

Motivic Accumulation in the Exposition of the First Movement from Beethoven's Op. 29

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Abstract: Starting from Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno's quoted motto, the text discusses "what is going on, musically, *underneath*" the "formal schemata" on Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quintet*, Op. 29, first movement exposition. In order to achieve this purpose, the term motivic accumulation is proposed and explained as a rather effective analytical tool. Comments on some concepts by authors such as Arnold Schoenberg, Wallace Berry, Charles Rosen, and Clemens Kühn will integrate the analysis in order to fulfil this explanation.

Keywords: Ludwig van Beethoven. *String Quintet*, Op. 29. Musical Form. Motivic Analysis.

Acumulação motivica na expolição do primeiro movimento do op. 29 de Beethoven.

Resumo: Partindo da epígrafe citada de Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, o texto discute "o que se passa musicalmente *debaixo*" do "esquema formal" da exposição do primeiro movimento do *Quinteto de cordas* op. 29 de Ludwig van Beethoven. Para alcançar este objetivo, o termo acumulação motivica é proposto e esclarecido como uma ferramenta analítica efetiva. Comentários sobre alguns conceitos de autores como Arnold Schoenberg, Wallace Berry, Charles Rosen e Clemens Kühn são integrados à análise para complementar essa explanação.

Palavras-chave: Ludwig van Beethoven. *Quinteto de cordas* op. 29. Forma musical. Análise motivica.

By structure I do not mean here the mere grouping of musical parts according to traditional formal schemata, however; I understand it rather as having to do with what is going on, musically, *underneath* these formal schemata (ADORNO, 1982, p. 173, italics by Adorno).

1. Beethoven's *String Quintet*, Op. 29

The C major quintet was composed in 1801 and dedicated to Count Moritz von Fries (1777-1826), a "wealthy banker" (COOPER, 2008, p. 410), to whom the composer dedicated also two violin sonatas, Opp. 23 and 24 (*Frühling*) and the *Symphony* no. 7, Op. 92. Op. 29 is Beethoven's only original work for a quintet type of instrumentation: the quintet op. 4 is an adaptation from *Wind Octet*, Op. 103, and the quintet op. 103 is an adaptation from *Piano Trio*, Op. 1 No. 3. The short *Fugue* for string quintet written in 1817 was "published posthumously as Op. 137" (KINDERMAN, 2009, p. 81). Paul Bekker, as a reference to the key of the string quintet and following early 20th century typical sort of analysis remarks that:

“the C minor and C major pieces complement each other. [...] they are reflections of intimately related ideas which express themselves in C minor works as painfully agitated and in the C major works as joyfully moved affects” (1912, p. 486). Beethoven composed remarkable works in the key of C major: *Piano sonata*, Op. 2 No. 3 (1794-1795); *Piano Concerto* no. 1, Op. 15 (1795-1800); *Symphony* no. 1, Op. 21 (1799-1800); Overture to *Prometheus*, Op. 43 (1800-1801); *Piano Sonata*, Op. 53 (1803-1804); *String Quartet*, Op. 59 No. 3 (1806). After many years without writing in this key, the composer finished the *Violoncello Sonata*, Op. 102 No. 1 (1815), and the *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120 (1819-1823). Barry Cooper points that the most important innovation of Op. 29

is the key of the second subject in the first movement. Beethoven had explored remote key-relationships in several earlier works, and had sometimes placed part of the second group in an unexpected key (the dominant minor in Op. 2 No. 3; the minor of the relative major in the *Pathétique*); [...]. Now, for the first time, he tried a different approach: the lyrical second subject is in A major, and the exposition closes in A minor (2008, p. 118).

Cooper remarks that Beethoven provides a “long-range pointer” to this mediant relation in first movement by inserting “a minuet-style passage” in A major in the last movement, “in a completely different metre from the surrounding material”, *Presto* (2008, 119). Later, the composer will explore different mediant relationships between first and second thematic groups in the first movement of the exposition according to the sonata form. For instance, in Opp. 31 No. 1 (G major / B major/minor), 53 (C major / E major), 106 (Bb major / G major), 111 (C minor / Ab major), 125 (D minor / Bb major), 130 (Bb major / Gb major), and 132 (A minor / F major).

2. The concept of motivic accumulation

Motivic accumulation is not an established technical term, although it has been used as a self-explicative expression in reference to different procedures in the music of Richard Wagner (1813-1883) (GREY, 2006), Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) (KNAPP, 2003), and Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) (HAMER; MURRAY, 2016). Ahead, an explanation about the sense and context in which the term is used in this text.

Although the aim of this text is not to present a review on music glossary, it will be worthy to bring out some melodic motif definitions. 1) “The features of a motive are intervals and rhythms, combined to produce a memorable shape or contour which usually implies an inherent harmony” (SCHOENBERG, 1967, p. 8). 2) “A motive, as is suggested by its

etymological source, is a motivating idea in music – the small cell out of which the music evolves” (BERRY, 1986, p. 2). 3) “Motif is the *moving* (Latin *movere* = move), a germ cell which wants to have an effect” (KÜHN, 1998, p. 35, italics by Kühn). And a longer one:

A *motive* [...] may be defined as a relatively short musical idea that functions as a cell or basic unit from which phrases and larger structural units are constructed. The motive is characterized by its rhythmic shape, its intervals, and its harmonic implication. A motive may display only one of these characteristics (for example, rhythm alone), or it may display a combination of characteristics (BENJAMIN et alii, 2008, p. 256).

Therefor, motif is a short compositional element, which in some cases can be part of a larger musical unity. It has characteristic rhythmic and intervalic features and these, occasionally, can be used separately as basic material for new thematic ideas. Another important matter in this context refers to the coherence of a given piece thematic materials, a single movement, or the whole composition. This coherence is based on a careful so-called motivic-thematic work: “Integration is often achieved in the rondo, as in other forms, by the use of bridging passages – transitions and retransitions – and by *interrelations among materials* of the various sections” (BERRY, 1986, p. 136, our italics). Bellow, author Charles Rosen stresses out the current use of motifs in the music of Classical period:

Motivic development has been a, basic technique of Western music at least since the fifteenth century, but the use and character of the motif altered radically in the later eighteenth century, evolving with the new conception of musical form. The motif now emphasizes the articulations of form, and – most important of all – is inflected in response to these articulations (ROSEN, 1988, p. 178).

In this context is interesting to remember the four types of thematic elaboration according to Reti, which were very important for late developments in overall musical analysis:

1. Imitation, that is, literal repetition of shapes, either directly or by inversion, reversion, and so forth;
2. Varying, that is, changing of shapes in a slight, well traceable manner;
3. Transformation, that is, creating essentially new shapes, though preserving the original substance;
4. Indirect affinity, that is, producing an affinity between independent shapes through contributory features (1978, p. 240).

Motivic accumulation, in the sense used here, is a specific mean to achieve coherence in music: either complete or some of its characteristic features, motifs are taken from previous sections are reused in the following ones and, in the case of the exposition in

sonata form, remain somehow present and recognizable until the end of it. It is essential to emphasize that the term accumulation is not in a sense of polyphonic superposition, yet as a kind of musical cognitive process, which affects the auditory system, and the short-term memory of listener. During a given time, a listener perceives, processes, and associates similar motivic materials and so, accumulates them into memory. This is quite a different strategy from that one of using a single motive as a sort of instrumental leitmotif (*avant la lettre* in the case of Beethoven!), as it occurs in the *String Quartet*, Op. 18 No. 1's first movement in the early motif heard in the exposition (Ex. 1):



Ex. 1. Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quartet*, Op. 18 No. 1, first movement, 1st violin, ms. 1-2

In the course of a 114 measure long exposition, there is only four passages in which this motif does not occur – measures 48-71, 78-88, 91-100, 105-114 –, in a total of 55 measures, than it is possible to affirm that, being presented on a major part of it, this very one motif permeates the entire exposition of the movement.

The motivic accumulation is also quite different from the strategy of obtaining new thematic material from previous ones through more complex variation. Example 2 shows this procedure: the second idea (A2) uses a similar rhythmic structure like the first one (A1), but with another intervallic structure and melodic direction:



Ex. 2. Ludwig van Beethoven's *Piano Sonata*, Op. 2 No. 1, first movement, ms. 1-2 and 21-22
(Adapted from KÜHN, 1998, p. 80)

The three strategies mentioned above help the listener to recognize the “interrelations among materials” (BERRY, 1986, p. 136) which are, apart from the harmonic system, one of the cornerstones of coherence in tonal music. They are part of a set of procedures which generates “subliminal nets” (MESQUITA, 2010) of motivic-thematic relationships.

3. Beethoven's Op. 29: exposition of the first movement, *Allegro moderato*

It is quite possible to perceive that the form of this exposition is clearly well articulated. The elision, when the last measure of a unity is simultaneously the first of the next one (MESQUITA, 2016), is the tool Beethoven uses in order to soften the juxtaposition of phraseological unities and sections. One may understand Beethoven's concerns in this movement more as of a motivic and harmonic nature rather than a formal one. This may afford a hypothesis that perhaps the composer did not want to overburden the listener's attention with formal innovations. Instead, to call it upon the motivic and harmonic procedures, in this last case, the new mediant relation (C major / A major/minor) between first and second thematic group. Table 1 summarizes the form of this exposition:

Measures	Section	Key
1-17	First thematic group	C major
18-40	Transition	From C major to A minor
41-64	Second thematic group, first idea	A major, then A minor
64-75	Second thematic group, second idea	A minor
75-93	Closing group	A major, then A minor
93-94	Retransition	From A minor to C major

Table 1. Ludwig van Beethoven, *String Quintet*, Op. 29, first movement exposition's formal scheme

In order to accumulate motifs, the composer usually conceives thematic ideas which specific, sometimes contrasting both rhythmic and intervallic characteristics. In this way, motifs and their reuse will be easy to recognize in forthcoming sections. These features will call up the listener's attention to something that has already been heard; the audience will establish relationships among distinct thematic unities at different moments in the course of the whole exposition. It is of fundamental matter in this context the fact that the composer does not create complex variations with previous motivic material; otherwise, he runs the risk of making their recognition impossible on the part of the listener. As Schoenberg stated: "Frequently, several methods of variation are applied to several features simultaneously; but such changes must not produce a motive-form too foreign to the basic motive" (1967, p. 9).

The exposition of this movement uses three basic resources. The first one, played by violin I and later by violin II presents motif 1 (M1) in measures 1-17, which is characterized by a flow of preponderant quarter notes and dotted half notes, "expression of a restrained noble calmness" (BEKKER, 1912, p. 486). One can observe the mirror of this melody on violoncello (Ex. 3):



Ex. 3. Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quintet*, Op. 29, first movement, ms. 1-3

The second one is the first material of the transition (ms. 18-40), characterized by eighth notes triplets and a varied melodic contour, initially in imitation (M2), a “forwards driving element” (BEKKER, 1912, p. 487) (Ex. 4):



Ex. 4. Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quintet*, Op. 29, first movement, ms. 17-19

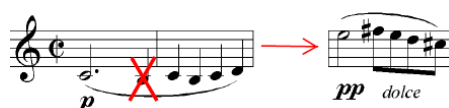
The third resource occurs as being the first idea of the second thematic group (ms. 41-64) and is also characterized by imitation (1st violin and viola), yet with a motive (M3) with a calmer rhythmic profile than the beginning of transition, “delicately relieving” (BEKKER, 1912, p. 487) (Ex. 5):



Ex. 5. Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quintet*, Op. 29, first movement, ms. 41-44

With these three motifs and their profile characteristics in mind, it is possible to make more perceptible the way Beethoven proceeded by accumulating them during the exposition. It is convenient at this point to remark that the composer might reuse the complete motive, or a fragment derived from it, an even smaller element. In this sense, the rhythmic structure can play an important part: “Resemblances of *rhythm* and of texture are [...] far more persuasive than those of pitch in thematic relationships” (ROSEN, 1988, p. 243, our italics).

M1 is undoubtedly the most prevalent motif. It appears in thematic group 1, returns in the transition (ms. 25-30), again in the closing group (ms. 75-91), and finally in the retransition (ms. 93-94). Its rhythmic diminution occurs at the end of the transition (ms. 40). The rhythmic structure of the first measure returns in the second measure of M3 (see Ex. 5) and permeates the entire first idea of second thematic group (ms. 42-58). It may be a hypothesis that the first measure of M3 is another rhythmic diminution from M1 (Ex. 6):



Ex. 6. First measure of M3 as diminution from M1

If we assume this hypothesis, it is verifiable that the diminution occurs in ms. 41-44, and 49-56. A similar motif occurs in ms. 45-46 (Ex. 7), but with the first note shortened. It is useful to note that the *sf* on F# in ms. 46 seems to indicate that this note was supposed to be on the downbeat, like in the original motif:



Ex. 7. Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quintet*, Op. 29, first movement, 1st vln., ms. 45-46

The eighth note triplet characteristic of M2 returns in the second idea of second thematic group (ms. 64-70) and at the end of the closing group (ms. 91-92).

M3, as earlier demonstrated, interweaves deeply with M1.

Table 2 shows an overall view of the motivic accumulation in this exposition:

Ms.	1-17	17-24	25-31	40	41-46	49-56	64-70	75-90	91-92	93-94
Section	TG 1	TR	TR	TR	TG 2, I 1	TG 2, I 1	TG 2, I 2	CG	CG	R
Motive	M1	M2	M1	M1	M3 (M1)	M3 (M1)	M2	M1	M2	M1

Table 2. Motivic accumulation in the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 29
(TG = Thematic group; TR = Transition; I = Idea; CG = Closing group; R = Retransition)

It is easy to observe that the listener's attention deals with almost the entire duration of this exposition, which presents very little motivic material. However, different variation techniques guarantees the thematic coherence and this has an evident cognitive implication: "It is the organization of a piece which helps the listener to keep the idea in mind, to follow its development, its growth, its elaboration, its fate" (SCHOENBERG, 1938/2010, p. 381).

4. Last remarks

As pointed out, motivic accumulation is a procedure that Beethoven consciously applied in *String Quintet*, Op. 29 first movement's exposition. Like other procedures in music or artistry in general, it is almost impossible to determine the first creator of something. Applying a similar analysis like the one proposed here, precedents of this compositional procedure could be observed in Joseph Haydn's (1732-1809) so called monothematic style (e.g., exposition of first movements from symphonies 44 and 104) and in works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) (e.g., exposition of the first movement from *String Quintet*, KV 593). It is interesting to observe that in later works Beethoven uses the same procedure of motivic accumulation, as in *String Quartet*, Op. 59 No. 1 first movement exposition. In his turn, he became the key reference for future nineteenth-century generations of composers such as Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), Richard Wagner, Anton Bruckner (1824-1896), Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), Gustav Mahler among others. The legacy of Ludwig van Beethoven helped to establish the motivic accumulation as a solid procedure for the craft of composition in different styles and for distinct musical and social purposes.

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