A Tool for Illustrating Genetic Processes

Beethoven's Werkstatt seeks to explore the dynamic compositional processes in Beethoven’s œuvre and make them accessible in exemplary digital editions. For this purpose, within the first module of the project, a prototype browser-based edition has been created, which illustrates the writing progress of the musical text in one example from Beethoven’s manuscript for op. 59 no. 3. It provides digital transcriptions of each variant that Beethoven tried in his alterations. These transcriptions are generated by Verovio (http://verovio.org) using the underlying XML encodings, which follow a custom MEI model (http://music-encoding.org). This model has been specifically enriched to accommodate the requirements of genetic criticism in the field of music.

The user of the edition may take different perspectives on the variant section by choosing a specific coloring mode. The first mode just shows the sequence of variants that Beethoven wrote down while altering and revising his manuscript. The second mode, preliminary called textual layers, colors the musical text (both in the facsimile and the transcriptions) according to the writing layer in which it has been added. This means that only those parts of a variant get the color of the new text that Beethoven wrote during the associated modifications. That way, it becomes immediately visible how the musical text ‘stacks up’ during multiple revisions and alterations. The third coloring mode focuses on the development of the musical text as such. Here, musical symbols are colored according to their variance from the preceding layers: only new content gets a new color, while existing content preserves its color, no matter if it has been written anew or just stayed valid. With this perspective, the user can immediately see how Beethoven tried new approaches, sometimes reverted to existing solutions, and kept other parts of the text stable throughout multiple writing processes.

The example used for this poster is taken from Beethoven’s working manuscript for the second movement of his String Quartet op. 59 no. 3, composed in 1806. The autograph manuscript is in the possession of the Beethoven-Haus, Bonn (BH 62).