

The *Weltgeist* Plays it. Notes on Hegel's Dialectical Thinking and Beethoven's Compositional Style

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In the preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel maintains – from the very first page, which deals with scientific knowledge – that essential are not the results and the final aims of research, as is commonly believed, but rather the essential lies in the development and the process (*Ausführung*) which, through the work of the concept, leads to the results. In a not dissimilar way, in the classical sonata-form, and in particular in its Beethovenian version, the results of the recapitulation are produced through the motif-work of development (*Durchführung*). The analogies are obvious and can be identified even in the compositional technique of Bach¹, or in that which Schönberg defines as developing variation (*entwickelnde Variation*) and which, subsequently, in Viennese Classicism became the preponderant compositional principle. Such analogies are an expression of a deeper historical problem of which both Hegelian philosophy and the music of Beethoven are similar representations, but at the same time they are dissimilar,

¹ See T.W. ADORNO, *Bach gegen seine Liebhaber verteidigt*, in: ID., *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by R. Tiedemann, G. Adorno and S. Buck-Morss, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1973-2001, vol. X.I, p. 141; English translation: ID., *Bach defended against his devotees*, in: ID., *Prisms*, Boston, MIT Press, 1997, p. 138, in which the author defines Bach's musical conscience as being double, harmonic and counterpoint-based, which seeks to synthesize a harmony based fundamentally on the general bass with the polyphony of single autonomous voices.

or they represent relations between subject and substance, expressivity and form, particular moment and general totality and, in the last analysis, relations between individual and society in an analogous, but also diverging, manner, especially with regard to the final solutions. In 1807 Hegel summarizes his approach stating that it is necessary to conceive of and express truth not only as substance, but equally as subject². If the basic problem is the same, the critical impulse with regard to historical development instead leads Hegel to reinforce the systemacity of rational knowledge and therefore the totalizing side of the dialectic, there where Beethoven matures a critique of the tectonic of the sonata–form, founded on the tonal system, that transcends it together with the tonal system itself. A critical approach of comparison between Hegel and Beethoven, consequently, must be established through the execution and the development of their particular themes as *Ausführung* and *Durchführung*. Both, in fact, seek to constitute a totality, but both, and in a radically diverging way, will be constrained to recognize in a more or less explicit way that the entirety is the non–real. The ways out are offered by side roads and, in order to have philosophy and music interact, it is necessary to translate the Hegelian dialectic into something that can be called sound figures (*Klangfiguren*), that is moments of a philosophy of music in which one of the two – philosophy or music – is not always missing. On the other hand, it is necessary to attempt to translate the music of Beethoven, through a dialectical interpretative language, even at the risk of failing, as is the case in the last compositions that are more resistant to logical and conceptual understanding. Nevertheless, perhaps this very failure could open up other horizons for reading and understanding not only of Beethoven, but also of the aporias of totalizing thought and of the failure, equally significant, of the attempt to build an encyclopedic system of philosophical sciences.

The problem of the beginning that certainly torments tonal music, but also much philosophy, is dealt with by Hegel in a way no less clear and explicit as it was dealt with by Beethoven, both regarding the content of the answer and in terms of the gesture and the style. *The Science of Logic*, which at this point can be quoted with reference to both, establishes clearly that, «There is nothing in heaven, or nature or spirit or anywhere else that does not contain just as much immediacy as mediation»³. So the beginning consists of something that has both an immediate expressive necessity and the energy of mediation. It is Adorno who affirms that Beethoven’s compositional procedure resembles in many ways and

² See G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in: ID., *Werke*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1986, vol. III, pp. 22-23; English translation: ID., *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Blackmask online, p. 7.

³ ID., *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in: ID., *Werke*, cit., vol. V, p. 66; English translation: ID., *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 46.

above all in its essence the reflective structure of Hegelian dialectics⁴. Given that Adorno's philosophy is very much in debt to Hegelian thought, his reflections on Beethoven's compositions, reflections that instead are completely missing in Hegel, constitute the starting point for the present critical essay. This approach is reinforced by the fact that, in the figure of Adorno, the Hegelian conceptual organization shows its flaws. It may be that the failure of the attempt to interpret the *Missa Solemnis* in the essay that appeared in 1957 is related to the initial slow movement away from – and the subsequent abandonment of – his life project⁵. But above all Adorno was not able to solve the problem of why Beethoven, in his maturity, had turned to archaic musical forms, and this was because of a conceptual aporia in the foundation of his research⁶.

From the dramatic dynamism that inspires the compositions of the classical period, the closest to the Hegelian dialectic conception, Beethoven, in his maturity, moves away increasingly in the direction of a compositional procedure evermore epic and allegorical that in many ways is a forerunner of Mahler's symphonies. Beethoven's music therefore represents both: the constitution and the conclusion of, as well as a criticism not only of the sonata-form⁷ – a form that is substantially of eighteenth-century derivation – that in his work is recreated through spontaneous and emancipated subjectivity. From op. 10 onwards, actually, it is even possible to interpret this kind of recreation as a sort of continuous self-reflection on the compositional principles, which may be read as "aesthetic nominalism"⁸ and determines the allegorical style of the late compositions. This

⁴ See ADORNO, *Beethoven. Philosophie der Musik*, ed. by R. Tiedemann, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1993, p. 36 et seq.; English translation: ID., *Beethoven. The Philosophy of Music*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 10-11. This thesis, never developed in the writings published in his lifetime, is as strong and harbinger of further development as it is whispered here, that is to say without any execution or development, because it is born from a genuine intuition that is still free of conceptual armour. Indeed, this idea acquires further weight if we consider how Adorno, throughout his life, almost continually and tirelessly took notes for a book on Beethoven that he never wrote. From 1937 onwards the 34-year-old began writing in various notebooks fragments of this essay that was announced several times over a long period of time in his letters to acquaintances and friends right up to the definitive abandonment of the project in 1966, three years before his death.

⁵ See ID., *Gesammelte Schriften*, cit., vol. XVII, p. 12; English translation: ID., *Night Music: Essays on Music 1928-1962*, London, Seagull Books, 2009.

⁶ See R. TIEDEMANN, *Vorwort*, in: ADORNO, *Beethoven*, cit., p. 10; p. VIII.

⁷ This critical approach in Beethoven's compositional proceedings, though, is not linked to the form only, nor exclusively to the sonata-form, since he does not use only this form as that for the first movement. It is to be found also in special techniques either in different forms employed in the first movement as in the other movements of a composition. Thus, the constellation of the single movements and the materials they are working with, should also be taken into account, obviously always in their relationship to the first movement.

⁸ I have to thank Gianmario Borio very much for this idea and for the one above (see note 7) as well as for the critical review of the musical part of the present essay.

is what its incomparable originality⁹ consists of, which, in its turn dialectic, also constitutes the principle of decomposition of substance and, therefore, the cause of moving music away from its traditional public function, even though it was also put into service. In this way he creates what we can define as, with Benjamin, the dialectic of the aura: the unique appearance of a remoteness despite the proximity of that which causes it, accompanied by the tendency, traceable in later Beethoven, towards the allegorical and the epic, which marks an era of crisis of the aura and therefore of crisis of symbolic, totalizing and substantial expressivity¹⁰. If art is impossible without the meeting of substantial and objective totality, represented by traditional forms and languages, and free subjectivity that, penetrating the form, gives it life, then in Beethoven's later compositions the blessed tension between subject and substance, disintegrates where the Hegelian system represents the latest attempt, tragically unsuccessful, to construct a bulwark against looming barbarism.

1. MUSIC AND CONCEPT

Contrary to what Hegel maintains in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, it is not poetry that converges into philosophy but music, and this in a particular way in Beethoven's work, where we are faced with the same problem of Hegelian philosophy: how is it possible to create a whole, a substance, without inflicting violence on the single elements, the subjects that constitute it? Even the *modus procedendi*, the inherent logic and the forms are similar in that music constitutes a play on pure logical forms – position, identity, simile, contradiction, part and whole – that are also used by philosophy. The difference, nevertheless, between music and philosophy, consists of the fact that in music the synthesis is constituted without judgment (*Urteil*, which is to say original separation or division) and therefore without that

⁹ See the so called Beethoven Paradigm in: L. GOEHR, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 205-242; for instance: «works were specified *in toto* according to an underlying or transcendent truth. That a work's determining idea was an expression of an individually inspired genius effectively meant that its content was necessarily elusive and not subject, therefore, to mundane description or change» (p. 222); or: it is «the central conception of a musical work as a self-sufficiently formed unity, expressive in its synthesized form and content of a genius's idea» (p. 242).

¹⁰ See W. BENJAMIN, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in: ID., *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1980-1989, vol. V.I, J 77a, 8, p. 461; English translation ID., *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 365 as well as G. LUKÁCS, *Die Theorie des Romans*, Darmstadt/Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1982; English translation: ID., *The Theory of the Novel*, London, Merlin Press, 1988: the form of the novel is expression of an era abandoned by the gods. Hegel too maintains that in periods of passage from one era to another the epic in its various forms always finds itself in the foreground.

conceptual abstraction that suppresses the concrete particular; the musical synthesis is not structured as subordination, but as constellation of the elements that compose it. This, however, does not detract from musical logic as if, with regard to discursive logic, it were less stringent; on the contrary, it constitutes a necessary and objective logic that constructs a stringent whole through the reiteration and the recreation of its substantial forms by the particular and free subject. To be in possession of the concept of something means knowing what purpose it can serve, but that purpose is imposed on the thing by the very concept¹¹. The young Hegel also knew this problem well and indeed maintained that «to understand means to dominate»¹². The universal character of every problem abstracts from the multitude of details only that which renders them all identical. Thus, like Hegel's philosophical procedure, Beethoven's musical dynamics also represent the process of understanding and interpreting the historically given world.

That which for Hegel is the perceptible, is for Beethoven, in his classic period, the theme, or mere immediacy and abstractness. The spirit, the Hegelian whole, corresponds to the traditional musical form. Between these two extremes there is the mediation, the work of the concept and musical development; the work of the subject corresponds to what Adorno describes using Schönberg's concept of the developing variation and this is for Beethoven that which determined negation is for Hegel. From this analogy between the negative moment of the dialectic and the principle of the development especially in the sonata-form or in general the thematic elaboration also in other forms, there comes the further analogy of the immanence of form that relates to both in the sense that the results of the mediation can never come from the exterior, but purely from the interior of the compositional or dialectic process, or from the creative or conceptual work. The reconciliation that concludes the Hegelian idealistic system with absolute knowledge finds its match in the recapitulation where the new reveals itself to be already contained in the old, that is at the end of the sonata-form, the same thematic material as the exposition is presented in the form of a new result. The first triad of *The Science of Logic* does not constitute a *creatio ex nihilo*, the opposition between being and nothingness means nothing if not carried out beyond their synthesis in the becoming (*Werden*) and, in the same way, for Beethoven the two themes without development are lacking in meaning. The Hegelian becoming is therefore represented in music by the sonata-form and it too affirms truth as whole, or the immediacy of the initial themes can be made real only through their development, through the motif-work. The basic logical form on

¹¹ See I. KANT, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in: ID., *Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. by W. Weischedel, Darmstadt, WBG, 1983, vol. V, p. 298 et seq.; English translation: ID., *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 51 et seq.

¹² HEGEL, *Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe*, in: ID., *Werke*, cit., vol. I, pp. 241-242.

which the entire structure of these analogies rests is that of identity that in Hegel is established ultimately between the mediating subject and the mediated object, and which in Beethoven is constituted by the form as identical totality born from a movement, that proceeds by contrasts and oppositions. Neither the perceptible in Hegel nor the themes in Beethoven have a real character of immediacy; only after the process of mediation is it possible to speak in these terms because any form of immediacy is such only as second, following mediation. Identity and totality are constituted therefore also in the sonata-form as results of mediation, or, as Schönberg says, the form is the history of a theme. Beethoven's idealist system consists of the fact that his work is the *auskomponiert* tonal system and therefore understanding Beethoven means fundamentally to understand the tonal system. He subsumes the single moments under the abstract concept of the tonal system; nevertheless the entirety comes only from the progression and the interaction of the single elements. The identity of the tonal becoming is constituted in the end as a totality of the connections that has as a consequence the negation of the single moments; despite its being established from the beginning, the tonality in the end is established as a result, similar to that which occurs for the Hegelian whole.

Through a detailed analysis of the concrete musical material, it is possible to identify the ways in which some moments of Beethoven's "idealist system" are realized. The negative moment, for example, is manifested in the opening of the *Eroica* at the seventh bar, where the cellos play a C sharp that does not belong to the base scale of E flat major¹³. The negative moment obstructs the force of the whole; at the beginning it creates a conflict with the objective spirit of the base tonality, but it is indeed thanks to the passing of this negative moment that the strength of the tonal movement can then develop. The negative moment is therefore an essential part of the tonal movement itself, and is necessary so that this last can draw strength from the negation of the specific moments.

Furthermore, these interlacing moments and the intimate mediation between the themes are very clearly to be seen in the bars 1–16 (first theme) and 35–50 (second theme) of the first movement of the *Appassionata* (*Sonata for piano* in F minor, op. 57). In truth the two themes are identical just as, in *The Science of Logic*, the being and the nothingness are identical. Identity is constructed through differences. As in the Hegelian system each single detail is false in that it is negated by the subsequent moment, Beethoven disqualifies the individual moments so as to increase their usability within the development of the whole. In this way a musical process is created that is very similar to the Hegelian movement of the *Aufhebung* that not only removes the particular moments but, at the same time, elevates and preserves them. This nevertheless is possible only if,

¹³ See L.V. BEETHOVEN, *Third Symphony*, op. 55, first movement, bars 1-8.

from the very beginning, the thematic material is intimately mediated in itself and shows almost no particular characteristics, as occurs for those themes that are basically deduced by the chord. Nevertheless, although these compositional technique characteristics bring Beethoven close to the Hegelian systematic intention of constructing the whole according to which only the subjective recreation of the objective substance in its totality can be real, Beethoven is more real than Hegel. Indeed, he not only recreates the objective musical form beginning from his artistic subjectivity, but he also criticizes the totalizing immanence of the form and transcends it, unleashing within it – and not with exterior expedients – the energy necessary to overcome the form itself. From bar 284 of the *Eroica* onwards there enters a third theme in E minor that is deduced from the previous musical process but which, at the same time, transcends it, opposing to the reality of the recapitulation the possible and the potential, the non-identical, as Adorno would say, that comes out of the movement of the identificatory musical logic and which is an expression of hope¹⁴. The artistic identity is self-declared as appearance and does not purport to reconstruct the real. In art this is possible because, contrary to the self-sufficient logic of discursive thought, it presupposes as constitutional the dualism between the work and the user. In the stringent logic of its interior structure, art always defers to the other beyond itself and thus breaks the constriction towards an absolute and total identity.

2. THE TONAL SYSTEM AND THE RECREATION OF FORM

The tonal system constitutes the language of the collectivity, which, in relation to the individual subject, represents the totality. Within this concept of totality, nevertheless, it is possible to differentiate the totality of the real – or of bourgeois society with its socio-economic relations that are only partially organized by rationality – from the utopian totality that could be born from the consequent actuation of the potentiality contained in the real totality. The artistic dialectic is actuated within the communication that is established between the creative individual that seeks expression and the objectivity of forms and languages already constituted by tradition, between the individual Beethoven and the tonal system that does not allow single melodic moments that do not derive from the mere fundamental harmonic relations. In this sense, before the subject begins to sing, its melody, its themes, are pushed by the tonality to become the whole, to recreate the objective, pre-constituted form. The tonal system subjects the music to discursive logic, which does not allow something to remain outside of pre-con-

¹⁴ Ivi, bars 284-290.

stituted relations. The relations between identical chords always mean the same; there is a principle of identity in music too and consequently also a principle of contradiction or a musical dialectic. The particular themes constitute, through the contradictory progression of development and single thematic elaborations, the whole of traditional form. The truth, in music too, is the whole, or is the reconfirmation of that which is initially posited, the themes, which already contain the result, the recapitulation.

The music of Beethoven realizes this tonal dialectic in the opposition of that which he defined as the male principle and the female principle. The individual communicates with the collectivity by making the pre-constituted language truly his own, recreating it by beginning with an autonomous, subjective organization that seeks to find its own expression. The male principle represents the subjective extreme, which, in Beethoven's poetics, places its requirements with regard to the objective extreme, or the female principle that resists. In musical language such opposition is realized in the relationship between the second interval on the one hand and the chord on the other and therefore in the dialectic between lyrical song and harmony. Beginning with this fundamental opposition Beethoven constructs relations between small intervals, traceable to the male principle, and large intervals deriving from the female principle. Where the latter posits only the tonality in itself as pre-constituted, the former principle creates a dynamic movement between accents, syncopes, *nuances* and *sforzati* that represent a particular feature of Beethoven's compositional procedure. In dialectic terms, the male principle represents in a certain way the negative moment, as is seen in the case of the first bars of the *Eroica*, that is the negation of the tonality initially posited in itself by the female principle. Beethoven's natural genius is manifested in the knowledgeable use of the chord and its dissipation through the seventh diminished. Thus the subjective moment, or its expressivity and gestuality, take possession of the objective moment, the logic and the traditional technique, to then be able to manifest themselves; the resulting dialectic is profoundly rooted in the same musical conception of Beethoven, in which it is not difficult to recognize the Hegelian conception.

Beginning with a musical dialectic conceived in this way it also becomes possible in the end to explain why the objective moment might prove to be insufficient, especially in the mature compositions and why Beethoven in his later days was necessarily transformed into a critic of classical Beethoven. The dialectic tonal system indeed renders possible both the construction of the form and resistance to it, transforming the deferment from the scheme into the real substance of tonal music. This substance is already contained *in essentiam* for example in the same sonata-form that constitutes a dialectic whole of necessity and freedom because the very same objective traditional scheme requires a develop-

ment (*Durchführung*) or thematic elaboration, that passes, however, through the individual that can predispose the themes and construct the development. The composer realizes the dialectic of the sonata-form without ever giving way to the schematicity of a form assumed as objective structure; i.e. he attempts to mediate the extraneousness of the formal scheme with regard to the subject, its exterior nature and reified schematicity without nevertheless losing objectivity and binding character. In the *Appassionata* Beethoven constitutes the objective form beginning with subjectivity, thus actuating in a certain sense in music a Copernican change analogous to that carried out by Kant in philosophy. First of all he creates two themes, which, as we have seen, are practically identical, and thus he both respects and transgresses the rules at the same time. The identity of the themes reduces the tension, while their slight difference maintains it formally, and this confers to the free subjectivity greater expressive space within the objective form. This renders possible also a structuring of the entire first movement that moves slightly away from a classical structure. It is indeed possible to consider the exposition as a first strophe and the development of the themes – which is in essence the repetition of the exposition with identical succession of the themes but this time, in an *auskomponiert* form – as second. The recapitulation constitutes the third strophe, which is followed however by a fourth, i.e. by the coda, which inverts the succession of the themes, thus obtaining the possibility of closing the entire movement with the first, which is the tragic one. Beethoven melds the objective sonata-form with a free dramatic-poetic form and thus imperceptibly shifts the barycentre of a traditional form, all the rules of which he in any case respects. The formal and free dramatic-poetic element appears strongly at the beginning of the development when from bar 79 to bar 92 there is a model on the base of the first theme in E minor under the sixteenths of the right hand. Already here, as later in the fourth movement of the *String quartet* in F major op. 135, only the subjective decision (*Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß*) creates the objective movement of the development. The whole of the form becomes possible only beginning with the subjective freedom.

From the purely aesthetic point of view the temporal factor allows us to distinguish two types of sonata in Beethoven's work. The first is of the intensive type based fundamentally on contraction, the dominion and the abbreviation of time through the development or elaboration of identical motifs that are apparently free of time. This is the expression of tranquillity through movement and is at the basis of the symphonic-dynamic idea that inspires the first movements of the *Third*, *Fifth*, *Seventh* and *Ninth Symphonies*, as well as the *Appassionata*. In the mid-to-late period of his production, Beethoven came to a first critical moment that would subsequently constitute an essential part of his mature style. The second type can be defined extensive-epic and anticipates moments in the

compositional style of Gustav Mahler. Here time is liberated and the mediation between the single motifs recedes, giving rise to a less dynamic and at one point more geometric performance; space erupts into the art of time, dissolving the immanence of the form. The tension that had been a fundamental law of the first type is now distributed over longer motif groups; the development often receives a long introduction and, once underway, it concludes quickly; the music, at times, almost stops itself. In the *Scherzo* of the *Eroica* the first six bars constitute a non-binding introduction of a binding theme; nevertheless, the entire *Scherzo* remains as though suspended in the air and it seems as though nothing happens¹⁵.

The extensive-epic type is exemplified above all by the *Trio for piano, violin and cello* "Archduke" in B flat major op. 97. The expressive subjectivity now intervenes immediately in the compositional process, no longer mediated through the objective moments of the form and it creates a subtle ambiguity that will be characteristic of the *Spätstil*. Already from the *Eroica* onwards – in which in the first movement a third theme appears and where the entire *Scherzo* remains ambiguously suspended because it is realized fundamentally on the basis of a single interval – Beethoven reaches the limits of the sonata-form where the objective moment and the subjective experience become dissociated. The critique, which here begins to take form, is directed above all against the totality of time dominated aesthetically through the objective form and involves consequently primarily the moments of the development and recapitulation that progressively lose their constitutional sense of the form. The totality reveals itself as appearance and the sense of the form is no longer found in the lingering instant of the first type, but in looking backwards, in dwelling nostalgically and in the epic character later recouped by Mahler.

3. LATE BEETHOVEN – SPÄTSTIL

Beethoven's late style, which unfolds roughly from the *Sonata for piano* in A major op. 101 onwards, cannot be reduced either to its polyphonic-objective component, or to its subjective-expressive component; we can find both monodic and polyphonic elements, an increase in subjective expressivity, but also the suppression of this same expressive character. A general characterization of the *Spätstil* could perhaps be represented by a statement made by a mature Goethe on the process of aging that is manifested in a progressive movement away from the plane of appearance. To move closer to this style the traditional dialectic

¹⁵ Ivi, Third Movement, bars 1-14.

conceptuality of Hegelian derivation is no longer sufficient and one must proceed in a phenomenological way, focussing attention on individual particular traits.

One of the first characteristics is that of emergency (*Ernstfall*); the aesthetic game becomes serious, announces its own character of appearance and transcends form. Classically each work represented, in its entirety, a complete individuation, concluded within itself, that constituted a sense. Beethoven's last quartets or piano sonatas no longer constitute an individuality, a complete unity in themselves, but they transcend the immanence of form through strict thematic relations, the single movements can also be put together in different ways, giving rise to different musical structures. The last quartets cannot finish, just like Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*, or the *Concerto for violin and orchestra in memory of an Angel* by Alban Berg, because they refuse to constitute a sense and a signifying totality within the aesthetic dimension that outside of them does not exist. Schönberg, aware of this state of emergency, had replied to those in America who had paid him compliments on his compositions: «My music is not lovely!» Bars 1–4 of the first movement of the *Quartet* in B flat major op. 130 and 1–17 of the first movement of the *Quartet* in F major op. 135 provide an idea of what the state of emergency means.

Furthermore, in the *Spätstil*, Beethoven no longer unfolds the meanings along the temporal arc of the composition – indeed the composer relinquishes dominating and structuring time through the meanings of the single parts – but he condenses them in small spaces as Anton Webern would a century later. The subject refuses to express itself following the rules of communication and takes a step backwards with regard to its own creation, as in a dream where the conscious being recedes with regard to the natural that pushes towards an expression that deceives logic and condenses meanings in a few signs.

The third characteristic consists of the desensitization and spiritualization of the compositional material. The perceptible moment – the horizontal dimension, which already had been robustly predisposed to be functional to the construction of the form – is now further reduced so as to allow for the appearance of something spiritual. The subject intervenes directly and at times leads the composition to results that do not come from the objective compositional material as in the case of the *crescendo* at the beginning of op. 130 (bars 5–7 and 11–13) that are, so to speak, “input” by the expressive subject. From this comes the destruction of the symbolic unit and a *modus procedendi* that in many ways is close to *allegoresis*, constructing structures of meaning with the bringing together of elements of undervalued forms, structures that are strongly molded by a subjective experience marked by death and decadence. These structures never constitute self-sufficient unions, but they always mean something else and require – because of their fragmentary and spiritualized character – completion by the user. Beethoven re-

duces the mediation to the point of having it disappear so that the abysses in the aesthetic appearance open up, those usually covered by the mediation. Instead of affirming the always identical in aesthetic mediations that input a semblance of polyphony in the monody of the motif–work, which indeed is subdivision and progressive development of a previous unit that in the end is reaffirmed, the approach now is to have the always identical expressed in an abstract way. The dramatic and dialectical character of the compositional style, on which its affinity with Hegelian dialectic is founded, recedes in the face of the epic and allegorical moments, which, in the last analysis, mortify the music.

Another characteristic is represented by the polarization and subsequent dissociation of compositional elements and material layers that classical music had synthesized. The tonal system is disassociated in the polyphonic extreme and in the homophonic extreme that are no longer mediated to construct a unit within which, through the objective language, the subjective premise can be elevated to an objective result. From the harmonic point of view, the subject dissociates from the collective language by no longer mediating the passages from one chord to another and substituting, as Schubert would do, modulation with subsequent shifts in chords. Through the use of syncopes and rhythmic accents that differ from their harmonic counterparts, the rhythmic dimension also dissociates from the harmonic dimension. The substance of the harmony is reduced to the simple individual chord, the meaning of the whole passes to the part and the chord, being an allegory, becomes a substitute of the processuality of the tonal system. Consequently the horizontal dimension is also polarized and, as later in mature Brahms, the large form is dissociated from the theme. In the *Ninth Symphony* Beethoven indeed juxtaposes in a hard and harsh way the most important theme of joy with the *textura* of the movement as such. In its extremes Haydn's classical ideal is also dissociated, an ideal that had united the folk dimension of music with its erudite dimension. Music no longer speaks the language of the individual that in the caesurae of the composition retires from the work, leaving it to speak alone.

In the fifth movement of op. 130 (bars 1–9) the tonic is anticipated and appears already in the introduction, creating an effect of suspension and of ambiguity that does not allow the subject to dominate the tempo. The condensation that loads the single reduced parts with immense meanings transforms them into compositional conventions such as the trills in the *Sonata for piano* in C minor, op. 111 or the repeated motifs in bars 1–8 of the second movement of op. 130. The tonal material hardens, the themes no longer live their own life and, as far as conventions go, they free themselves of the appearance of being dominated by the subject. The problem of how something living can transform itself into a formula, or reify itself, becomes a formal law in Beethoven's last compositions: establishing in some way a relationship between the conventions and subjectivity as occurs in

the first movement of op. 135, where the melody is only variously subdivided and repeated. The sense is no longer mediated by the totality of that which appears because nothing of that which appears is what it seems to be. The *allegoresis* of the *Spätstil* moves away from the plane of appearance and puts its roots down in the inorganic and in the amorphous because the subject has now reached full self-awareness of the total nullity of the individual. This moves the centre of compositional attention to the relationship with death and the subject comes out of it only by leaving free that which previously he had dominated, depositing definitively the artistic appearance as in the *Cavatina* (fifth movement of op. 130), where in bars 23–30 the absolute caducity of the music is *auskomponiert*.

Op. 130, Fifth Movement, bars 23–30

4. CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

In the *Sonata for piano* in C minor, op. 111, the classic third movement is absent and, as is known, in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* the character of Wendell Kretschmar – a counter-figure of Adorno – justifies this absence, explaining that, following that immense trill in the second movement, after that extremely long farewell it was not possible to begin again. The subject abandons the dramatic and public stage because the substance, the objectifying form, no longer holds it, neither does the subject himself understand any longer the form, the substance. Perhaps the efforts made by Beethoven regarding counterpoint and other previous compositional procedures of thematic elaboration and variation can be interpreted as extreme attempts, but failures, in recouping into subjectivity a different formal compositional and substantial objectivity. Nevertheless, the process

of subjectivization of music, as well as that of philosophy cannot be stopped, neither is it of any use to recoup styles, methods and procedures as such from the past. Hegel knew this very well when, in his lessons on aesthetics, he criticized the Nazareni. The attempt to keep together, through subjectivization, the substance and the subject – in musical terms the vertical dimension of the harmony, i.e. the tonal system, and the autonomous melodic, horizontal dimension – is common to Hegel and Beethoven, and it failed. It is this, perhaps, that makes up the deepest sense of the Hegelian verdict, according to which art belongs to the past: art has lost the capacity to participate in the creation of a human collective and public coexistence. The freedom from conventions – compositional as well as ethical and political – had not managed to transform itself into a freedom for a new binding language and for what, before the Revolution, was called Brotherhood. Beethoven's last compositions indeed seek to render musically the regressive reification not only of a musical language and syntax, but that of life as such. In order to overcome the failure of the bourgeois attempt not only to found the autonomy of art, but above all to construct a new society, free and brotherly, more than a century later, the imaginary composer Adrian Leverkühn not only would maintain that «the heart needed to be [...] swept with the besom»,¹⁶ but also that it was necessary to «become much more barbaric to be capable of culture once again»¹⁷.

If in the passage from the dynamic, dialectic and dramatic style to a more epic and allegorical approach Beethoven dissociates Haydn's classical and humanist ideal of unity between the erudite or subjective and the folk or the substantial, this is not to be read only as a criticism and self-criticism of the classical in music, but also rather as critique of his own historical and political present. Not only in 1804 did he delete the dedication to Napoleon on the score of the *Third Symphony*, but it seems that eight years later in Teplitz – as Bettina von Arnim recounts – Goethe made way for the passage of the imperial family and bowed, while Beethoven expected the imperial family to make way for the two artists. According to another anecdote, his younger brother, Johann Jakob, after having purchased some land just outside Vienna, wrote him a note that was signed, «Johann Jakob van Beethoven, landowner». Ludwig, apparently, replied: «Ludwig v. Beethoven, brain owner». In his own solitude, in his private freedom from everything, but without a constructive freedom for the work and for society, the modern composer has nothing but his own faculties for experience and for transforming it into music. The solitude of the modern artist is not only a

¹⁶ T. MANN, *Doktor Faustus*, Frankfurt a.M., Fischer, 1974, p. 87; English translation: Id., *Doctor Faustus*, New York, Vintage International, 1999, p. 70.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 83; p. 66.

consequence of the fact that, with the rise to power of the bourgeoisie, art had become autonomous, but is also a consequence of the failure of the Revolution and the substantial disappearance of its ideals, in particular the ideal of brotherhood. Modern art pays for its own autonomy with the lack of influence, not only culturally, but also socially and politically, of its own works. The subject has been lost to substance and this subtracts every binding foundation of truth not only from the subject, but also from substance itself, no matter how much it also seeks refuge in the philosophical system.

Not only with regard to Goethe, but also with regard to his contemporary Hegel, who believed he had seen in Napoleon the spirit of the world as a seer on horseback, Beethoven's relationship with his own historical and political present presents significant differences that are certainly not limited to the anecdotal¹⁸. With the *Ninth Symphony* and the *Missa Solemnis* it seems he sought one last time to achieve for music the substantiality of being a social and collective catalyst, a substantiality, however, that is declared as being impossible by the compositional procedures used and by coeval chamber compositions. The attempt to construct an organic totality – be it philosophical, musical, aesthetic or socio-political – through and beginning from single and individual subjectivity characterizes the history of bourgeois culture certainly from the moment in which Descartes placed all possibility of trustworthy knowledge and experience in the cognitive faculties of subjectivity. The very birth of aesthetics as an autonomous philosophical discipline through Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century constitutes a significant moment of this in that it seeks to integrate logical, rational and deductive knowledge with perceptible, mimetic and inductive knowledge, thus again subjectivity and substantiality. As is known, this approach will find its complete expression in Schiller's attempts to integrate, through a re-elaboration of the third Kantian *Critique*, Baumgarten's epistemological approach with the political, social and cultural exigencies of the epoch. Beethoven's *Ninth*, ultimately, is a paramount but also ambiguous expression of that history, both political and economic as well as musical and cultural: this is the maximum manifestation of bourgeois subjectivization and sentimentalism and, nevertheless, it also repre-

¹⁸ See GOEHR, *The Imaginary Museum*, cit., p. 208: «The Beethoven Myth [...] is justified [...] on much more than aesthetical grounds alone». From the point of view of self-awareness, similar episodes confirm the Beethoven Paradigm elaborated in terms of museumization of musical works (p. 205), «complete and discrete, original and fixed, personally owned [...] musical works» (p. 206), music as autonomous art (p. 207), publishing houses, performing bodies, and a paying public (p. 210), social emancipation, independent, and individual consciences (pp. 211 and following), originality (p. 220), precise notional instructions, untouchability (p. 224), distinction between composers and performers (p. 228), transparency (232), modern forms of music criticism (p. 239), and, finally, the ideal of *Werktreue* or *Texttreue* (pp. 231 and 243 and following). It might as well also be precisely a consciousness like this, which in the end dialectically pushes the underlying work-concept and aesthetic autonomy, which so profoundly influences the ideology of what is called classical music, into the direction of overcoming itself.

sents for the last time the ideal of a full and substantial humanity to which every man aspires. But already this index of universality and substantiality marks the overturning of the maximum cultural expression of humanity in barbarism: the bourgeois universal, indeed, has never been sufficiently general, total and structured within itself, to be also a genus, a human genus capable of transforming individuals into subjects that are formed and are actively participant in an organic whole that does not suppress singularities but, on the contrary, elevates them to the highest degree of socialization. The bourgeois universal of humanism, which dates back to the beginning of the Renaissance¹⁹, indeed finds historical expression in totalitarianism, a bad parody of totality, which, being only partial, always requires another negative to define and therefore to limit itself. The bourgeois substance is incapable of reaching a totality of dialectically and organically grown together single subjects, that is therefore in itself organized; it has never succeeded in structuring the totality of the human genus and to modify, consequently, individual consciences so as to be able to bring about an overturning of the quantity of the masses to assure a substantial collective quality, aiming to determine with ever increasing precision the organic position of the individuals within mankind, and not only the mere function of the individuals in the economic productive process which, through alienated work, produces degenerate partialities²⁰. In the *Ode to Joy* Schiller indeed limits the circle of the joyous to those who have found a friend, «Who cannot, may steel alone, | Weeping from our holy ground!»²¹. Despite Beethoven's having substantially reduced the text of Schiller's ode, so that it was almost half of the original length, and his having made significant changes, this passage is not modified at all. There is therefore a blind moment even in Beethoven's lucid consciousness that is otherwise vigil in looking out for the ideological falsity of bourgeois culture²².

For his part, Hegel, on the failure of the programme announced in 1807, ten years later – and so shortly after the Congress of Vienna – reacts by reinforcing, in the *Encyclopaedia*, the philosophical concept in the hope of managing to create an

¹⁹ The «revocation of Beethoven's *Ninth*» by Leverkühn has precisely the meaning of revoking, from the Renaissance onwards, the entire bourgeois culture that led, according to Thomas Mann, to the barbarism of the twentieth century. See MANN on *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in: ID., *Wagner und unsere Zeit*, Frankfurt a.M., Fischer, 1990, p. 134.

²⁰ It may be useful, with regard to how to consider the totality or mankind, to make a reference to the difference that Aristotle operates between *to pan* and *to holon*; see ARISTOTLE, *TA META TA PHYSIKA*, V, 26, 1024a 1 et seq.

²¹ F. SCHILLER, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. by H.G. Göpfert and G. Fricke, München, Hanser, 1966, vol. I, p. 48 (the English translation is by John Sullivan Dwight).

²² It is necessary, nevertheless, to bear in mind not only the fact that the *Ninth* was, in 1822, the first musical work commissioned by a public musical institution, the London Philharmonic Society, but also the political intentions that its composer, faced with the restoration, tied to it.

organic and systematic totality, despite the adverse historical and political developments; as a consequence he too, like Beethoven, stops the dynamic of becoming, but in a different way: he operates a logical, conceptual and therefore abstract *metabasis*. For Hegel the force of the philosophical concept not only surpasses artistic imagination, but it must also be politically efficient and capable – idealistically and platonically – of organizing peaceful human coexistence. Nevertheless, faced with the Hegelian verdict that decrees its death, an art such as Beethoven's music survives despite the philosophical systemization of the whole, as though it really were truth, because it recognizes a similar reconciliation between subject and substance as profoundly false. The Hegelian *Ausführung* here dissociates itself from the Beethovenian *Durchführung* that declares its failure. Thus, in the face of perennial non-conciliation art not only maintains the right to contribute to the creation of collective consciousness; on the contrary, it is more strongly invested with the emergency that followed the failure of the Revolution and of philosophy, praxis, and theory. Art neither dies nor is surpassed by the philosophical concept; it, thanks to its forms and techniques connected to *mimesis*, keeps the horizons of individual and collective freedom open. Only of that which is free is it possible to conceive an idea²³: this is the profoundest truth of idealism, both in Hegelian philosophy and in Beethoven's music. In fact, only he or she who is free can – reflecting, contemplating, imagining and acting – make their own idea real, even if there are no guarantees. Philosophy, like the Hegelian, which seeks to understand and to interpret the natural and historical world, can achieve a perfectly unique system only when it has managed to mold these worlds as well; this is what the gamble of idealism consists of. In this sense Hegel's effort is heroic because it has sought to erect a bulwark against the advance of barbarism; but it is also tragic because it is destined to fail.

In the continuing lack of a true historical collective subject, the hope of salvation can be invested only in the individual, as much bearer of culture, critical consciousness, ideals and knowledge as he or she is a disruptive ingredient. In the current state of affairs, subjectivity remains the only *pharmakon* capable of also being dialectic: in a sense it is the survivor, or what remains of the great revolutionary bourgeois cultural project – of which the October Revolution was intended as heir – of a free, self-aware subject, integral part of a socialized totality of mankind.

²³ See HEGEL, HÖLDERLIN, SCHELLING, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, in: HEGEL, *Werke*, cit., vol. I, p. 234.