective feeling (*Gefühl*) in the direction of a defined ideal content. Marx’s concept of psychological coherence demonstrate how
musical components mirror parts of an idea, or ideal content, even if they seem to contradict the identity of this idea; psychological coherence presents the parts as particular ideas or thoughts, which can then be absorbed into the whole (Eckerson 2015: 424).

A piece of art, from the Hegelian point of view, mirrors, and is created through, the spirit. The spirit is mind or intellect, the inner life of the subject, which is universal. Hegel writes:

"Our imaginative mentality has in itself the character of universality, and what it produces acquires already thereby the stamp of universality in contrast to the individual things in nature. In this respect our imagination has the advantage that it is of wider range and therefore is capable of grasping the inner life, stressing it, and making it more visibly explicit. Now the work of art is of course not just a universal idea, but its specific materialization; but since it has been produced by spirit and its imaginative power, it must be permeated by this character of universality, even though this character has a visible liveliness... The artist therefore does not adopt everything in the forms or modes of expression which he finds outside him in the external world and because he finds it there; on the contrary, if he is to create genuine poetry, he grasps only those characteristics which are right and appropriate to the essence of the matter in hand." (Hegel 1975: 164)

Theodor Adorno makes explicit the connection between Beethoven and Hegel (Pearce 2006: 7). In his notes for an unpublished project on the composer, Adorno explores in depth the dialectical struggle as it happens in both the music of Beethoven and the philosophy of Hegel: “Beethoven study must also yield a philosophy of music, that is, it must decisively establish the relation of music to conceptual logic. Only then will the comparison with Hegel’s Logic, and therefore the interpretation of Beethoven, be not just an analogy but the thing itself” (Adorno 1998: 11).

Adorno asserts that music and metaphysics can express the same attitudes and experiences: “[Beethoven’s] music expressed the same experiences which inspired
Hegel’s concept of the World Spirit” (ibid.: 32). There is no doubt that we see two equivalents here, one at the level of expression and one at the level of experience. For Adorno, the sphere of experience is about the world in which both Beethoven and Hegel lived. They both were born in 1770, and Hegel died only four years after Beethoven. Adorno’s reading of the relation between the two personalities regarding experience focuses on the French Revolution, a fundamental event in the paths of life of both men. Beethoven, for Adorno, is “the musical prototype of the revolutionary bourgeoisie,” and his music “the essence of society…becomes the essence of music itself…[and the] kinship with that bourgeois libertarianism which rings all through Beethoven’s music is a kinship of the dynamically unfolding totality” (ibid.: 43). Therefore, Beethoven’s music is not only reproduction or resemblance, because “in [his] music society is conceptlessly known, not photographed.” This equivalent at the level of experience can be understood in this way: Hegel and Beethoven made use of independent mediums to express a revolutionary/ bourgeois awareness of life. This equivalent at the level of experience is feasible only because “the approach taken by both Hegel and Beethoven reflects a capitalist logic in which the free individual is pre-shaped by the universal whole” (Pearce 2006: 7). This consideration leads to the other equivalent, the level of expression.

In my reading, Beethoven’s musical motion in the first fourteen variations of Op. 35 is a representation of an interpretation of the world, and particularly of the process that the great Hegelian dialectic philosophy perceives the world to be. That process that Beethoven’s music was able to deliver in its own language is the same process that Hegel conveys with his philosophy: the process of human consciousness that arrives to comprehend itself. Spirit, for Hegel, is able to attain true knowledge in the moment it
ceases to consider itself as separate entity from the world it attempts to comprehend, hence in the moment it understands that each practical experience of the world already carries within itself the whole history of consciousness and all its constant change. The interaction in contradiction of the *tema* and *basso del tema* that create a whole in the musical motion of the first fourteen variations in Op. 35 is Beethoven’s communication of historically particular knowledge, the specific instances that Hegel’s consciousness finds along the course of history. For this reason, it represents Hegel’s dialectic, thanks to which consciousness makes itself free from the boundaries of time and place and reaches the universal.
CHAPTER 3

THE LARGO VARIATION XV: THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND MUSIC
AND THE BEETHOVENIAN IDEAL OF FREEDOM

I consider the Largo as a movement separated from the rest of the work because
of its expanded form–41 bars vs 16 bars in the other fourteen variations–, its thematic
transformations, and its musical stature compared to the other sections. This movement is
anticipated by the Minore Variation XIV, which functions as a “moment of separation”
between the first fourteen variations and the parts that follow in the piece–the Largo, the
Fugue, and the final Coda. The switch to the parallel major/minor key is a common
feature of other sets of variations–Beethoven himself used the C Major tonality in his
32 Variations in C Minor, WoO 80 and Mozart’s first movement of the Sonata in
A Major, K. 331 presents the parallel minor key in the third variation, a beautiful, sudden,
and unexpected turn. However, the Minore variation in Op. 35 has a different function: it
represents a turn to a new perspective within the musical structure of the piece.
Variation XIV seems to be “new” only because it is in E Flat Minor: its structure and
phrasing do not differ from the previous thirteen variations. Yet, Variation XIV is the
preamble of the Largo: this variation should be played slower than the consistent tempo
of the other thirteen variations–heading hence to the slower tempo of the Largo.
Moreover, it finishes with a long E Flat Minor chord with a fermata and is linked to the
Largo by an embellishing passage that avoids separation between its music and the
beginning of Variation XV–Largo.
Example 4: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–
comparison between *tema* and its transformed version in mm. 1-4 of Variation XV–
*Largo*.

In Example 4, the *tema* and the *basso del tema* are compared with the transformed
version presented in the *Largo*: while the melody is embellished by ornamentation, a
different *basso* for the first time accompanies it. This *basso*, after moving from E-Flat up
a fifth to B-Flat as in the *basso del tema*, goes then down a fourth to F and continues to C,
up a fifth again. This progression I-V-ii-vi is embellished by the tonicization to F Minor
and it is followed by a measure (bar 5) where the first four notes of the melody (G-E-
Flat-D-F) are repeated by the *basso*—this bar functions as an embellishment of the return
of E-Flat in the *basso* (see Example 5).
Example 5: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–Largo, mm. 1-6.

The statement at the beginning of the Largo initiates a musical motion that presents a continuous transformation of the tema and the basso del tema and a revisited dialectic based no more on the varied melody theme over a richer or less harmonized bass but on a dialogue of notes where melody and bass merge into each other and integrate.

In Example 6–Variation XV, bars 25-28–the music of the Largo reaches its climax of integration: the dialogue triumphs as the result of an interaction of the parts where the main subject is the whole, not the division.
Example 6: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–Largo, mm. 25-28.

The interaction of the parts in this section is akin to the structure of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s sculpture *Apollo and Daphne* (see Figure 1): this piece of art represents Daphne’s metamorphosis with intense emotion and drama by portraying the different stages of her changes. In the myth, Eros, god of love, wounds Apollo, god of the sun, with a golden arrow. He also wounds Daphne, a young woman, a follower of Artemis, goddess of the hunt, and daughter of the god of the river, Peneus, with a lead arrow.
Apollo immediately falls in love with the nymph, but she does not want his love. In fact, Daphne refused any who loved her because she hated marriage and wished to be alone. Many times her father Peneus asked for a son-in-law and grandchildren, but Daphne requested to remain unmarried and her father consented.

Figure 1: Apollo and Daphne by Gian Lorenzo Bernini.
Apollo chases her, and she begins to flee, frightened by him. Being more captivated by her beauty as she runs away, he grows impatient and soon, sped by Eros, reaches her. Feeling her strength failing, Daphne cries out to her father and asks for help. Peneus responds just as Apollo captures her. Daphne’s skin turns to bark, her hair leaves, her arms branches, her feet roots, her face a treetop and the end result is a beautiful laurel tree. After the transformation, Apollo still embraces the tree. He cuts off some of her branches and leaves to make a wreath and proclaims the laurel as a sacred tree. The interaction with the sculpture—walking around it—is necessary to capture the metamorphosis (there is more than one optimal viewpoint). For example, seen from behind Apollo, Daphne’s human figure is obscured, leaving only the elements of the tree in view, so walking around the sculpture gives an impression of the transformation taking place. I am not making a claim about influence between Bernini and Beethoven here—it is unlikely that Beethoven knew this sculpture. The point is that both works of art involve metamorphosis and a dialectical process.

The Largo ends with a Coda in C Minor (see Example 7), which concludes on the V chord–G Major–as an opening to the next movement, the Fugue, where metamorphosis and dialectic are also implied.
Example 7: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–Coda of the Largo.

The Coda brings a parallel with the sixth variation (Example 8), where the key of C Minor was used for a singular harmonization of the theme, hence offering reparation for something long past. I read the Largo as the musical testament of the philosophical progress of the Goethezeit: the dialectic and metamorphosis of the tema and the basso del tema represent the transformation of the human cognition from a limited interface with reality to the origin and destiny of all reality—the progress from Kant to Hegel; the integration of the tema and the basso del tema in the Largo represents self-consciousness,
the human condition that became fundamental to the concept of reality and history in German Idealism; and their dialectical motion represents the dialectical process proposed by Fichte and discussed by Hegel, where consciousness is portrayed as a self-determining process and is the product of its own motion through time.

Example 8: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–Var. VI.

In this reading, the music of the *Largo* is permeated by the ideal of freedom.

However, what is the ideal of freedom for Beethoven? An examination of the Hegelian
philosophy is necessary to explain this. The relationship between Hegelian self-consciousness (individual) and history (society) calls for a specification of the notion of being-with-oneself in otherness, a concept particular to Hegel’s philosophy. In Hegel, the notion of being-with-oneself in otherness is implanted into a matrix of other conceptions. Therefore, this matrix cannot be divided from the notion itself, and it is fundamental to give a picture of it in its completeness before a discussion of the way both the notion and the matrix permeate the Beethovenian idea of freedom can be initiated. Moreover, Hegel’s idea of freedom needs to be taken into account. Hegel’s idea of freedom is elaborated in two levels: the first is largely conceptual, or abstract, while the second is about the effectuation of freedom in history, society, individual action, and philosophy (Sparby 2016: 175). The idea of freedom for Hegel has three segments or moments—the universal, the particular, and the individual—both on the abstract and concrete level. Hegel’s separation between the particular moment and the individual moment is difficult to capture. According to Sparby, it is useful to think about the particular as a species or a kind while considering the individual as something unique in a way that has universality and particularity in it. Hence, there is only one whole individual reality existing and remaining the same, universal, through different, particular moments in time. Regarding the entirely abstract level, the universal moment of freedom is about the absolute freedom of the individual. The individual, the subject of freedom, keeps being “what it is independent of whatever it exists as” (ibid.: 176). A human being can have different identities. Some of these identities are an issue of option, others are not. The main factor is that the individual continues to be independent in itself, hence free, of any of these identities and it never loses itself totally in any form of existing. The will, as Hegel
asserts, is essentially free, and this basic freedom implies specifically the capacity to separate oneself from any particular existence without stopping to exist. Therefore, freedom becomes specific when the will identifies with something particular. Universal freedom is restricted because it has to detach itself from the substantial existence. When the will takes the identity of something particular, it separates itself from itself, or, more precisely, separates itself from its universal essence, even if in this process, at the same time, it also effectuates itself by giving itself substantial existence. However, what the free will is in itself and what it exists as generates a tension through this particularization because the will becomes at the same time both more and less free. When the will discovers a way of effectuating its universal nature in a specific existence, it will achieve the individual moment of freedom, the moment of being-with-onself in otherness.

Considering the Hegelian individual freedom and the development of this individual freedom, we arrive to Hegel’s philosophy of history, which is the realization of the development of freedom. Furthermore, Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* discusses the concretization of the abstract freedom in his investigation of *abstract right, morality,* and *Sittlichkeit* (society or ethical life). *Abstract right* deals with the universal elements of freedom in the sense of the inalienable, universal rights, while *morality* concerns the specific aspects of free action, for instance happiness or conscience of the moral subject. *Sittlichkeit* is about freedom within the *family, civil society,* and the *state.* These three categories recognize an individual moment of freedom, which is additionally distinguished into a universal (*family*), a particular (*civil society*) and an individual (*the state*) moment of substantial freedom. The family recognizes a “universal substance” where all of its members are directly connected to each other. Even if family
relationships are not discretionary, a particular will can effectuate itself only when a subject/individual detaches itself from the family and chooses to assume a specific identity. For Hegel, the state represents the highest moment of the effectuation of substantial freedom within finite, human existence and “is a superordinate individual that establishes and secures a sphere within which its citizens can lead lives that accord with their deeper nature as human beings” (ibid.: 177). Yet, the state is not the perfect apex of freedom because it exists within finitude. For Hegel, there is a deeper form of freedom, the *spiritual freedom*, which is recognized in *philosophy, religion*, and *art*, and contemplates the fundamental forms of thought and their relationship to reveal existence. Hence, eventually, freedom for Hegel is discerned in a stoical escape into the interiority of human thinking.  

An investigation into the Hegelian idea of freedom is fundamental to understand Beethoven’s ideal of freedom. Yet, Beethoven was born in a time in which the idea of freedom was extremely articulated. The two revolutions occurred in America and in France affected Germany, which addressed the concept of freedom mainly through art and philosophy. Immanuel Kant’s thought taken in its completeness rotated around the question of freedom, like Hegel’s though. Friedrich Schiller is often considered the “poet of freedom,” and political freedom is a central theme of his dramas. His *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* contain the well-known declaration: “It is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom” (Pederson 2005: 3). While perhaps less associated with freedom than Schiller, Goethe was another personality who contributed to

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the idea of freedom with his political dramas. Beethoven read and admired Kant, Hegel, Schiller, and Goethe and he was certainly fascinated by the various and complex use of freedom in their work, which influenced his perspective of the potential power of art and music to enlighten individuals and society in a new way and to bring them to higher levels of understanding and behavior.

Adorno claims that the musical processes of Beethoven’s heroic works express the actual forms of freedom.\(^\text{11}\) For Adorno, freedom is something more fundamental than simply politics, it is a theoretical energy that gives life to the internal motions of the musical form (Adorno 1998: 43). Daniel Chua investigated in depth the dialectic of freedom in Adorno’s Beethoven.

\emph{Abstraction–the method by which music purifies itself of meaning–is the condition of freedom that preens itself from the empirical world. This is a freedom abstracted from the ideals of the French Revolution and enshrined by Kant as an idea of reason; it is a freedom of a mind unimpeded by the friction of matter, a formal freedom, a transcendental freedom, an absolute freedom.}\(^\text{12}\) So it is not that music is too abstract to specify freedom...rather, freedom’s abstraction demands an abstract music. (Chua 2005: 15)

Chua studied why the focus is on freedom and not on equality or fraternity. For him, the answer is that freedom, in the words of the theologian Christoph Schwöbel, is the “modern universal,” and it is “the fundamental principle for what it means to be human in the modern…era” (Schwöbel 1995: 57). Or, as Hegel states, “freedom is the highest destiny of spirit,” the absolute value that rules the ethical, political, and economic principles of our time (Hegel 1975: I, 97). However, it is easy that such a comprehensive

\(^{11}\) Adorno uses the terminology “intensive type” for Beethoven’s heroic works.

\(^{12}\) This freedom, for Adorno, has been the most pressing concern of philosophy since the seventeenth century.
concept of freedom can turn into an autocratic one. Hegel reminds that, like the French Revolution, absolute freedom can turn into horror (Hegel 1977: 355-63). For Adorno, the problem is that the dialectic of modernity itself is the negation of freedom by horror, and Beethoven’s heroic music identifies a historical moment where a particular idea of freedom born under the Enlightenment arrives at controlling modern society as its universal regulation (Adorno 1973: 218). Adorno sees in this process a motion that brings in itself the seeds of its own negation, incorporating the complete political spectrum from the libertarian to the authoritarian (Adorno and Horkheimer 1999).

I see the Beethovenian ideal of freedom emerging from the music of Variation XV of Op. 35 as a positive value. Beethoven’s music in Variation XV, read as the musical testament of the philosophical progress of the Goethezeit permeated by his ideal of freedom, is both solemn and extroverted and it again and again juxtaposes these qualities. It is lyrical and has an element of grandeur. And when it is grand, it also remains intensely personal. In the Largo, Beethoven was able to attain a perfect balance between vertical pressure (harmony) and horizontal flow (melody) as he combines vertical factors such as harmony, pitch, accents or tempo, all of which imply a sense of rigor, with a great sense of freedom and fluidity in the melodic discourse. Moreover, the music of Variation XV has universal, particular, and individual qualities if compared with the other variations of Op. 35. It is universal as he relates to the whole set—it is a variation

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13 In this passage Hegel sees critically the idea of absolute freedom, describing it as “a death . . . which has no inner significance or filling,” and as “the empty point of the absolutely free self” (p.360). In addition, see Nigel Gibson, “Rethinking an Old Saw: Dialectical Negativity, Utopia, and Negative Dialectic in Adorno’s Hegelian Marxism,” in *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, ed. Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.268-70.
of the set; and it is particular and individual because it is longer than the other variations and can be considered as a separated movement in the set because of its expanded form, of its thematic transformations, and of its musical stature. I agree with Daniel Barenboim’s conception of Beethovenian freedom:

Beethoven was a deeply political man in the broadest sense of the word. He was not interested in daily politics, but concerned with questions of moral behavior and the larger questions of right and wrong affecting the entire society. Especially significant was his view of freedom, which, for him, was associated with the rights and responsibilities of the individual: he advocated freedom of thought and of personal expression.
(Barenboim 2015)
CHAPTER 4
THE FUGUE: THE HISTORY BEHIND MUSIC

The Fugue (in three voices) is based on the first four notes of the *basso del tema*.

After the first subject, the answer is stated in mm. 6-11 (Example 9).

Example 9: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–
Fugue, mm. 1-20.

In the Fugue, Beethoven presents dramatically the opening of the *tema* only three times
in a short section in bars 52-64 (Example 10), stating finally and definitely the superiority
of the *basso del tema* over the *tema* as the *tema* does not reappear for the rest of the
fugue.
Example 10: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35—Fugue, presentation of the Tema from m. 51.

The music of the Fugue presents an interaction and dialectic of the parts: Example 11 shows both these features. In bars 28-32, the second voice presents the subject in F Minor, followed by the upper voice that answers in B Flat Major in bars 33-36. Yet, at the end of the answer this key turns to the parallel key, B Flat Minor, which opens a five-bar short bridge in bars 37-41 before the entrance of the subject in the lower voice. This bridge is harmonically unstable: bar 36, the final bar of the B Flat answer, seems to prepare a turn to A Flat Major, but it is a false anticipation. While A Flat Major is briefly touched in bar 37 with a cadential ii-V-I, it is immediately abandoned in favor of F Minor, reached in bar 40 with a iv-V-i. The ambiguity of A Flat Major/F Minor is kept with the entrance of the third subject in the bass voice: while the subject in bars 41-45 is in A Flat Major, the goal of this section is F Minor in bar 46. However, the music has not reached stability here; the motion keeps presenting instability even if it is clear that F Minor is the harmonic goal of this section—bar 52 confirms this key with a stronger
arrival on the tonic i6-i. Stability in the musical motion will arrive again only when the key of E Flat Major finally triumphs at the end of the Fugue, preparing the entrance of the final Coda. In the section from bar 28 to 52, Beethoven presents again the subject in three voices after the exposition at the beginning of the Fugue; yet, the section is developmental because the harmonic goal is uncertain until the end of the third subject. The voices interweave in a musical motion that keeps presenting metamorphosis and dialectic: these features present themselves in the dialogue of the three voices, in the ambiguity of A Flat Major/F Minor, in the instability of the musical motion, and in the harmonic and melodic transformation.

Example 11: Beethoven, Fünfzehn Variationen mit Fuge für das Pianoforte, Opus 35–Fugue, mm. 39-57, entrance of the subjects in different keys and dialectic among voices.
In the *Eroica Variations*, Beethoven turns to the fugal style following a plan that he employed again in the *Diabelli Variations, Op. 120*. In fact, the Fugue of Op. 35, like the one of Op. 120, happens as the penultimate event in the musical structure and gives Beethoven an opportunity to a return of the *tema* with additional decoration in the varied and extended presentation of the Finale, considered by Misch in this way: “...since the bass theme (which furnishes the fugue subject) plays only a secondary role in comparison with the real theme of the variations, the fugue cannot conclude the work” (Misch 1956: 17). Misch’s assertion, however, completely ignores that Beethoven, by selecting for the subject of the Fugue the first four notes of the *basso del tema*, affirms definitely the superiority of the *basso del tema* over the *tema* in Op. 35. Moreover, he does not elucidate the presence of the Finale, which would have been probably attached anyway,
independently from the thematic content of the Fugue. In fact, the Fugue in Op. 120 is thematically one of the sections most strongly connected to the waltz theme, and notwithstanding this the theme still returns afterwards, though transformed. In reality, this is a remarkable characteristic of Beethoven’s other fugal sections uniform with both the Diabelli Variations and the Eroica Variations, therefore the fugue in every case represents a path to a non-fugal ending. The only work that arrives close to the interruption of this “rule” is the Cello Sonata Op. 102 No. 2\textsuperscript{14} (Ormesher, 1988: 77-78). Yet, regardless of its nonfulfillment exactly to conclude the piece, the Fugue actually comes to have the task of a Finale in each of these sets of variations. The Fugue, in each case, is preceded by an enlarged slow section—the Largo Variation XV in the Eroica Variations and Variations XXIX-XXXI in the Diabelli Variations, respectively—, which functions as a base for the fugue, separating it from the precedent variations and by that means augmenting its capability of suggesting the beginning of a final section. It is for this reason that, when Beethoven enlarged his original version for Op. 120, he composed the Adagio Variation XXIX and Largo Variation XXI to increase the dimensions of the Andante Variation XXX, which had previously been the only variation dividing the Fugue from the energetic Vivace Variation XXVII. As asserted by Kinderman, Beethoven’s original plan in the Diabelli Variations had been to move directly from the Andante into the Fugue (Kinderman 1987: 41 and 178). The modifications made in Op. 120 are a demonstration of Beethoven’s realization of the

\textsuperscript{14} The concluding fugue of the Cello Sonata Op. 102 No. 2 foreshadows the fugal Finales of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Op. 106 and the late string quartets. Moreover, this cello sonata is the only one to include an enlarged slow movement and this movement is before the fugue.
necessity to collocate the fugue separately in a more convincing way as he did in Op. 35. Hence, to summarize, in both the *Eroica Variations* and the *Diabelli Variations* the Fugue incorporating the function of a Finale is the penultimate event in the musical structure, is anticipated and prepared by an extended slow section, and is followed by a return of the theme. However, differently from the Fugue of Op. 35, the Fugue of Op. 120 is in reality enumerated as one of the variations, a fundamental point of distinction between the two sets because this Fugue is conceived and constructed clearly considering the structure of the theme, even if not obviously its length. Moreover, the Fugue of Op. 120, considered as a whole, is conceived into two clearly determined sections, each of which follows the structure of the Diabelli’s waltz, and these sections are thus mentioned as the “fugue” and the “variation on the fugue” (Ormesher 1988: 79).

One of the main impressive aspects emerging from a reflection on Beethoven’s fugal style, even before we start analyzing his fugues, is for Ormesher in the richness of contents associated to its musical qualities:

*[It] lies in their diversity of expressive moods and the wide range of emotional worlds they inhabit. Analysis shows that this variety is dependent upon many factors, tonality, tempo, dynamics and texture to name but a few. It also shows that the uniqueness of each fugue is in part the result of the pre-selection by Beethoven (whether consciously or subconsciously) of a number of specific “musical arguments” from which to fashion the structure and character of the fugue.* (ibid.: 244)

In his study on Beethoven’s instrumental fugal style, Ormesher employs the term “musical argument” to mention a particular compositional aspect or feature, typically thematic or tonal, which is demonstrated by his analyses of Beethoven’s fugues to be one of the remarkable and principal propelling forces of the fugal style of the German composer, giving energy and scope to the music. He asserts, for instance, that the
inclination of some of his fugues towards the IV key (the subdominant)–this occurs in the Fugue of Op. 35 in the first answer, where the music moves form E Flat to B Flat, and later in the answer in B Flat Major in measures 33-36–is to be interpreted as a musical argument because this stress upon a secondary tonal center as opposed to the tonic generates a tonal variation that infuses unpredictability and tension into the music that then necessitates resolution. Ormesher concludes that, even though some of the arguments pointed out during the analyses of Beethoven’s fugues may happen again from one fugue to another, there are not two fugues that have their foundation upon an indistinguishable mixture of arguments, and this is without doubt a noteworthy element in the establishment of a particular identification for each fugue.

I read the music of the Fugue of the *Eroica Variations* as the statement of the historical perspectives of the early nineteenth century. Such perspectives accompanied the progress of the philosophical thought of German Idealism, which can be found in the political actions and personality of Beethoven’s hero, Napoleon Bonaparte, and culminated in the composition of Op. 35 in 1802. Charles Fitler gives a portrait of Napoleon as a man with a notable personality, which was the key to his influence. He emphasizes the power of his ambition, which from an obscure village took him to command most of Europe. He stresses his combination of will and intellect and hypnotic impact on people. For Fitler, history is the product of Napoleon’s thought and actions:

*Napoleon was not unto this earth displayed a king by birth, but he did find a kingdom by his will, which influence confirmed, an unseen evidence as proof revealed. He fought his battles by the plan that o’er his mind did come as hidden thought revealed…He did conscience bind, and grace despoil of flattery to faith, by arguments which he did use by his own will. He praised the blessings he did give, and made them seem a sacredness within his grasp, as if revealed by his own will. He followed pathways of*
his own, and did defile the human gifts, that unto him were offered as a tribute to his greatness here, within his grasp by his own will... It is an influence found, not sent unto the human reason by God’s will, but as an influence doth here on earth become accepted as a power by the human will. (Fitler 1898: 52-54)

In the age of Goethe, Kant, and Hegel, man became the measure of things. Kant taught that human beings can understand the world only as the product of their categories of thought, while Hegel regarded human history as a dialectical process based on that of human self-consciousness. In the Fugue of Op. 35 the subjects in different keys can be read as Kant’s categories of thoughts, and the dialectic between voices can be read as Hegel’s dialectical process of human history. Furthermore, the renewed power of Christian thought confirmed the orientation towards the self in two aspects: the Christian conception of history as a one-way, goal-oriented linear process towards redemption from original sin, which can be interpreted as the life of the individual self, and the glorification of the struggle in this process. German Idealism responded to Christianity mainly as an aesthetic force: history does not repeat itself in the endless cyclical iterations and metamorphoses because there is only one apocalyptic process, which consists of the Creation, the Fall, and the Redemption (Burnham 1995: 114). In the analogy between a human life and the life of the Christian cosmos, fundamental is the interaction between the will of the individual and the cycle that embraces everything. Therefore, Christianity provided German Idealism with a mythology of the self. The German dramas of the Goethezeit also celebrated the struggle to create one’s own destiny and expressed it as the heroic search for freedom. Schiller’s “sentimental” artist aims at a distant ideal that provides a constant point of orientation instead of portraying the present reality. However, for Goethe there is no arrival: man keeps metamorphosing because this is how nature works. The self is attracted by a symbolic rebirth—hence it incorporates cyclical
metamorphoses within its own mortal trajectory—and does not have unlimited control of its destiny (ibid.: 115). For many reasons, Goethe gave birth to ideas that later became prevailing in the nineteenth century. Goethe was considered a cultural force, who argued that the organic nature of the land shaped the people and their customs—an argument that has become recurrent ever since. He argued that laws could not be created by pure rationalism, since geography and history determined habits and patterns:

_We conceive of the individual animal as a small world, existing for its own sake, by its own means. Every creature is its own reason to be. All its parts have a direct effect on one another, a relationship to one another, thereby constantly renewing the circle of life; thus we are justified in considering every animal physiologically perfect. Viewed from within, no part of the animal is a useless or arbitrary product of the formative impulse (as so often thought). Externally, some parts may seem useless because the inner coherence of the animal nature has given them this form without regard to outer circumstance. (Goethe 1995: 121)_

Goethe’s influence was dramatic because he understood that there was a transition in European sensibilities, an increasing focus on sense, the indescribable, and the emotional. Goethe’s development as a philosopher was marked by two elements: 1) the general question regarding the relationship between the self and the world, in particular how a subjective, creative activity can participate in the experience of the world; and 2) the more specific question regarding the relationship between nature and art. The world is actually there only for the one who acts on the world and, in turn, suffers the world’s reaction. Truth rests on a living relationship. Hence, it is linked with error, in which this vital relationship is realized. In the Fugue of Op. 35, I identify metamorphosis (as the music of each voice is in continuous transformation throughout the movement), struggle (as the voices confront one another until one of the three states its superiority in
the subject), constant point of orientation (when the subject is proposed throughout the piece), and rebirth (when the subject returns in a different key)—Example 11.

The typical hero of the *Goethezeit* is a conflicted hero with a set of values worth dying for and a domestic situation worth living for. He is a self-conscious hero, aware of his place and his time, and his action features contemplation and activity, a dramatic dialectic involving spiritual evolution. The basis for the heroic decision comes from inside the hero himself, not from God or Nature: the hero both acts and sees himself acting, bearing the heavy mantle of self-consciousness. In Hegel’s vision, the hero knows where he is going because he knows where he has been. While for Goethe the present moment is a flashpoint that illuminates a continuum of vanishing perspectives, for Hegel the ends of the continuum brighten the present moment. The Fugue of Op. 35 unites these different philosophical visions of human destiny and portrays the historical perspectives offered by Napoleon, the archetypal hero of the *Goethezeit*. In 1802 Napoleon represented a new confidence in social mobility and the individual talent the French revolution had shaped. Napoleon’s historical plan in 1802 was for the time very progressive and it implemented several objectives of the French revolution by rationalizing government and advancing social conditions. As a man of the Enlightenment,\textsuperscript{15} who followed the writings of the philosophers of his time, he represented change. He established equality and democracy with the introduction of the

\textsuperscript{15} The Age of Enlightenment (or Age of Reason) is the era from the 1650s or earlier to 1776 in which cultural and intellectual forces in Western Europe emphasized reason, analysis, and individualism rather than traditional lines of authority. It was promoted by “philosophes” and local thinkers in urban coffeehouses, salons, and masonic lodges and challenged the authority of institutions that were deeply rooted in society such as the Catholic Church; there was much talk of ways to reform society with toleration, science, and skepticism.
Napoleonic Code, a set of uniform laws that made all citizens equal before the law. Beethoven was influenced by the political actions and the personality of Napoleon Bonaparte because he was a son of the revolution; for him, in 1802 Napoleon represented the personification of the Romantic hero who could be stronger than destiny only thanks to his own will. The Fugue of Op. 35 can be read as a hymn to the human will, a testimony of absolute faith in the values of the individual, who build his own existence throughout difficulties; its music is a triumph where metamorphosis, dialectic, struggle, and rebirth unite in the name of Napoleon, the hero in the *Eroica Variations* and of the *Goethezeit* “per antonomasia.”
CHAPTER 5

THE CRITICAL THEORY APPROACH AS AN ENHANCEMENT TO THE PERFORMANCE OF OP. 35

To understand a work such as Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations*, it is imperative for a performer to have knowledge about the way music moves in a composition in variation form and about musical form in general (Eckerson 2012: 141-142). According to Dahlhaus, two moments occur in hearing and understanding a musical work by Beethoven: 1) hearing a piece and finding it agreeable technically, sonorously, etc.; and 2) catching the “aesthetic concept” behind this work (Dahlhaus 1989). The first moment is discussed by Marx in his *Ludwig van Beethoven: Leben und Schaffen*. He asserts that music can be considered as a play of tones captured by the ear: it incorporates its own “self-satisfied goal” or can be considered as having an aim at expressing “a distinct goal that lies outside of itself, and has its own profound significance in all the arts and in human existence overall” (Marx 1997: 175). According to this perspective, the first duty of a performer is to establish if the music is only a play of tones or if it incorporates a distinct objective. The second moment, instead, involves a more critical approach and an aesthetical preparation from the performer to capture the meaning. This aesthetical preparation is related to Marx’s concept of an idea as a conception living in the music, which the performer needs to distinguish and recognize even if a scientific conclusion supporting the nature of it does not exist, and which necessitates a spiritual investment from the performer to be determined. Therefore, this idea controls the goal of a piece of music with a purpose that goes beyond the play of tones. For Burnham, this idea is “employed as a symbol of the… intuition about the wholeness and spiritual elevation of
the musical work (Burnham 1990: 190). Close to Marx’s idea is the conception of “poetic idea” described by Anton Schindler.¹⁶ in a passage on Beethoven, Schindler reports that “Beethoven hoped to convey the inner ‘poetic idea’ that led him to compose each of his various works, and thus make possible a true understanding of them” (Schindler 1996: 400).

A critical theory interpretation is what a performer/interpreter of a piece of music can consider while he is engaged in the task of working towards a deep understanding of a substantial piece of repertoire like Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations*. Performing a piece of music is mainly conveying meaning. A critical theory interpretation is the result of “a mixture of descriptive, meaning-ascribing, and evaluative discourse” (Pontara 2015: 3). Critical interpretation is also considered as separated from musical analysis. In particular, Joseph Kerman defined analysis as “a kind of formalistic criticism” insufficient to deal with “the problems that must be faced if music is to be studied in its integrity” (Kerman 1985: 115). According to Kerman’s perspective, analysis should not be applied for its own purpose, but it should be accompanied by a historically oriented critical interpretation capable to propose a richer and deeper comprehension of a piece of music in its past and present contexts. For Kerman, any critical interpretation had to consider the “meaning and value of art works” (ibid.: 16), which specifically meant an investigation into music as aesthetic experience infringing the visionless attachment to the facts and the verifiable issues that had blocked music analysis and musicology into a non-productive and self-imposed scientism for a long time. In looking back on the past, Kerman’s conception of critical interpretation was perhaps following a traditional line of

¹⁶ Anton Schindler (1795-1864) was secretary and early biographer of Beethoven. His *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* dates 1840.
thought, as it dealt with “the interpretation of a work’s meaning as a work of art rather than as a symptom of the culture in which it was created” (Hatten 1996: 4). However, his critique of analysis and music theory, and of all he considered as an out-of-fashion positivistic musicology, was indubitably a fundamental fount of inspiration for the more radical forms of musicological criticism that were soon to follow. With the affirmation of the new musicology in the last ten years of the twentieth century, the concept of critical interpretation accumulated new implications for many critical theorists. As Pontara asserts, giving a critical interpretation to music now has the meaning to attribute to it a particular non-musical or extra-musical content:

Suddenly, it was possible, even mandatory some believed, to interpret music as having social, cultural, ideological, political, biographical, gendered, sexual, or in other ways semantically specifiable content or meaning. This new understanding of what the concept of critical interpretation involved belonged firmly within the domain of what has since come to be known as musical hermeneutics. (Pontara 2015: 4)

A hermeneutical interpretation addresses a piece of music as if the score is a text and attributes to it intelligibly outlined narrative, figurative, or representational meanings. The effort to explain a piece of music with regard to the particular aspect of clear and specific semantic contents is the common trait that all interpretive goals included under the title of musical hermeneutical interpretation feature. Pontara proposed a fascinating model that theorizes regarding hermeneutical interpretation in music and is in accordance to the conception of critical theory and hermeneutical interpretation that is behind my reading of Beethoven’s Eroica Variations. He named this model historical imputationalism and considers it as constituted by four principal claims: 1) hermeneutical interpretations of music should be estimated as plausible or implausible instead of being evaluated as true or false; 2) the meanings identified by these critical interpretations are
attributed to instead of being considered pre-existent in the musical piece under study;  
3) plausible interpretations are not in contrast with what are consensually estimated as  
acceptable descriptions of the music; and 4) plausible interpretations are restricted by  
requirements of historical and contextual relevance, and it is necessary that these  
requirements are central to an interpretive application, even if they are not objective  
(ibid.: 5). Pontara’s model refers to the theoretical description of interpretation developed  
by Joseph Margolis, and emphasizes the two basic requirements of critical plausibility  
that are central to his perspective. According to Margolis, a plausible interpretation  
1) must be uniform or compatible with “the describable features” of a given artwork; and  
2) must adhere to “relativized canons of interpretation that themselves fall within the  
tolerance of a historically continuous tradition of interpretation” (Margolis 1992: 48).  
Taken together, Margolis’s two requirements make possible the following affirmation: if  
interpretative claims are in accordance with correct descriptions of the work, and, in  
addition, they agree with or are in relation to interpretive principles that have their  
foundation in historically and culturally appropriate “myths,” then it is reasonable that we  
accept them as plausible interpretations of the given work in question. According to the  
words of Margolis himself: “...would-be interpretations must accord with the description  
of a given work and with admissible myths or schemes of imagination” (ibid.: 43). The  
amalgamation of Margolis’s two requirements gives him the necessary opportunity to  
support a form of interpretive relativism without consequently abandoning the  

17 Margolis constantly developed his views on interpretation over a time span of at least  
three decades, from his The Language of Art and Art Criticism (1965) to his later  
Interpretation Radical, but not Unruly (1995).  
18 Relativism is the notion that points of view have no absolute truth or validity within  
themselves, but only subjective, relative, value according to differences in perception and
conception of explanatory standards and plans of actions in interpretation: “Critical interpretations...are noticeably weaker than statements of fact. But they are weaker logically, not methodologically. There is absolutely no difference in conceptual rigor in defending divergent interpretations and in confirming exclusive physical facts” (ibid.: 45).

However, Margolis himself, in an essay of 1993, claims that there is “a neglected constraint on all theorizing around musical expression and representation ... namely, that we must be prepared to support a conceptual ‘adequation’ between whatever we impute as the nature of music, and what, congruent with that ‘nature,’ we concede or insist is possible or impossible regarding expression and representation and similar functions” (Margolis 1993: 141). Seen in this perspective, Margolis’s conception of descriptive and interpretive affinity would apparently necessitate that interpretations have their foundation upon acceptable descriptive statements. This minimum prerequisite can also be expressed in this way: interpretations that have their complete foundation on absolutely imprecise descriptions (in other words, false descriptions) of a given piece of music are certainly not compatible with true descriptions of that piece. Hence, what is fundamental to consider in an investigation of a piece of music towards a correct critical theory interpretation is to approach the piece without forgetting the importance of the relationship of compatibility as the factor that supports and makes possible the correspondence between interpretive assertions and the descriptions of the structural consideration. The term “moral relativism” is often used in the context of moral principles, where principles and ethics are regarded as applicable only in a limited context. There are many forms of relativism which vary in their degree of controversy. The term often refers to truth relativism, which is the doctrine that there are no absolute truths, meaning that truth is always relative to some particular frame of reference, such as a language or a culture (cultural relativism).
happenings in the music. The content of reasonable hermeneutic interpretations has to discuss the meanings that they identify as a response to the described and experienced qualities or elements of the music or musical events with which they are aligned (Pontara 2015: 15). As a result of that, the meanings of these interpretations are, taking a term from Margolis, imputed to the music. Yet, these meanings are additionally and simultaneously in agreement with the musical features illustratively selected, to the degree that they can semantically metamorphose, submerge, or ratify those features in processes that are, based on experience and observation, logical or acceptable within a given interpretive community. Compatibility is in this case equivalent to the suggestion that “interpretation builds upon the music’s semantic potential” and that “it does so by virtue of a number of specific attributes of the musical trace” (Cook 2001: 182)–aspects that, for the motivations of critical interpretation, are always illustratively defined. Therefore, what renders an interpretation compatible with a description is the experienced correspondence between the content–the meaning–of the interpretation and what we discern as the objective qualities or aspects of the musical element, owing to what we as a group, and mainly by accord, consider to be precise or true explanations of the same. Both interpretations and accounts identify aspects that we may or may not feel can be merged or unite together; when we feel that they can be effectively combined and fuse we will be prepared to admit that a relationship of compatibility between them exists (ibid.: 16).
Various studies address the issue of musical performance and interpretation using models of aesthetic thought and other critical reasoning, a practice that deals with a multiplex articulation of diverse fields of study, specifically history, aesthetics, philosophy, technique, repertoire, and critical interpretation. The realization of these models in real performance practice is also the topic of research works concerning both tendencies of interpretation and diverse actual styles of performance, an examination that has fixed the prerequisites defining a well-determined diagram of quality trends regarding interpretation. The discussion and the studies regarding the essence and the definition of these models certainly open pertinent questions to contemporary concert performers who search for conveying meaning and saying something new in the concert field beyond the mere performance itself. Interpretation in music, conceived as both comprehension of the piece of music and performance of the same, involving awareness and reflection, propends to consider subordinate the concrete conditions of performance, and even the exterior sphere (in other words, the reception of performances-interpretations are potentially in contrast with the specifically thoughtful aspects of performing and giving meaning to a work). Maybe a type of platonic musical idealism, according to which

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music is especially intellectual and subordinately physical or musical ideas are more authentic than their physical realizations, suggests this precise idea of interpretation in music (Cruz and Lourenço 2011: 50-51).

Some philosophers endorse a circumscribed conception of interpretation, according to which interpretation corresponds to critical interpretation. Jerrold Levinson, for example, proposes this vision of the conception of interpretation in a study of 1993. For him, critical interpretation is “what we tend to understand by ‘interpretation’ when no qualification is given” (Levinson 1993: 33). Therefore, a critical interpretation is an assertion that furnishes “an account of a work’s import and functioning” (ibid.: 34) and interpreters, according to this perspective, are automatically writers or speakers. A repercussion of this point of view is that musical pieces cannot be considered, because of the lack of qualification, as examples of interpretation, and performances cannot be considered as such either, because in both cases we do not have something that is, as a result of that, critical interpretation. Paul Thom states that critics can give an interpretation to musical works; yet composers, when they compose, do not interpret anything. They only do so when they speak or write about the music they compose. Comparably, an act cannot be an interpretation of itself, even if it can represent one, or can be thought to manifest one. (Thom 2006: 457-458). If, as Levinson asserts, a performative interpretation is only “a considered way of playing a piece of music” (Levinson 1993: 36), then a performative interpretation, obviously, is not, as a result of that, a critical interpretation. In addition, according to Levinson, a way of assigning “a definite correlative” critical interpretation to a given performative interpretation does not exist (ibid.: 44). In fact, he did not notice a planned relationship between the two types of
interpretation. On the other hand, considering the underlying differences between them, Levinson eventually affirms that it is only “a curious fact” that a performative interpretation is named interpretation at all (ibid.: 33).

Another repercussion, as Levinson develops his perspective, is that interpretation (specifically, critical interpretation) points at being exact and true. Regarding this point of view, “performative interpretations irreducibly compete for space in a way that individually valid but superficially opposed critical interpretations, when properly understood as partial, do not” (ibid.: 39). According to Levinson, contrasting critical interpretations of the same element or object should be combined into a comprehensive critical interpretation that accounts for the work’s import and functioning and that admits its uncertainties, while on the contrary performative interpretations of the same work are immanently more than one. To summarize, Levinson asserts that interpretation deals with having words in mind, it is classified as expression of those words, follows clear and planned thinking, and for this reason is limited to the area of critical interpretation; hence, a critical interpretation has the objective of clarifying or explaining the structure or the meaning of a composition but does not become involved in wordless suppositions.

Contrarily, concerning performative interpretation, the performer is playing, and he feels or hears the work as it is, communicating his meaning in action and not looking for, or considering, any words. I agree with Thom that, while acknowledging the dissimilarities between performative and critical interpretation, we may also notice that there are deep similitudes between particular musical elements or events and the pursuits of interpreters, and that a conception of interpretation, certainly more flexible than Levinson’s, can exist
and it includes certain activities of composers and performers in coexistence with critical interpretations.

Other two aspects need to be considered when we deal with the relationship between performance and interpretation: the first one is the notion of a piano interpretation school and the second one is the artistic personality of the performer/interpreter. Concerning the first aspect, the notion of piano interpretation school furnishes in a certain sense a direction in the comprehension of the history of Western classical piano performance regarding the definition of a particular tradition of approach to the general and specific repertoire, specialized repertoire, tempo, use of pedal, different piano selections, distinctive sonorities, pedagogical methods, and technical and interpretive approaches (for instance, use of rubato, clearness in the voicing, use of the flexibility of the wrist, balance, use of diverse timbres, etc.). It is challenging for the individual performer to separate her/himself from the logical context to which s/he is associated or recognized. The second aspect, the artistic personality of the performer/interpreter, is what certainly stands out from a particular tradition of performance and interpretation: in fact, when we listen to a piano recital, it is the individual artistic personality that captures the attention, not a certain pianistic tradition or a model of interpretation. The notion of artistic personality reflects the actual situation of the individual career of the artist, with recurrent contacts with diverse cultural realities. However, knowledge of critical models of performance and interpretation furnishes an additional option of comprehension of an artistic personality where in it diverse perspectives, approaches, and conceptions regarding music and its interpretation exist at the same time. These two positions are not in contrast: they need to have their realization
in the performing artist of our time, who does not have to represent a particular pianistic tradition or school of interpretation, yet does not have to completely disregard the aesthetical principles of performance of the past. To try to succeed in the concert field as a new performing artist, s/he needs to strive to find a spot for her/himself independently “above any ideal coherent context or general category such as school or interpretative model” (Cruz and Lourenço 2011: 52).

I believe that it is fundamental for a performing artist to reflect in depth on what it means to deal with musical interpretation in aware performance, which demands the identification of critical reasoning, the construction of meaning, and its conveyance regarding interpretive choices and visions. My study of Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations* can help concert performers in this reflection and in their work towards a correct rendition of a demanding piece of repertoire. The *Eroica Variations* is one of the most substantial concert pieces for piano by Beethoven and of the beginning of the nineteenth century, performed in recital by renowned concert performers of the past and the present like Schnabel, Kempff, Gilels, Richter, and Brendel, to name a few. In this piece, there is Beethoven and his conception of the pianoforte. Beethoven was a great pianist, and he was considered as such by his contemporaries, even if we do not have to count him in the number of virtuosos of his time and even if he honestly recognized at the end of his life that some of his students like Ries or Czerny were better than him in mastering piano technique (Balolla 1985: 116). For Beethoven, the pianoforte was the instrument of the future: its penetrating timbre, its power and variety of sound, improved by the technical and mechanical developments introduced by the many piano builders of the time, made it the “king” instrument of concerts and recitals. Beethoven was the first composer who
fully explored the timbric dimension of the pianoforte. Alfredo Casella\textsuperscript{21} stated that “Beethoven found in the pianoforte of its time rather than in the orchestra of the same time an instrument more suitable and close to his aesthetic thinking” (ibid.: 123). Even if this assertion does not have to be taken as a preference given by Beethoven to the composition of works for piano over the composition of works for orchestra—it was perhaps suggested by an abstract and hierarchic concept of perfection and technical finiteness of the pianoforte over the orchestra of the time—, it is certain that Beethoven, in works like the \textit{Eroica Variations}, greatly dedicated to experimentations regarding the timbric and sonoric response of the instrument. Moreover, in the monumental structure of variations of Op. 35, the Beethovenian creative process is clear: the Beethovenian ideal, the “spirit,” tends to subtract the phenomenic aspect from precarity to accord it rational dignity and Schillerian aesthetical liberation in a dimension of absolute harmony (ibid.: 103). In Op. 35 we experience the original meaning of revolution considered not as eversion, but as progressive regeneration obtained thanks to the development of determined premises, in particular, of some elements constituting the core of the musical motion (specifically, the \textit{tema} and \textit{basso del tema}), which incorporate a propelling force since their first presentation together.

When I decided to begin a critical theory/hermeneutic investigation of a substantial piece for piano, I immediately thought that this investigation could help me discover and interpret more in depth as a performer one of my pieces of repertoire. However, which piece of my current repertoire would have been the most appropriate one

\textsuperscript{21} Alfredo Casella (1883-1947) was an Italian composer, pianist, and conductor. His editions of Beethoven’s works greatly influenced the performance style of many Italian pianists.
for such an investigation? Moreover, how would this investigation have contributed to my interpretation of that piece? At the time I was challenged by this task, I had been studying as a pianist Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations* for two months after one year of intense study of (and several recitals with) Schumann’s *Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13* (1837 edition). While I was still fascinated by the monumentality and the beauty of the *Symphonic Etudes*, I did not feel that this piece by Schumann would have been a good choice for a hermeneutic investigation because Schumann spoke about his music very much: he was a writer, a musical critic, and published a journal. He defined in detail the two parts of his personality, Eusebious and Florestan, and did not hide that in some cases his music reflected his personality and his personal fights. In addition, Schumann was a Romantic composer, and as such he filled his music with feelings, passions, and tumults of the heart and of the mind. What else could I have read in this music? Even if the *Symphonic Etudes* are one of Schumann’s compositions where the allusions to Eusebious and Florestan are left aside, I would however have to deal with a critical theory reading that could not separate itself from the clear associations between Schumann’s life and his music. Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations*, instead, was a piece that

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22 The *Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13* the set of etudes for piano by Robert Schumann are in also variation form. This composition was revisited in different editions by the composer himself. Nowadays, the most performed ones are the 1837 edition and the 1852 edition. I performed the 1837 edition as Maurizio Pollini and Sviatoslav Richer did, with the five posthumous variations inserted between Etude V and Etude VI.

23 Eusebius and Florestan are imaginary figures representing the two sides of Schumann’s personality. They appear very often in Schumann’s critical writings. In Schumann’s *Carnaval, Op. 9* they are portrayed one after the other in the fifth (Eusebius) and sixth (Florestan) selection.

24 The succession of the etudes, however, emphasizes the alternation of more lyrical, melancholy and introverted passages, where we see the Eusebius character, with those of a more excitable and dynamic nature, where we recognize Florestan. In the 1837 edition the Florestan character triumphs.
more appropriately offered itself to a hermeneutic reading, because Beethoven did not leave many detailed writings on his compositions: in fact, in his writings he focused more on generic aesthetic issues. His intellectual tension and the Schillerian moral unity of his personality merged into the musical dominium and became one entity with the musical structure and the intense musical pulsating of his works.

My journey throughout the *Eroica Variations* began first with my learning as a pianist, and continued with my investigation as a critical theorist while I was still refining and later performing the piece in recital. I kept then dedicating to the critical theory investigation of Op. 35 after I stopped performing it in recital to study and perform other concert repertoire. I believe that my dedication to this piece as both pianist and critical theorist allowed me to synthesize in my double work of performer and interpreter the performative approach and the interpretive approach I discussed above. I feel that this double approach of performer and of critical theorist of Op. 35 makes me stand out as one artistic personality who is saying something new on a substantial piece of the concert repertoire and who was able to separate herself from the logical context to which she is associated or recognized because of her path as an artist and pianist. As a performing artist, while I was working on the *Eroica Variations* as a critical theorist, I reflected in depth on what it means to deal with musical interpretation in the conscious performance of a substantial piece of repertoire, which requires 1) the identification of critical reasoning, 2) the construction of meaning, and 3) its communication regarding interpretive choices and views. In my double work of performer and interpreter of Op. 35, I dealt with the first two points (the identification of critical reasoning and the construction of meaning) while I was addressing the piece as a critical theorist, and I
communicated to the audiences of my recitals my philosophical and historical reading of
the piece as a performer.

I performed Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations* in recital about ten times in Europe and in the US between November 2014 and October 2015, and I noticed a profound change in my approach to the performance of the piece between the time when the critical theory research on the piece was not initiated and the time when my historical and philosophical reading of the piece was clearly defined. As I mentioned earlier, the *Eroica Variations* were studied and performed by great concert pianists of the past and the present. Nowadays, thanks to the developments and the advancements of technology, we can listen to those performances, and we can actually listen to great performances of any piece of repertoire because they are instantly available. Everybody can listen to everything from his/her home. This instant availability of recordings thanks to technology—the availability of recorded performances in online music libraries and in YouTube in particular—is very useful to investigate performance tradition issues, to see how the best pianists before us rendered a piece and how the pianists contemporary of us address them. When I was searching for the best performances of the *Eroica Variations*, it was easy to find online and listen to the renditions of Schnabel, Kempff, Gilels, Richter, and Brendel. However, the way technology and the availability of instant, great performances of concert pieces in our devices (computers, smart-phones, and tablets) is affecting the field of the concert live performance does not have only positive aspects. Concert performers nowadays have to face two great challenges: 1) the pieces of repertoire they perform and interpret were already studied in depth and greatly rendered by the masters of the keyboard of the past; and 2) those performances are immediately
available when we want to listen to them. This means that it is becoming more and more
difficult for a concert performer to see a numerous audience attending his/her recitals,
unless we think about those few names and those few halls in the world that are still able
to sell out recitals.\textsuperscript{25} How is it possible to react to all this? How can concert performers
who are not international concert pianists still make a career in the concert field? I think
that the answer is to be able to say something new with a performance, something that
has not been said already, and that makes this performance different from what already
exists. My philosophical and historical reading of the \textit{Eroica Variations} can be an
example to follow: it explains in words an interpretation, which can help concert
performers towards a new, correct rendition of a demanding piece of repertoire. As I said
earlier, I experienced an enormous change while approaching the \textit{Eroica Variations} in
performance between the time when my critical theory investigation on the piece was not
started yet and the time when my reading was clearly determined. Before my
investigation, my \textit{Eroica Variations} in live performance were a performative
interpretation among others; after my reading was defined, they became a unique
performative and critical interpretation. Starting from that moment, they were not
anymore only music, but started to communicate a meaning, the philosophical and
historical perspective I saw in their music. In my conception of the performance of the
\textit{Eroica Variations}, live now the Hegelian dialectic, the stages of the philosophical

\textsuperscript{25} It is necessary here to mention another challenge that classical concert performers have
to face: the return to the concert scene of the figure of the composer-concert pianist, who
is able to attract numerous audiences around the world performing his/her own music, a
phenomenon started with the turn of the twenty-first century. The music of these
composers/concert pianists, however, has very little in common with the great classical
concert repertoire: it is always appealing and easy to perform and to comprehend. It is the
so-called classical contemporary music. Yiruma, Ludovico Einaudi, and Giovanni Allevi
are famous exponents of this genre.
thought of German Idealism and the historical perspectives that the hero of German Idealism at the time Op. 35 was composed, Napoleon Bonaparte, was incarnating. Therefore, such a performance of the *Eroica Variations* metamorphoses into a musical transfiguration where the music remains the protagonist, but it also incorporates culture (philosophy and history), which becomes also protagonist at the same time. For this reason, the *Eroica Variations* in the rendition I give are different from any other existing performance.

My reading of Op. 35–specifically the part that stresses the interaction of the *tema* and *basso del tema*–might be also considered as a “semantic approach” to a piece of repertoire. *Tema* and *basso del tema* in this perspective are musical elements considered as signifiers. It is difficult to give explanations regarding music, in particular because of the enormous inter- and often intra-cultural variety of music. Rather than focusing on the diverse connotations of language and music, I agree with Koelsch’s suggestion that language and music are distinct elements of the same continuum (the music-language continuum), instead of being two spheres completely unrelated (Koelsch 2011: 125-128). According to Koelsch, it is necessary to make a differentiation between two aspects: 1) the meaning of music (in the sense of how a musical process works regarding its ability of communicating meaning), and 2) the procedures lying beneath the appearance of meaning caused by the interpretation of musical information from an investigator/researcher of music. The first aspect treats music and its meaning as an object, while the second aspect is about the subjective procedures connected to the interpretation of musical information (and the interpretation of other factors involved with the musical perception) that make possible the construction of meaning. In his
theory of musical meaning, Koelsch gives space to both aspects: to the meaning of music as a process, and to the conception that musical information has a meaning for an individual. Therefore, there is certainly a correlation between both aspects, even if a grade of correlation exists and needs to be considered (some perceptions are more accurate, or more ambivalent, than others), in music as well as in language. This brings to the conclusion that even if a word, taken alone from its context, normally has a complete, defining meaning that a musical element usually does not have, the sum of musical elements considered as musical information can also incorporate a transparent, defining meaning, specifically an extra-musical meaning underlying the musical motion. Thanks to the specificity of the meaning of words, we can give a reasonable explanation to that extra-musical meaning.

The diversity between musical meaning and linguistic meaning is specifically in the multitude of meaning we can attribute to music. However, considering the aspect that the meaning recalled by a piece of music is much less definite than the meaning recalled by language, we should have present while giving a critical interpretation of a piece of music that the utilization of language addresses the issue that perceptions or points of view have to be remodeled into words and writings, and we need to be attentive to the inter-individual correlation of these perceptions even if the same word or explanation is employed to allude to these perceptions. Koelsch’s supposition is that music can recall perceptions of meaning that, before being remodeled into words, carry more prominent inter-individual correlation or agreement than the words that an individual employs to delineate these perceptions. According to this perspective, music has the favorable condition of carrying a vision or a meaning without its definition being misrepresented of
falsified by the employment of words. In giving a reading of a piece of music, we have to consider that musical elements were used by composers to convey meaning (meaning that however cannot be demonstrated or verified) and we use our point of view, our experience, and our knowledge to give an explanation or a critical interpretation as accurate as possible of those musical elements. Considering semantics and its preconditions of true and false, it is obvious that this signifies that there is no true or false in music. We listen to a piece of music and consider its musical motion a communicative medium. However, its meaning is not clear or explicit. With respect to the music-language continuum, the grade of freedom between language and music considering the construction of propositions and assumption (as well as the ambiguity of meaning) is high. My reading of Op. 35 might be considered as a “semantic approach” to a piece of repertoire in the sense that Koelsch attributes to the term “musical semantics:” he employs his term to stress that the definition of musical meaning goes beyond the processing and the comprehension of musical signs. My critical interpretation Op. 35, in fact, does not stop to the mere analysis of the tema and basso del tema. It starts from that analysis of the musical elements, it processes and comprehends the musical elements or signs, and from there it departs to presents then a much broader vision, which consider many other factors.

The conception of music as portrayal of other subjects—philosophy and history—in my reading of Op. 35 might also remind the association music/images suggested by many performers-pedagogues as a direction to follow while pianists and in general performers are striving to refine a performance to give it meaning and definition. I would like to recall an episode at the Mozarteum Universität Sommerakademie in Salzburg in 1991.
Sergio Perticaroli was teaching Liszt’s *Mephisto Waltz No. 1* and discussed how the *Un poco meno mosso* waltz section after the first part of the piece can be better rendered by thinking about an image or a story: particularly, he talked about the piece as a typical example of program music, and suggested one look at the episode from *Faust* by Lenau, which Liszt took as a program note:

> There is a wedding feast in progress in the village inn, with music, dancing, carousing. Mephistopheles and Faust pass by, and Mephistopheles induces Faust to enter and take part in the festivities. Mephistopheles snatches the fiddle from the hands of a lethargic fiddler and draws from it indescribably seductive and intoxicating strains. The amorous Faust whirls about with a full-blooded village beauty in a wild dance; they waltz in mad abandon out of the room, into the open, away into the woods. The sounds of the fiddle grow softer and softer, and the nightingale warbles his love-laden song. (Ewen 1965: 519-520)

However, Perticaroli invited to consider the program note as a context where the waltz would have taken place, and to build another image to associate to the waltz in a similar context: he said to imagine a wonderful woman dressed in black, and to imagine Mephistopheles as a handsome man dressed in tuxedo, standing in a ballroom.

Mephistopheles approaches the woman, and ask her to dance. The woman refuses. This is the first question/answer pattern appearing in the musical motion after the statement of the new theme in the *Un poco meno mosso* waltz (he also pointed out that it is clear that Mephistopheles asks the question and the woman answers because the register of the answer in the phrasing is higher than the one in the question, and high registers are

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26 Sergio Perticaroli is considered one of the most influential Italian piano pedagogues of the second half of the twentieth century. He won the Busoni International Piano Competition in 1952, and after a brief career as a concert pianist around the world, which followed the Busoni prize, he decided to fully dedicate himself to teaching, accepting only few performance commitments. He was first professor of piano at the Rome Conservatory of Music, and later professor of piano at the Rome Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. He taught an annual master-class at the Mozarteum Universität Sommerakademie for many years.
usually considered to have feminine qualities)—see Example 12.\textsuperscript{27} He said that the second question/answer pattern might be imagined as a second tentative from Mephistopheles who asks again the woman to dance, and the woman refuses one more time. At the third tentative, she accepts, and starts dancing with him—the phrasing at this point moves to another direction, where however there is still repetition, which he read as the doubts she has about her acceptance when she started dancing. Perticaroli said that this image could help performers to build intensity and pathos in the section, and to give shape to that moment in the phrasing.

We can discuss the validity of the association music/images as a help to improve the performative interpretation of a piece. I liked the episode I have just recalled, and I believe that the association music/images, besides being suggestive, can be helpful to performers who have difficulties at “feeling” and “seeing” the piece. However, this kind of association music/images does not apply to my reading of the \textit{Eroica Variations} for two obvious reasons: 1) Op. 35 is not a Romantic piece and as all the music by Beethoven does not have to be considered a Romantic work, even if Beethoven’s works, in particular the ones of the third period, definitely opened the doors to Romanticism and advanced innovations that culminated in some works of the new musical era (additionally, there is usually no tendency to associate images to the repertoire before Romanticism, unless it is specified, as it happens for instance with the \textit{Four Seasons} by Vivaldi);\textsuperscript{28} and 2) we cannot imagine philosophy and history, in this case we cannot

\textsuperscript{27} This example from Liszt’s \textit{Mephisto Waltz No. 1} is taken from the Leipzig: Peters edition.

\textsuperscript{28} A clarification of one of Beethoven’s most famous piano sonata is needed at this point: Beethoven’s \textit{Sonata in C Sharp Minor, Op. 27 No. 2} Quasi una fantasia, was named
imagine the Hegelian dialectic, the transformation of the philosophical thought of the 
*Goethezeit*, and the historical perspectives of German Idealism.

Example 12: Liszt, Mephisto Waltz No. 1—*Un poco meno mosso*, mm. 33-76.

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*Moonlight Sonata* in 1832 (hence, in the full Romantic period) by German poet and music critic Ludwig Rellstab.
My reading of the *Eroica Variations* supports the performance of the piece thanks to a different process: it adds to the piece awareness and knowledge of Beethoven’s time and of its cultural instances, being itself a cultural and critical approach to the piece, which transforms it from a pure display of technical mastering of the instrument—that however is always present in such a piece of repertoire—into something superior: a piece of art, where music is, as Beethoven wrote in one of his letters, the “incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend.”
CHAPTER 6

PERFORMING BEETHOVEN’S EROICA VARIATIONS:
AN ARTISTIC APPROACH

Op. 35 is one of the most demanding pieces of the piano literature of the
nineteenth century. It is monumental in structure, meaning; and gigantic technically and
musically. It is Beethoven, the best Beethoven, the Beethoven considered as a composite
genius and as a champion of the universality of the musical language. In Op. 35 there is
the Beethoven as absolute artist, creator of the immortal masterpieces in which
Romanticism recognized its own metaphysical ideals. However, in Op. 35 we also find a
hidden Beethoven, often unspoken or overshadowed: the Beethoven as virtuoso of the
piano, as performer of impressive spectactularity, and as improvisator able to capture
audiences. Derived from German Idealism, the separation (more in particular, the
fracture) between performance and composition, which advantages the latter,
subordinates the instrumentalist to the author and surrounds the score with a sacral
meaning: the artwork, intended to transcend reality to achieve a spiritual connotation,
crystallizes itself in the score with a formal structure considered perfect, and thus
immutable. In Op. 35, an authoritative geniality is accompanied by an incessant creative
restlessness, already radically modern. In the Eroica Variations there is also music in its
most profound essence, there is art, history, philosophy, Enlightenment, Goethezeit,
German Idealism, and there is the pianoforte as we conceive it today, an orchestral
instrument. Last but not least, there is the challenge that only a great concert piece can
offer.
The *Eroica Variations* represent a moment of particular relevance if we look at the relationship between Beethoven and the pianistic variation, a relationship that is not always possible to define clearly because Beethoven, in addressing the variation genre, alternated committed and courageous researches to choices showing a more occasional character—especially in the years of his youth—before arriving to the elaboration of the variations in the *Sonata Op. 109* and in the *Sonata Op. 111* and later in the *Diabelli Variations, Op. 120*, which are considered as the culminating phase of his research and development of the genre. Before these apexes, the *Eroica Variations* are maybe the most remarkable set, the collection richer in novelties with a variety of ideas that anticipates the cornerstone models of Beethoven’s last years (Petazzi 2000). This richness, however, has caused divergent opinions and some perplexities among Beethoven’s scholars. Giovanni Carli Ballola, for instance, judges with excessive severity the “uncertain” and “ambitious” experimentalism of the collection. According to him, the *Eroica Variations* were conceived as a “magnificent” study towards the last movement of the *Eroica Symphony*. Additionally, he asserts that the Fugue has thematic material that presents an exterior resemblance with the one in the Fugue of Op. 106, yet the polyphonic procedures are not developed according to a credible contrapuntal logic while the variations, permeated by brilliant pianistic technical ingredients, are mere iterations of the thematic scheme (Balolla 1985: 91). It is undeniable, notwithstanding such an opinion, that Op. 35 presents stylistic and qualitative elements of notable attention that certainly anticipated determining aspects of the most advanced Beethovenian thought. However, because of their significant affinities with the Finale of the *Eroica Symphony*, they can be obviously considered a kind of preparatory design for it, especially since they
share with the Finale of the *Eroica Symphony* the initial material and the conception to not begin immediately with the exposition of the theme, but with the *Introduzione col basso del tema*. It is also necessary to recall here, as seen earlier, that the main “musical ingredient” of the *Eroica Variations* was not original either, as it came from the allegorical ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* of 1801).

In the *Introduzione*, after presenting the *basso del tema*, with the sudden contrast of color constituted by the three B-flats, Beethoven builds on this bass contrapuntal lines in two, three, and in four voices.\(^29\) The theme, thus, arrives at the end of a long introduction. The first variations move according to a traditional plan, which shows brilliant virtuosic writing. Beethoven abandons the contrapuntal procedure manifested in the *Introduzione* and shapes the profile of the *tema* and the *basso del tema*. In Variation VII, Beethoven returns to a Baroque procedure by presenting a rigorous canon structure (of notable independence from the theme). Variation VIII anticipates a melodic intensity and conception found later in Romantic *Klavierstücke*. Variation IX returns to a brilliant dimension, and opens a new phase in the overall articulation of the cycle, as in the first time at the beginning of the set with Variation I. The *Minore* Variation XIV shows a notable harmonic definition and, as discussed earlier, directly relates to Variation XV, the *Largo*, where the richness of the embellishments, not at all

\(^{29}\) Robert Schumann will remember this contrapuntal procedure in his *Ten Impromptus on a Theme by Clara Wieck, Op. 5*, which were composed in 1833 as a set of variations on a theme by the thirteen-year old Clara Wieck. They were modeled after Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations*. Schumann’s model is clear at the beginning of the work, where, as seen in Beethoven’s collection, the Impromptus begin with a bass line alone and the actual melodic material emerges only when the variations themselves start. As an additional imitation of Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations*, Schumann concludes the set with a fugue, edging it with a gigue in a homage to the Baroque dance suite.
conventional, is another aspect of the *Eroica Variations* that, together with the opening Introduzione in contrapuntal motion and the canon structure of Variation VII, reminds of a Baroque dimension. Moreover, thinking about another parallel with the Baroque period, the *Largo* Variation also presents in its character those qualities of freedom associate to a fantasy, a toccata, or a prelude. Those forms often precede a fugue, which is the musical peak of Op. 35 after the incessant experimentation and development showed in the fifteen variations. More precisely, I see the *Largo* Variation XVI and Fugue taken together as constituting a point of arrival in the musical motion of Op. 35.\(^{30}\) This wonderful moment of arrival in the *Eroica Variations*, however, does not conclude the piece, but it is placed framed in the structure of the cycle, because it is followed by the *Finale Andante con moto*, one more and last statement of the theme, broader and varied.

I arrived to the study of Op. 35 in my life as a pianist after mastering and performing the most substantial Beethoven’s sonatas and the *Thirty-two Variations in C Minor*. Before I approached the *Eroica Variations*, I studied Beethoven’s *Sonata Op. 111*. I believe that addressing Op. 35 with a deep and fresh knowledge of what the pianistic variation meant to Beethoven in the last period of his life—knowledge acquired thanks to the study of the second movement in variation form of Op. 111—allowed me to fully comprehend the novelty that the *Eroica Variations* represented in the genre\(^{31}\).

\(^{30}\) The *Minore* Variation XIV in Op. 35 has also a diverse function if compared to the other variations because it anticipates the turn to a new moment within the musical structure of the piece, the arrival of the Fugue anticipated by the *Largo* Variation.

\(^{31}\) The *Eroica Variations* are considered a milestone in the output of Beethoven’s variations, second only to the other monumental set composed by Beethoven at the end of his life, the *Diabelli Variations*, *Op. 120*. Beethoven dedicated to the variation genre many times during his life: living apart the sets without opus number, where the musical and artistic outcome is not comparable to his most substantial examples (even if the
Moreover, I approached Op. 35 in a time of my artistic development that corresponded to the study of great pieces of the concert repertoire, aspect that allowed me to be fully aware of the challenges, the content, and the artistic and musical originality offered by the piece. My approach to the *Eroica Variations* is an orchestral approach that considers the sonoric and timbric possibilities of the modern piano and the revolution that Beethoven brought to piano performance with his most substantial pieces. I believe that the *Eroica Variations* are comparable for structure, monumental dimensions, and musical profoundness only to Beethoven’s most substantial piano sonatas. I found in this piece the challenges of all the cornerstones of the piano literature that I addressed in my life, even if different, and for this reason I reckon Op. 35 one of the core pieces of my repertoire as a concert pianist. The main problem in the rendition of this piece is to be able to sustain the artistic intensity, the tension, and the driving force that shape the *Eroica Variations* from the opening sustained E-flat Major chord to the last chord after about twenty three minutes. The musical motion of this piece is a continuum, and in its variety it creates a whole: the fast moments, the slow moments, the moments of pause, the fast moments, the slow moments, the moments of pause,

Thirty-two Variations in C Minor present an experimentation and an attention to the transformation of the theme and of the musical discourse that does not forget artistic aspects), Op. 34 and the sets in Op. 109 and Op. 111 are regarded as other notable achievements in the genre.

Understanding the stages of artistic development is for a pianist helpful to achieve awareness of the moment of artistic life s/he is living. Thanks to this awareness, a pianist make choices about what to study and what to perform. This awareness is also necessary to become an effective teacher. I believe that pianists keep developing artistically until the end of their life only if they keep practicing new repertoire and keep performing actively. In my opinion, while there are extraordinary cases of pianists that can be considered as having reached maturity in their twenties, the average age of entrance into artistic maturity nowadays (considering that the career of a pianist might last a life-time) is about forty-five/fifty years depending on the artistic path.
each rest, each breath, each length of a note with the fermata have to be attentively and logically planned, and have to accord.

Discussing the piece from a technical standpoint, even if it is clearly a piece that displays pianistic virtuosity, it does not present impossible challenges: the only parts that require particular attention in performance are to me Variation II (because of the fast sixteenth-note triplet motion in the right hand, where the precision is fundamental to have clarity in the technique over pedal, to obtain a powerful outcome in the fast tempo, and to shape the lines of phrasing throughout), Variation IV (the fast left hand passages have to be always well-defined independently from the dynamic level, and the shape of the variation depends on this definition), Variation IX (the pianist has to have precision and strong, iron fingers in his/her right hand to sustain a powerful motion in the speed while playing continuously intervals in staccato–thirds almost always–built on arpeggios, broken octaves, and scale passages), Variation XII (the grace notes after the jumps in the right hand need to be clear and the playing of them does not have to delay or interrupt with slight pauses the fast, propelling motion in triplets), and the Fugue (because every fugue, independently from the musical period it belongs, is difficult to play because of the timbric outcome among the voices that needs to be well-defined and clear, no matter where the subject is). Discussing the piece from a musical standpoint, instead, the *Eroica Variations* are challenging to play in any section. The heroic character dominates to me in the whole piece, and even the slow, soft variations like Variation V or Variation VIII do not have to be considered as intimate moments, but as sections where
the “heroic force” leaves some space to the “heroic reflection” before exploding again.33

The main musical challenges in the piece are 1) to create, as in all the substantial variation sets, special moments with each variation without forgetting to shape each variation as a part of a whole—this musical challenge regards in particular the first thirteen variations because, as discussed already, from the Minore Variation XIV on the piece turns to a new perspective—and 2) to give emphasis to the musical content of each of the parts from the Minore Variation XIV to the end of the piece (hence, Variation XIV, the Largo Variation XV, the Fugue, and the Finale, where the theme comes back one more time) as separate and more significant movements in the set that however constitute the set.

Before discussing in detail my artistic approach to the Eroica Variations, I would like to briefly recall the approach of great concert pianists of the past and of the present to this piece like Schnabel, Kempff, Gilels, Richter, and Brendel. What the performances of these masters have in common is to me 1) the great attention to the “double variation” in the work, that is, the attention to the transformation of the two themes (the tema and basso del tema) in each variation, the unusual feature of Op. 35, where the “first theme” is the bass line that appears at the opening, and the “second theme” emerges as the actual theme of the set at the end of the Introduzione (after the contrapuntal A quattro); and 2) the exceptional virtuosic display and the musical depth in approaching the phrasing in its complexities and scope. In these performances wild humorism and alluring lyricism are combined, while winning exuberance permits to navigate through the diverse events.

33 All the great heroes of mythology and of history were regarded because of two features: force and reflection – the latter in the sense of seriousness and correctness of thinking and deliberation. See, for instance, the heroes in Homer. 1997. Iliad. Trans. Stanley Lombardo. Indianapolis: Hackett.
of this massive piece with drive and notable effortlessess. What is different in these performances are minor details as, for instance a choice of tempo, of pedal, a longer fermata, a more emphasized moment of breathing, etc. Without disregarding the choices of the great pianists, the novelty of my approach to the performance of Op. 35 has its foundation on a precise reading of the score (in the sense of respecting the tempo, articulation, and dynamic signs in the score without taking any freedom that sometimes concert pianists take) and on an artistic vision of the work that is certainly enhanced by my critical theory interpretation of the piece (it is the first time that Op. 35 has been philosophically and historically investigated with such detail; furthermore, the very little literature on the relationship between Beethoven’s music and the philosophical thought of the time shows that such readings of Beethoven’s music need to be expanded).

My approach to the performance of the *Eroica Variations* is based on the conception that the work needs to be sustained in its whole and entirety constituted by distinct moments: 1) the Introduzione col Basso del Tema (and its contrapuntal specifications of *A due*, *A tre*, and *A quattro*; 2) the Tema and the first thirteen variations; 3) the Minore Variation XIV as an anticipation of the turn of the piece to the discussed new perspective; 4) the *Largo* Variation XV; 5) the Fugue; and 6) the Finale (the last presentation of the *tema*, varied expanded, and musically increased to build the significant end of a substantial piece). I begin the piece giving great emphasis, with a powerful and warm sound, to the first chord in fermata because that chord to me has an important function: it sets up the context for what follows, the entrance of the *basso del tema*. I play the *basso del tema* with great definition and clarity in the *pianissimo*. The *fortissimo* of the B-flats needs to be very powerful and contrasting, not percussive,
however. I conceived the entire Introduzione as a “crescendo” preparing the entrance of the *tema*. Yet, this crescendo is not a dynamic crescendo, but a crescendo that Beethoven clearly conceived as an increase of texture in the three contrapuntal lines of *A due*, *A tre*, and *A quattro*, leading to the explosion of the loud sound to the *forte* in the *A quattro*. The *A quattro* is the arrival moment of the Introduzione before the entrance of the *tema*, and it anticipates the powerful heroic character of the most brilliant variations and of the Fugue in the set. I address the statement of the *Tema* with great attention and detail. While the *tema* emerges for the first time in the piece, it is not replacing the *basso del tema*, which to me needs to be played always with definition and clarity in the exposition of the theme and in the variations (as seen earlier, the *basso del tema* will always have a fundamental position in the musical motion and in its transformation). I shaped the exposition of the *Tema* and the variations not only following the dynamic signs, but also considering the direction of the phrasing. Moreover, I search for slight differences in the repetition of each part of the binary form. For example, in the first two measures of Variation I, in the opening phrase unit, I played the first time a slight crescendo to A Flat, while the second time I shaped it with a slight crescendo diminuendo; in Variation IV, I played the first part of the binary form bringing out the top note of the chords in the right hand the first time, hence focusing on the variation of the *tema*, while in the repeat of it I still brought out that note, but I focus more on the left hand sixteenth-note motion, shaping it continuously without losing obviously the main dynamic level, which is piano and only opens to loud in the measure that precedes the second part of the binary form.
Another aspect of my approach to Op. 35 is the clear definition between legato, “Mozartian legato,” and staccato playing so the articulation adds contrast to the various moments of the piece. More in detail, Variation III and Variation VII need a correct legato/staccato according to the articulation signs. Variation IX and XIII need a perfect and powerful staccato for the intervals of the arpeggios (Variation IX) and for the triplets notwithstanding the jumps between the embellished single note and the chords (Variation XIII). In Variation V and in Variation XIV smooth legato playing dominates, and Variation X and Variation XII share the legato patterns in two sixteenth notes.

Regarding the Mozartian legato, Variations I, II, IV, and VI present long passages where to apply this particular articulation—the right hand passages in Variations I and II, and the left hand passages in Variations IV and VI. All the three types of articulation are employed in the long sections of Op. 35, Variation XV, the Fugue, and the Finale.

A strong musical sensitivity and a great awareness of the capabilities of timbre and sound of the modern piano are necessary conditions to perform the *Eroica* Variations: in this piece, the *forte* needs to be loud, powerful, triumphant, and full, and the *piano* needs to be soft, clear, defined, dramatic, and reflective. In addition, the shape of the different nuances of sound needs to be diverse depending on the section, and crescendo and diminuendo need to be adjusted more or less powerfully depending on the

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34 The Mozartian legato articulation is the one used to play the majority of legato fast passages in the fast movements of Mozart’s sonatas and other works for piano. It is a “mix” of legato and non-legato playing and, thanks to it, it is possible to have brilliancy and clarity in the fast tempi, even if pedaling is employed. Its realization is in the quick release of the fingers while connecting.

35 It is important to remind that Beethoven did not use any articulation sign for these passages, as Mozart did not employ any articulation sign for the passages where we apply the Mozartian legato. Variation VIII does not present any articulation sign for most of the right hand and left hand sixteenth-note passages either, yet the character of this variation asks for a legato playing for those passages.
context. All this requires a great command of the instrument. The most challenging sections to render in Op. 35 are the Largo Variation XV, the Fugue, and the Finale because of their meaning and their position in the piece. Variation XV is a hymn where the melodic lyricism, the integration of the tema and basso del tema, and the tension build in the musical discourse, and by this integration need to direct the artistic vision of the performer. Variation XV is also the light after the darkness (the Minore Variation XIV), the point of arrival after the first fourteen variations, and the variation where the new perspective of Op. 35 starts realizing itself (longer movements, most substantial writing in the texture, more demanding musical construction, etc.). The Fugue is the section that distinguishes itself from the rest of the work, and incorporates qualities of Beethoven’s past and present. It represents the Baroque period revisited in the new century, the nineteenth century. It is heroic, and points to the future since it does not conclude the piece, but is followed by the Finale. The Fugue requires a command of timbres that need to be sustained clearly in the different dynamic levels, which necessitate great contrasts. The Finale has to be addressed without losing power and direction after the conclusion of the Fugue. The varied and expanded last presentation of the Tema is triumphant, and does not to have be conceived as the end of Op. 35, but as a bridge towards the actual end of the work, its last chords.

The power of the Eroica Variations is in their enormous artistic possibilities that, if expressed altogether in performance, give life to a remarkable pianistic achievement. In my performance of Op. 35 I commit to realizing the orchestral conception of a monumental work for piano, the explosion of the heroic character in its two aspects of force and reflection, and the humanism and the Enlightenment of Beethoven as a man
and an artist of the early nineteenth century. A critical theory reading of Op. 35 enhances my artistic vision of the piece directing my performance in the definition of both *tema* and *basso del tema* in their combination in the different variations. Because of this reading, complete awareness of the philosophical and historic moments that Beethoven was living at the time of composition—and maybe portraying in the musical motion—strengthens my musical conception. Thinking of the diverse sections of Op. 35, the Hegelian dialectic supports the shape I gave to the first fourteen variations. The philosophical progress of the *Goethezeit* is behind the way I integrate the *tema* and *basso del tema* in their transformation in Variation XV. And Napoleon Bonaparte’s historic triumph in the early nineteenth century colours my timbric variety in the voicing of the Fugue, giving direction and driving force to the succession of its various moments.

Hence, my performance of the *Eroica Variations* is not only a mere display of technique and musicality, it is much more: it is also the representation of a vision of music (and of performance) that has its foundation in the conception of music as expression of the culture of its time. For this reason, Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations* are to me, besides being a milestone of the nineteenth century piano repertoire, the music of German Idealism and of its history:

*Music is in a sense a summatory activity for the expressions of values…As a vehicle of history…it points up the continuity of the culture; through its transmission of education, control of erring members of the society, and stress upon what is right, it contributes to the stability of culture. And its own existence provides a normal and solid activity which assures the members of society that the world continues in its proper path.*

(Merriam 1964: 225)
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THIS STUDY

This study of the *Eroica Variations*, Op. 35 analyzes Beethoven’s music through
the philosophy and the history of the time as if it were inside the musical motion.
Marston (1997) claims that anyone writing about the *Eroica Symphony* can hardly fail to
mention the fact that the main theme of the finale is not unique to the symphony, but had
been used by Beethoven on three previous occasions, most notably in the *Eroica
Variations*. Schenker is no exception; he makes the point that the symphony finale not
only uses the same theme as the piano variations, but adopts essentially the same formal
model too. For this reason, this study could be expanded with an analysis of the finale of
the *Eroica Symphony*, searching for the changes and the progress that the years passed
between 1802, the year of composition of the *Eroica Variations*, and 1804, the year of
composition of the *Eroica Symphony*, brought to the philosophical and historical
perspectives of the time and how these changes and progress affected and were reflected
in Beethoven’s music. An aspect that would need to be deeply investigated in the
historical perspective is certainly the political, authoritarian turn that Napoleon took in
1804, when he was proclaimed Emperor of France, hence disappointing those who, like
Beethoven, saw in his previous actions the realization of the ideals of the French
revolution. Another aspect that could be investigated in a study of the *Eroica Symphony*
is how Beethoven changes the use of the *tema* and the *basso del tema* switching from the
piano writing to the orchestral writing, and how the philosophical and the historical
aspects are present in the finale and in the whole structure of the *Eroica Symphony*. 
Beethoven saw in his contemporary Napoleon (they were born one year apart, Napoleon in 1769 and Beethoven in 1770) the living projection of his nature and of his personality, certainly the projection of his ideals. He considered Napoleon as he considered himself, a “giant” with the mind of a genius. Beethoven showed a tendency to address deity and humankind as if he was an elect spirit. In his attitude, he revealed to adhere to the concept of genius, which was in vogue among the German thinkers of his time. Naturally, it was not only a consideration of himself as a superior mind. The concept of genius served to define the task of an artist, to delimit the field of spiritual investigation reserved to art, in particular to music as the highest expression of human spirit. Considering this perspective, music had to be permeated by feelings of obligation, of commitment, and of necessary dominium of spirituality that, in some way, adhere to the Kantian morality. The concept of genius was adopted by Beethoven in the exacerbated meaning determined by the *Sturm und Drang;* genius, fundamental key to approach art, represented a medium by which an artist was able to discover beauty;

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36 For an in-depth investigation of Beethoven and the concept of genius, see Michael Broyles, 1996. “Tia DeNora, Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803.” *Current Musicology,* Vol. 60/61. Tia DeNora has extensively studied Beethoven’s early years in Vienna. She investigates three issues as they relate to Beethoven: the nature of the Viennese society, the concept of the artist, particularly the concept of genius in the Europe of the late Eighteenth century, and the conflict of musical styles that appeared with the approach of the end of the century.

37 Influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Sturm und Drang* (storm and urge) was a proto-Romantic movement in German literature and art. It occurred from the late 1760s to the early 1780s, and it gave free expression to individual subjectivity and to opposites of emotion in reaction to the constraints of rationalism imposed by the Enlightenment and the aesthetic movements associated to it. The movement is named after Friedrich Maximilian Klinger’s play *Sturm und Drang,* first performed in 1777. The ideologue of *Sturm und Drang* is considered to be the philosopher Johann Georg Hamann. Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, H. L. Wagner and Friedrich Maximilian Klinger were also significant figures of the movement. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was also a remarkable advocate of the movement, even if he and Friedrich Schiller ended their period of association with it by initiating what would become Weimar Classicism.
moreover, as a genius, an artist was capable to understand what was right and what was wrong in history and society. These conceptions mirrored to some extent the condition of isolation lived by the German thinkers who, excluded from an actual contact with the political and social reality of the time, attributed a decisive function to interiority (Casini 1989: 29-30). Janet Wolff points out that the way of considering the artist as a unique and gifted individual is a historically particular conception, which has its origins in the Renaissance with the rise of the merchant classes in Italy and France and with the rise of humanistic ideas in philosophy and in the religious thought. The process of artistic work still occurred completely in collective forms until the end of the fifteenth century. The artistic profession started to distinguish itself from craftsmanship from that time, and artists began to emancipate themselves from the guilds (Wolf 1984: 26-27). Hence, the artist is a reasonably modern figure. Arnold Hauser discussed the development of the word “genius” and its close association with the artist in the rich cultural context of the Renaissance.

_The fundamentally new element in the Renaissance conception of art is the discovery of the concept of genius, and the idea that the work of art is the creation of an autocratic personality, that this personality transcends tradition, theory and rules, even the work itself, is richer and deeper than the work and impossible to express adequately within any objective form ... The idea of genius as a gift of God, as an inborn and uniquely individual creative force, the doctrine of the personal and exceptional law which the genius is not only permitted to but must follow, the justification of the individuality and willfulness of the artist of genius - this whole trend of thought first arises in Renaissance society, which, owing to its dynamic nature and permeation with the idea of competition, offers the individual better opportunities than the authoritarian culture of the Middle Ages._ (Hauser 1968: 61)

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, thinkers interrogated the ways in which a nature ruled by physical laws can be
made compatible with a spirit of freedom and human creativity. According to Immanuel Kant, genius is the capability to comprehend concepts that are usually taught by another person. For Kant, originality is the essence of genius, and this genius has the talent of generating non-imitative ideas. Kant outlines the features of genius in the *Critique of Judgment*: “Genius is a talent for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other” (Kant 1987: 46).

Kant was well received by the intellectuals of the early nineteenth century, including Beethoven. The concept of genius exploded in the Romantic era and for this reason Beethoven was aware of being a genius and was able to recognize other geniuses. Bach, Haydn, and Mozart were geniuses too, yet they did not think about themselves as geniuses because the concept of geniality was not a concept of their time. Beethoven, instead, knew that people with a superior spirituality were geniuses. For this reason, Beethoven recognized in Napoleon the political, historical hero of German Idealism. For Beethoven, Napoleon incarnated Hegel’s idea of absolute freedom as the “representation of me myself,” and his political actions were guided by the consciousness of the self-conscious entity that represents its very self. As the hero of German Idealism, he made freedom his principal value and was the political representation of the Hegelian transcendental subjectivity that took shape as *absoluter Geist*: Napoleon was the “living Spirit” that carried this distinctive freedom within himself as a cosmic force, the freedom to make, to shape, and to create the history of his time. Hence, the Napoleon of the *Eroica Variations* is not only a “military hero” who won many battles and wars, but also a “human hero” who lived his life at the maximum of his potential. Beethoven was able
to recognize Napoleon because Beethoven himself was a human hero and a hero of German Idealism. Evidence of this idea is that, while deaf and sick, sublime in his sufferings, he composed the *Ode to Joy* of the *Ninth Symphony* as he felt that he had a mission to complete as a man and as an artist. In one of his letters, he wrote: “Apollo and the muses will not yet permit me to be delivered over to the grim skeleton, for I owe them so much, and I must, on my departure for the Elysian Fields, leave behind me all that the spirit has inspired and commanded to be finished” (Beethoven 1964: 86).

While Napoleon was waking up Europe from the long sleep of its monarchic past by incarnating the ideal of freedom and by affirming the rights of individuals of the French Revolution – in all things liberty was the fundamental principle of Beethoven’s life (ibid.: 101)–, Beethoven gave life to his heroic period, which mirrors the philosophy and the history of his time. It was 1801 when Beethoven started working on the *Eroica Symphony*. The Ambassador of France in Vienna, General Bernadotte, assured him that he would have let Napoleon have the score. Beethoven, as an ingenuous artist, was witnessing the ascent of his hero, the political projection of himself: he composed the *Eroica Variations*, his hymn to German Idealism and to the history born from that philosophy, in 1802 and was transforming that piece for piano in the last movement of the symphony that had to celebrate the history of that philosophy when Napoleon was proclaimed Emperor of France. Beethoven’s disappointment in Napoleon lies in his discovery of the ambiguity of politics, which incorporates both a general interest (the people’s interest) and personal ambition. For Beethoven, politics had to aim at freedom and at general interest, while for Napoleon politics had become in 1804 the realization of his personal ambition.
When Beethoven was informed that Napoleon had died, he said: “For this end I already composed a funeral march seventeen years ago” (Augias). The funeral march is the second movement of the *Eroica Symphony*: it is the funeral march of a hero and for this reason it has a heroic character. If compared to Chopin’s funeral march in his *Sonata No. 2 in B Flat Minor, Op. 35*, the character is different: Chopin’s funeral march is sad because it is the funeral march of a man (it can be played for every man who dies), while Beethoven’s funeral march is epic in the Homeric sense because it represents Beethoven’s disappointment in Napoleon and the failure of a political hero who carried in himself a philosophical and historical ideal. Moreover, it is epic because for Beethoven Napoleon as a hero will never die even if he failed, because the hero survives his time. Hence, notwithstanding his disappointment in Napoleon, Beethoven perceived him as a true hero, an immortal hero: to represent his immortality in the symphony, he placed the funeral march in the second movement, after a long-term fight and final triumph in the first movement. In this scheme, the third movement of the *Eroica Symphony* would symbolize resurrection and the last movement would represent the hero who takes a place among the immortals (Cooper 2000: 131). Berlioz discussed the last movement of the *Eroica Symphony* by noting that “the hero causes many tears; but, after the last regrets paid to his memory, the poet turns aside from elegy, in order to intone with transport his hymn of glory” (Scott 2007: 15).

In the *Eroica Variations* Beethoven represents the personality of the hero Napoleon in its two features: the epic aspect and the sentimental aspect. The epic aspect is in the strong character of the *basso del tema*, while the sentimental aspect is in the lyricism of the *tema*. These two aspects are also present in the contraposition of the first
theme vs the second theme (an epic aspect in the first theme and a lyric aspect in the second theme) in the first movement of the *Eroica Symphony*, besides being present obviously in its last movement. The *basso del tema* is “empty” because isolated notes are followed by rests (even long rests at times): it is something next to nothing that could be the foundation of anything. Yet, together with the *tema*, it forms a dance that for Beethoven “had come to represent something in the direction of Schiller’s most perfectly appropriate symbol of the assertion of one’s own freedom and regard for the freedom of others:” in other words, the image of an ideal society (Swafford 2014: 332). Beethoven, by using the technique of the variation, with his creativity transformed an “empty” *basso del tema* into a piece of music filled with philosophical and historical meaning, which is one of the cornerstones of the piano repertoire, and the last movement of one of his major symphonies.

The future of this study is in its potential: its approach and its methodology can be applied to other pieces of music. I believe that classical performing artists have the duty to explain the music that they perform and what they feel and see in their repertoire to make it accessible not only to other musicians in the field, but also to their audiences and to people that are distant from that music because they do not comprehend it. Investigating a piece of music considering its historical and philosophical context is one of the first duties a performing artist needs to commit to because s/he needs to completely understand the work to be able to deliver its meaning. In this sense, my approach to the reading of Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations* can be an example to follow because it suggests an “intellectual” investigation of the piece to enhance a performative interpretation that can be applied to other pieces of repertoire. I think that a critical
theory/hermeneutic reading, however, applies certainly better to pieces of repertoire that were not openly discussed by their composers regarding their meaning, that are not clearly associated to specific content, or that were not already investigated with a reading that has been accepted by the community, which thus considers that reading “the” reading of those pieces.  

Hence, in my opinion, the condition sine qua non for a study like this is that an interpretive reading of the piece does not have to exist or, if exists, does not have been in conflict with the new reading. The novelty of this study regarding Op. 35 is in the combination, in the investigation, of the critical theory aspect and the performance aspect, amalgamation that could be achieved because of deep knowledge of piano performance, music theory, critical theory, and of the disciplines of history and philosophy. Therefore, an interpretive reading of a piece of repertoire needs to be based on experience and knowledge and needs to refer to real facts to be considered reasonable and logic. Last but not least, this study aims to encourage performers to discuss more about the music that they perform, sharing their challenges and their perspectives on their repertoire because every interpretation is special:

*The function of the interpretation is fundamental: the great music of the past lives in the interpretations of the great performers who were able to transmit it. An interpretation is not an improvisation, yet there is undoubtedly a factor of improvisation (in it). We deal with a mysterious aspect: a piece of music has been addressed in all its elements, through performances and study, but then when we are performing in the hall we are in the conditions of having to give life to it again from the beginning. I am not saying that the preparation is not important, but that piece needs to live in that moment... It is obvious to search for the authenticity of an interpretation, of a vision and of a music, but when can we arrive to say that we have understood what the composer was feeling or thinking? This*  

38 Any other new, contrasting reading, in this case, would have great difficulties at affirming itself. Yet, new readings that investigate aspects left open by previous readings or that start their investigation from other accepted readings exist in the critical theory field.
is an enormous question mark: nobody will ever know for sure. Therefore, 
there is the fundamental necessity of believing in our own instinct. (Pollini
2012)
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