

## Teaching Classical Form: Strict Categories vs. Flexible Analyses

In the wake of the publication of the author's textbook *Analyzing Classical Form*, this article explores issues of formal theory, analysis, and pedagogy. It endorses a methodology that establishes strict categories of formal and harmonic organization but applies them with flexibility in actual musical analyses. One such category stipulates that a genuine cadence in the classical style finds dominant harmony standing throughout in root position. The implications of this rigorous requirement are explored with special emphasis on observing the melodic organization of the bass line in selected classical themes. Real cadential closure is distinguished from other modes of prolongational closure for the purpose of developing a coherent taxonomy of thematic structures. The flexible application of formal categories is demonstrated in relation to the initiating phrase functions of presentation (for the sentence), antecedent (for the period), and compound basic idea (for hybrid themes).

In the fifteen years since the publication of *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*,<sup>1</sup> it has been gratifying to see a work that was originally meant as an academic treatise become widely adopted as a textbook on musical form. But its classroom use is far from surprising, since the book originated largely from my own teaching experience, and its structure, a systematic building up from smaller to larger formal units, ensues directly from the pedagogically-oriented *Formenlehre* tradition. Yet *Classical Form*, with its copious endnotes and single-staff musical examples as well as its lack of review questions and additional excerpts for analysis, remains somewhat deficient as a teaching tool, especially for undergraduate instruction. I was therefore motivated to revise the materials into a full-fledged textbook, which has now appeared as *Analyzing Classical Form: A New Approach for the Classroom*.<sup>2</sup>

It thus seems timely to reflect on how I teach my theory of formal functions and to discuss some pedagogical perspectives that I have gained throughout my academic career. In particular, I want to develop in greater detail an idea that I only briefly mentioned in the introduction to *Classical Form*: namely, that my theory of formal functions establishes strict categories but applies them flexibly in analyses.<sup>3</sup> For I have come to understand that my students often find it difficult to negotiate between the need to accept a set of rigorously established theoretical principles and the desire for flexibility offered by musical works that seem resistant to simple classification.

In order to probe this problem of balancing strict categories with flexible analyses, I focus in the first part of this essay on one grounding principle of my theory and discuss what I see as the advantages to be gained by holding firm to this fundamental precept, especially as it relates to the system of formal categories that I develop for analyzing classical phrase structure. In the second part, I discuss how my theory can be applied

1 William E. Caplin, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

2 William E. Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form: A New Approach for the Classroom*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

3 Caplin, *Classical Form*, 4.

analytically to some selected themes, but in a way that engages multiple categories, thus helping to reveal the theme's individuality and subtleties of formal expression. I hope thereby to convey some insights into what I myself have learned in more than thirty years of teaching classical form.

Let me begin by highlighting one fundamental assumption that grounds my entire theory of formal functions; in fact, it is an assumption initially involving the domain of harmony, but as I will demonstrate, it is foundational for my approach to musical form. I am speaking here of the categorical distinction I draw among three general types of harmonic progressions: *prolongational*, *sequential*, and *cadential*. To be sure, sequential harmonies – based on a pattern of consistent root motion – are widely accepted as separate from these other two. But no harmony textbook of which I am aware differentiates so explicitly between prolongational and cadential progressions. Yet this distinction proves essential to the way in which I establish categories of classical phrase structure. By prolongational progressions, I am referring to ones in which a given harmony – usually the tonic – is sustained through time in our imagination by means of neighboring, passing, or substitute harmonies or by a bass pedal (see Example 1).

*Example 1*

Prolongational progressions.

Example 1 illustrates five prolongational progressions (a-e) in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The progressions are annotated with Roman numerals below the notes:

- a) I, (V<sup>5</sup>), I
- b) I, (V<sup>4</sup>), I<sup>6</sup>, V, (IV<sup>6</sup>)<sub>p</sub>, V<sup>6</sup>
- c) I, (VI), I<sup>6</sup>
- d) I ped., (IV), V<sup>7</sup>, I

As a general rule, prolongational progressions project a preliminary sense of ‘being in a key’, inasmuch as we are often comfortable saying, ‘the tonic harmony of such and such key is being prolonged’. But in order to truly *confirm* the sense of key, the harmonic context must become more secure, emphasizing in a particular way the fundamental harmonic functions of a key. This is the role of cadential progressions, which bring in succession the functions of initial tonic, pre-dominant, dominant, and final tonic (see Example 2). As the example shows, such cadential progressions can be further classified as ‘authentic’, ‘half’, and ‘deceptive’, depending on which specific harmony ends the progression. But note that in all cases – and this is a sticking point for many students – the dominant harmony must initially appear in root position and remain there throughout the course of the progression. Any inversion of the dominant prior to the cadential arrival on the final harmony of the progression destroys, I insist, the potentially cadential function of that dominant and ultimately converts the progression into a prolongational one.

I would argue that we should conceive and experience cadential progressions quite differently from those that are prolongational, and this difference is largely reinforced by our perception of what is happening in the bass voice. Indeed, throughout my teaching, I like to stress Arnold Schoenberg’s dictum to young composers – ‘watch the bass line’ – since I find that considerable information about harmony and form is conveyed by

## Example 2

Cadential progressions.

authentic

a)  $I^6$   $II^6$   $V$   $^7$   $I_1$      $I^6$   $IV$   $V$   $I_1$      $I^6$   $II^6$   $V(\frac{5}{4})$   $^7$   $I_1$

half

d)  $I^6$   $II^6$   $V_1$      $I$   $V_1$     deceptive

f)  $I^6$   $II^6$   $V$   $^7$   $VI_1$

the melodic motion of that voice.<sup>4</sup> This kind of focused listening is often difficult for students, especially those that play or sing upper-voice lines, but it has a great payoff when analyzing musical form. A simple illustration of what I mean can be found in Example 3a, which introduces some of the formal categories of my theory. This is the excerpt that, following Arnold Schoenberg and his student Erwin Ratz, I use to illustrate the basic features of the *sentence* theme type.<sup>5</sup> Here, we recognize that an opening two-measure *basic idea* is immediately repeated in a dominant version. Together mm. 1–4 create a *presentation*, the opening phrase of the sentence. The following phrase, a *continuation*, destabilizes the harmony and grouping structure as well as bringing a general sense of rhythmic acceleration conveyed by the initial *fragmentation* into one-bar units and a more rapid rate of harmonic change. Measures 7–8 contain a *cadential idea* that closes the theme with a half cadence.

Let us now focus on the bass line of this passage, shown in Example 3b. Observe that the initial harmonic progression prolongs root-position tonic via a neighboring  $V\frac{5}{4}$ . A second prolongational progression shifts the tonic from root position to first inversion, by means of a passing  $V\frac{4}{3}$ . At this point, the  $I^6$  *links* the end of the prolongational progression to the beginning of the half-cadential one,<sup>6</sup> which, after moving through a pre-dominant  $II^6$ , ends on an ultimate dominant harmony in root position to create the half cadence proper. (Note that I visually distinguish the prolongational from cadential progressions by means of curved and square brackets placed below the Roman numerals.)

Another excerpt (see Example 4a), illustrates a second fundamental theme type, the *period*, wherein an opening two-measure basic idea is followed by a *contrasting idea*, one

- 4 Indeed the epigraph to *Classical Form* cites Schoenberg's summary of his 'Advice for Self-Criticism' for budding composers: 'WATCH THE HARMONY; WATCH THE ROOT PROGRESSIONS; WATCH THE BASS LINE' (Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein, London: Faber and Faber, 1967, 118). Building on Schoenberg's admonition, I develop a theory of bass melody in my study 'Schoenberg's "second melody," or, "Meyer-ed" in the bass', in: Danuta Mirka and Kofi Agawu (eds), *Communication in Eighteenth-Century Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 160–186.
- 5 Schoenberg, *Fundamentals*, 63; Erwin Ratz, *Einführung in die musikalische Formenlehre*, 3d ed., Vienna: Universal, 1973, 23. For further information on the sentence theme type, see Caplin, *Classical Form*, chap. 3; Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form*, chap. 2.
- 6 In *Analyzing Classical Form*, p. 3, I define a *linking* harmony as one that functions simultaneously as the end of one type of progression (say, prolongational) and the beginning of another type (cadential).

## Example 3a

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 2/1, i, mm. 1–8.

presentation  
basic idea (tonic version)      repetition of b.i. (dominant version)

Allegro  
p

f: I      V<sub>3</sub>

continuation  
fragmentation      cadential idea

6  
sf      sf      ff      p

I      V<sub>3</sub>      I<sup>6</sup>      II<sup>6</sup>      V<sub>1</sub>      HC

## Example 3b

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 2/1, i, mm.1–8, bass line.

f: I      (V<sub>3</sub>)      I      (V<sub>3</sub>)      I<sup>6</sup>      II<sup>6</sup>      V<sub>1</sub>      HC

that closes with a half cadence. The phrase begins to be repeated at m. 5 but ends this time with a perfect authentic cadence. Here we observe a well-known fact about cadences, namely, that depending upon type, they create varying degrees of structural closure: the half cadence, which leaves the harmony open on dominant and the melody open on scale degree two, is decidedly weaker than the perfect authentic cadence, which fully closes both harmonic and melodic processes. This kind of cadential differentiation permits us to recognize that the two phrases of the period have different formal functions – an opening *antecedent* phrase ending with a weak cadence is matched by a *consequent* phrase ending with a strong cadence.<sup>7</sup>

Again, let us attend to the bass to help us be clear about the different kinds of harmonic progression contained within this theme (see Example 4b). Here, the bass melody is considerably more complex than in the prior example. Indeed, we might be tempted to recognize a ‘half-cadential’ progression already occurring within the basic idea itself. But since an opening idea cannot, in principle, bring about formal closure – after all, a cadence can only end something that precedes it – we do better to effect a degree of melodic reduction and recognize a prolongational situation connecting the opening tonic with its first inversion via a passing scale degree two. As in the Beethoven sonata, the I<sup>6</sup> at the beginning of m. 3 has the potential of linking to the start of a cadential progression, but instead, the third degree in the bass leaps down to the leading tone, which resolves to tonic in an entirely prolongational manner. Only then does the bass leap even further down to capture the fourth and fifth degrees, which respectively support the pre-dominant and dominant harmonies of the half-cadential progression. In the consequent phrase, the attainment of I<sup>6</sup> now fulfills its earlier potential of leading directly to the cadential progression. Note, however, that due to the shift

7 For more on the period theme type, see *Classical Form*, chap. 4; *Analyzing Classical Form*, chap. 3.

## Example 4a

Mozart, Piano Sonata in B $\flat$ , K. 333, iii, mm. 1–8.

Allegretto grazioso

antecedent basic idea

contrasting idea

consequent b.i. c.i.

*p*

I 6(VI) II 6(V)

B $\flat$ : I (V $\frac{3}{4}$ ) I<sup>6</sup> (V $\frac{3}{4}$ ) I II<sup>6</sup> V<sub>1</sub> I (V $\frac{3}{4}$ ) I<sup>6</sup> II<sup>6</sup> V I<sub>1</sub>

HC PAC

## Example 4b

Mozart, Piano Sonata in B $\flat$ , K. 333, iii, mm. 1–8, bass line.

I 6(VI) II 6(V)

B $\flat$ : I (V $\frac{3}{4}$ ) I<sup>6</sup> (V $\frac{3}{4}$ ) I II<sup>6</sup> V<sub>1</sub> I (V $\frac{3}{4}$ ) I<sup>6</sup> II<sup>6</sup> V I<sub>1</sub>

HC PAC

in register, the inverted tonic seems to belong more exclusively to the prolongational bass line than to the cadential one; throughout the theme, in fact, Mozart cleverly uses register in the bass melody to differentiate the two kinds of harmonic progression.

Let us now consider Example 5, which seems to resemble in certain respects the period theme type we have just been discussing. Again, an opening basic idea is followed by a contrasting idea, and to be sure, we perceive a degree of tonic ‘closure’ to this phrase. But should we regard this sense of ending as a genuine cadence? A look at the bass line, Example 5b, reveals that although dominant harmony is first approached at the end of m. 3 in a manner that might be considered cadential, the stepwise ascent of the line all the way back to tonic brings about an inversion of the dominant on the second eighth of m. 4; as a result, we should recognize here an overall tonic prolongation. When the phrase is repeated, much in the manner of a consequent, the close is now more genuinely cadential, and we can safely assign the label ‘half cadence’ to the phrase ending. Of course, the idea that a consequent can end with a half cadence is rather problematic, and I return to a consideration of this second phrase, along with Example 5c, at the end of this essay.

But for the moment, let us concentrate on the first phrase and ask whether it makes sense to label it an antecedent, as we may initially be tempted to do. According to my classification scheme, an antecedent requires cadential closure, but we have seen that this phrase does not end with a cadence, at least as defined by my theory. As a result, I recognize here a case of non-cadential, sub-thematic phrase closure; indeed, the term *prolongational closure* could rightly be used in this context. Moreover, since we find many phrases of this type in the classical literature, it is useful to provide a unique form-functional label to identify them as such. For this purpose, I have coined the expression *compound basic idea*, which I define as a simple two-measure basic idea followed by a contrasting idea, which does not conclude with a cadence.<sup>8</sup>

The term compound basic idea comes more into its own when we consider a larger-scale version of the sentence, what I call the sixteen-measure *compound sentence*, such as

8 See *Classical Form*, 61; *Analyzing Classical Form*, 107.

Example 5a

Mozart, Piano Sonata in E $\flat$ , K. 282, iii, mm. 1–8.

Example 5b

Mozart, Piano Sonata in E $\flat$ , K. 282, iii, mm. 1–8, bass line.

Example 5c

Mozart, Piano Sonata in E $\flat$ , K. 282, iii, mm. 1–8, reconstructed version.

that seen in Example 6.<sup>9</sup> Here, following a one-bar introduction, the initial phrase entirely fits the definition of a compound basic idea: a two-measure basic idea, a contrasting idea, but no cadential closure – indeed, no theory recognizes a cadence on II $\frac{6}{2}$ . When we hear a version of this phrase repeated, we understand that it functions analogously to a repeated basic idea in the simple sentence. And so we could speak of a *compound presentation*

9 Compound themes (period and sentence) are discussed in *Classical Form*, chap. 5; *Analyzing Classical Form*, chap. 6.



## Example 7

Haydn, String Quartet in G, Op. 17/5, ii, mm. 1–8.

(and even the final tonic) appears inverted.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Poundie Burstein has challenged the requirement for a root-position dominant in cases of half cadence, arguing that the close of the first phrase in Example 7 on  $V_5^6$  is a perfectly adequate half cadence when recognizing a period form, antecedent plus consequent.<sup>11</sup> I have great difficulty, however, accepting the notion that cadences can be formed out of inverted dominants and tonics, and for reasons that are empirical, theoretical, and experiential. First is the empirical fact that such contrapuntal cadences are simply never found closing a complete thematic unit in the classical style, whereas the three types that I recognize as genuinely cadential – half cadence, imperfect authentic cadence, and perfect authentic cadence – are regularly used for that purpose. Were we to include contrapuntal cadences as real cadence types, we would have to regard them as always functioning sub-thematically. Second is the theoretical problem that the concept of contrapuntal cadence overly complicates and distorts the classification system for theme types. For instance, if we consider Example 5a to be a period, then we would be recognizing that a consequent phrase can legitimately close with a half cadence, an idea that runs counter to most theorists' conception of that theme type. As well, we would have to say that a presentational unit, as in Example 6, has the potential of ending cadentially, which according to my classification scheme is prohibited, for many reasons that transcend the purely harmonic.<sup>12</sup> Third, and perhaps most importantly, is the experiential perspective. I would argue that we can learn to hear the true nature of classical bass lines and the effect they have on harmony and cadence. Thus looking again at Example 7, it is highly valuable to train our hearing in a manner that allows us to experience the bass line of mm. 1–4 as projecting a prolongation and not a cadence. (Note, by the way, the use of voice-exchange between the outer parts, which is highly typical of otherwise unambiguous prolongational situations.) As well, by not allowing the bass line to engage the fifth scale degree in any significant manner, Haydn forces us to wait for the cadence and then to be satisfied when it does occur in mm. 7–8.

- 10 Edward Aldwell, Carl Schachter, and Allen Cadwallader, *Harmony & Voice Leading*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Schirmer, Cengage Learning, 2011, 156. Other terms, such as *medial cadence*, *imperfect cadence*, and *inverted cadence*, have also been used to refer to this type of formal closure.
- 11 L. Poundie Burstein, 'The Half Cadence and Other Analytic Fictions', in: Pieter Bergé and Markus Neuwirth (eds), *What is a Cadence?*, Leuven: University of Leuven Press, forthcoming.
- 12 See *Classical Form*, 45, where I discuss why a presentation does not end with a cadence due to the repetition within the phrase. Inasmuch as the opening idea (be it a simple basic idea or a compound basic idea) sounds immediately again, the initiating quality of that idea is reinforced by the repetition, thus checking the tendency for closure. See also William E. Caplin, 'The Classical Cadence: Conceptions and Misconceptions', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2004), 59–60. I return again to the idea that direct repetition thwarts closure in connection with Example 10.

In my teaching of classical form, I have often encountered opposition to my insistence that genuine cadential closure requires dominant harmony to appear in root position. Partly this has to do with the way in which cadence is taught to many students in their early years, where virtually any kind of harmonic progression is labeled a cadence.<sup>13</sup> But such resistance perhaps arises for broader, cultural reasons as well. For in today's postmodern, pluralistic milieu, it may seem antiquated to insist upon such a rigid, unbending principle. We tend today rather to prize the fluid, the adaptable, even the 'fuzzy'. How then can we introduce an element of flexibility into our teaching of musical form, without giving up on the fundamental postulates that seem so crucial to the effective construction of a theory? I propose that the ways in which we apply the various categories of formal organization to specific musical cases can mediate between the theoretical need for fixed principles and the analytical desire to uncover diversities and ambiguities of formal expression. So let me turn to the question of how best to utilize the many formal categories and labels offered by my theory of formal functions.

I am particularly motivated in raising this question because of a pernicious tendency I have observed all too frequently in teaching classical form. Presented with a relatively large set of terms and procedures, I find that my students often think that the primary goal of a formal analysis is to find the appropriate label to a given passage or portion thereof. They tend to believe that a simple solution can be attained by applying the single, perfect category. Analysis for them merely becomes the task of finding one label after the next and being satisfied when all the relevant segments of the passage have been identified and classified; after all, the many examples in my books often feature an individual term associated with a given idea, phrase, or theme. So in the next portion of this essay, I discuss some cases that illustrate how an approach that advocates a flexible application of the strictly defined formal categories can produce interesting and nuanced interpretations.

*Table 1*

Summary of three initiating phrase functions.

phrase function	characteristics
presentation	basic idea, repeated tonic prolongational progression
antecedent	basic idea, contrasting idea ends with weak cadence
compound basic idea	basic idea, contrasting idea tonic prolongational progression

Earlier I made mention of the three types of phrases that typically function to initiate simple themes. These are summarized in Table 1: the four-measure presentation phrase, which opens a sentence; the four-measure antecedent phrase, which opens the period; and the four-measure compound basic idea, which can open various hybrid and compound themes. Indeed, the compound basic idea can itself be considered a hybrid of both the presentation and antecedent. Like a presentation, a compound basic idea is normally supported by one or more tonic prolongational progressions. Like an antecedent, the compound basic idea consists of a two-measure basic idea followed by a two-measure contrasting idea. Due to its prolongational harmonic support, however, a compound basic idea fails to bring cadential closure. In principle, these three initiating functions seem to be discretely defined

13 The origins of such practice go back to the very beginning of harmonic theory, when Rameau classified all types of harmonic progression in terms of various cadences (see Caplin, 'The Classical Cadence', 66).

categories of musical form, and indeed, in the majority of themes that we encounter in the classical repertoire, it is relatively easy to assign one of these labels to the opening phrase. (In some exceptional cases, of course, none of the labels seems entirely adequate, but such nonconventional situations would have to be the topic of a different study.)

Some examples arise, however, revealing that the categories are not defined with as great a precision as they may seem at first. For example, what exactly constitutes the distinction between a basic idea and a contrasting idea? Consider Example 8a. On the musical surface, the idea in mm. 3–4 seems to differ significantly with the basic idea that opens the theme: the basic idea features prominent melodic leaps in the context of dotted rhythms; the contrasting idea brings stepwise motion within a more uniform rhythmic profile. From this perspective, we could appropriately analyze the phrase as a compound basic idea.

*Example 8a*

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in E $\flat$ , Op. 31/3, iii, mm. 1–4 as compound basic idea.

*Example 8b*

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in E $\flat$ , Op. 31/3, iii, mm. 1–4 as presentation.

But lying behind the musical surface, is a more consistent melodic scaffold (as shown by the scale degree labels in Example 8b), in which the descending stepwise motion from  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{7}$  is matched by  $\hat{4}$  to  $\hat{3}$ , a melodic schema that Robert Gjerdingen identified a number of decades ago as highly prevalent throughout the galant and classical styles.<sup>14</sup> We could thus see mm. 3–4 as a kind of varied repetition of the basic idea in mm. 1–2 and analyze the phrase as a presentation. Which is the correct analysis, compound basic idea or presentation? Clearly both are viable, just as long as we identify the different criteria used to support each interpretation.

Another theme, see Example 9a, raises a similar question as to whether its opening phrase should be understood as a presentation or compound basic idea. Within a simple tonic prolongation (I – V – I), the surface rhythms and melodic motives suggest that mm.

<sup>14</sup> Robert O. Gjerdingen, *A Classic Turn of Phrase*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988. In *Music in the Galant Style*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, Gjerdingen labels this melodic schema a *Meyer* (after the American music theorist Leonard B. Meyer).

## Example 9a

Beethoven, Sonatina in G, i, mm. 1–8.

presentation

basic idea

3

4

5

continuation

7

8

G: I (V<sup>5</sup>) I V I ped. (V<sup>7</sup>/IV) IV V<sup>7</sup> I<sup>6</sup> II<sup>6</sup> V(5) 5) I PAC

## Example 9b

Beethoven, Sonatina in G, i, mm. 1–8, reduction of melody and bass.

compound basic idea

basic idea

contrasting idea

3

4

5

6

7

8

G: I (V<sup>5</sup>) I V

3-4 are a repetition of the basic idea, thus creating a presentation. But when we undertake a simple melodic reduction, shown in Example 9b, the background contour of the second idea is quite different from the first. We therefore see that the competing forces in this example are the opposite of what we found in the previous one, where melodic contour was retained, but rhythmic-melodic foreground motives were different. On the one hand, I find that when comparing a basic idea to a subsequent idea, differences in melodic contour normally supersede rhythmic similarities; so from that perspective, I might tend toward reading the opening phrase as a compound basic idea, as shown in Example 9b. On the other hand, the rhythmic patterns and the eighth-note melodic configurations of the two ideas are so similar as to suggest that reading a presentation phrase, as in Example 9a, would also be entirely appropriate.

Let us now consider another pair of phrase functions. Seeing as the sentence and period are presented almost as polar opposites, one would think that the presentation phrase of a sentence would always be fully distinguishable from the antecedent of a period. But even here, we sometimes find cases in which a mechanical application of labels fails to do justice to the musical details at hand. Example 10 illustrates one issue associated with distinguishing between presentation and antecedent phrases. In *Analyzing Classical Form*, Example 2.18, I simply offer this passage as exemplary of the sentence theme type and say nothing further about any potential ambiguities of form-functional expression.<sup>15</sup> But we

15 I thank Steven Vande Moortele for drawing my attention to the multiple phrase-structural interpretations offered by this example.

## Example 10

Beethoven, Bagatelle in G minor, Op. 119/1, mm. 1–8.

The musical score for Example 10 consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) is labeled "[antecedent?] presentation" and "b.i.". The second system (measures 5-8) is labeled "continuation". The tempo is marked "Allegretto" and the dynamics include a piano (*p*) marking. The harmonic analysis below the notes is as follows:

Measure 1:  $I^6$

Measure 2:  $(V^{\frac{3}{2}})$

Measure 3:  $I$

Measure 4:  $V^6$

Measure 5:  $I$

Measure 6:  $(V^6)$   $It^{*6}$

Measure 7:  $V$  [HC?]

Measure 8:  $I^6$

Measure 9:  $V$  ( $\frac{3}{2}$ )

Measure 10:  $I$

Measure 11:  $II^6$

Measure 12:  $V^{\frac{3}{2}}$

Measure 13:  $V$  [HC]

should not ignore the fact that its first phrase could be seen to end with a half-cadential progression, one that is particularly strong here due to the Italian augmented-sixth that precedes the dominant. Of course, the passage features a basic idea that is immediately repeated in the same melodic, rhythmic, and textural context, conforming to the requirements of a presentation phrase. Only in the harmonic dimension, which would ordinarily be decisive for a formal interpretation, is there a suggestion of the weak cadence we might expect to end an antecedent phrase. Yet I would caution against recognizing here a real cadential function: to the extent that we hear the third and fourth measures of the theme immediately restating the opening idea, little sense of formal closure is thereby expressed: if the basic idea is an initiation, then repeating that idea continues to project, indeed reinforces, that sense of structural beginning. For this fundamental reason, we are best to consider the phrase a presentation. At the same time, we should not entirely suppress the palpable degree of harmonic stability projected by the root-position dominant appearing in the fourth bar: that harmony may not create a true antecedent, but in the spectrum of thematic options lying between the unambiguous sentence at one extreme and the period at the other, the specific harmonic content of this theme would surely shift it marginally closer to the periodic side.<sup>16</sup>

A more ambiguous situation occurs in connection with Example 11a. Here we confront a theme that appears to be a regular period, with an antecedent phrase ended by a half cadence and a consequent that seems to bring a return of the opening basic idea. But looking closely at the details, we see, in the first place, that the entire basic idea does not return in mm. 5–6, but rather just its first half: from the end of m. 5 to the downbeat of m. 6, the melody leaps dramatically upwards to propel the music beyond the the high C achieved in the prior phrase. As well, the harmonic rhythm suddenly accelerates as the music moves into the cadential progression closing the theme. Why then does not Beethoven simply restate the entire basic idea? A rewritten version of the opening six bars will quickly reveal the problem (see Example 11b). After hearing the half cadence in m. 4, we can readily perceive that the basic idea itself sounds like another half cadence. The effect of a three-fold statement of similar material renders this rewritten version weak and ineffectual. If

16 A sense of incipient half cadence also arises at the end of the first four-measure phrase in the main theme of Beethoven's String Quartet in F, Op. 135, a theme that in *Classical Form*, Example 1.2, I simply offered as exemplary of the sentence theme type, but which I would now find to have a discernible periodic quality similar to the Bagatelle just discussed.

Beethoven had considered for a moment the possibility of bringing back the entire basic idea, it is no wonder that he rejected it in favor of a phrase that has more the characteristics of a continuation than a consequent. In fact, we realize that mm. 3-4, despite bringing a manifest half cadence, can be heard as a varied repetition of the basic idea (which itself has the 'content' of a half cadence). From these perspectives, the theme could be understood as bringing a presentation followed by a continuation. In short, it could justifiably, if not preferably, be labeled a sentence rather than a period.

*Example 11a*

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 2/1, ii, mm. 1–8.

[presentation?]  
antecedent

b.i. c.i. (b.i.?) (lead-in)

Adagio dolce p

F: I ————— V( $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$ ) I<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup> I V( $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$ ) [HC]

[continuation?]  
consequent

b.i. c.i.

I IV V $\frac{1}{2}$  I<sup>6</sup> IV V( $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{7}{4}$ ) I [PAC]

*Example 11b*

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 2/1, ii, mm. 1–6 reconstructed.

antecedent b.i. c.i.

Adagio dolce p

F: I ————— V( $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$ ) [HC?] I<sup>6</sup> V<sup>6</sup> I

consequent b.i.

(lead-in) I V( $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$ ) [HC] I V( $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$ ) [HC?]

## Example 11c

Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 2/1, ii, mm. 7–16.

B  
standing on the dominant

F: V

A'  
consequent b.i.

c.i.

PAC

As it turns out, this theme also functions as the A section of a broader small ternary form. So it is befitting to consider what happens when Beethoven has to recapitulate the opening of the theme at the start of the A' section. As seen in Example 11c, the harmony of the preceding B section consists entirely of a dominant prolongation, thus giving rise to a formal *standing on the dominant*, as Ratz has termed it.<sup>17</sup> Given this prominent emphasis on dominant, it is not surprising that Beethoven finds a way to alter the return of the basic idea in mm. 13–14 so as not to bring its half-cadential content; instead, the opening tonic moves to IV, rather than V. (The subsequent contrasting idea is completely new.)

In this example, then, we see the compositional complexities that ensue when the composer creates a basic idea that is inherently problematic, when what should be a fully 'opening' gesture already contains elements of closure. In other words, we recognize that the internal content of a musical idea can suggest one formal function – the sense of being an ending – a function that conflicts to some extent with its actual position – appearing at the beginning of the theme. And with this observation, we confront a fascinating aspect of formal functionality, namely, a distinction that we can draw between the *intrinsic* function of a musical passage and its *contextual* function.<sup>18</sup> The former idea relates to the notion that the musical content has

<sup>17</sup> Ratz, *Musikalische Formenlehre*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Vallières, Daphne Tan, William E. Caplin, and Stephen McAdams, 'Perception of Intrinsic Formal Functionality: An Empirical Investigation of Mozart's Materials', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies* 3/1–2 (2009), 18.

the potential of expressing its own formal function, independent of its actual location within the form. Here, the intrinsic function of the basic idea conflicts with its contextual function. We could even speak of the resulting incongruity as creating a kind of ‘form-functional dissonance’, somewhat akin to Harald Krebs’s notion of ‘metrical dissonance’.<sup>19</sup>

*Example 12a*

Beethoven, Andante in F (‘Andante favori’), WoO 57, mm. 1–8.

antecedent b.i. c.i.

Andante grazioso con moto  
*p dolce* *cresc.*

F: I<sup>6</sup> V<sup>5</sup> I V<sup>5</sup> VI V<sup>5</sup> II<sup>6</sup>

consequent b.i. c.i.

*p* *cresc.* *sf* *p*

V<sup>5</sup> I<sup>6</sup> V<sup>5</sup> I V<sup>5</sup> VI II<sup>6</sup> V<sup>5</sup> I

HC PAC

*Example 12b*

Beethoven, Andante in F (‘Andante favori’), WoO 57, mm. 1–8, reconstructed version.

presentation b.i. c.i. continuation frag.

Andante grazioso con moto  
*p dolce* *cresc.* *p dolce*

F: I V<sup>5</sup> I V<sup>5</sup> VI V<sup>5</sup> II<sup>6</sup> V<sup>5</sup>

cad.

V<sup>5</sup> I V<sup>5</sup> VI V<sup>5</sup> II<sup>6</sup> V<sup>5</sup>

HC PAC

19 Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Another case of such form-functional dissonance arises in Example 12a. At first glance, this theme seems like a standard eight-measure period. But examining more closely some of the details of its constituent phrases, we observe that the two-measure basic idea itself consists of a one-measure motive that is repeated sequentially. Moreover, the theme begins directly on a destabilizing I<sup>6</sup> and continues with a relatively rapid progression of harmonies that are largely sequential until the pre-dominant at m. 3. In short, the opening four measures display many of the characteristics of a *continuation* phrase, such as might end a sentence. In fact, it is relatively easy to construct a matching presentation phrase that could have preceded the start of this theme (see, with apologies to Beethoven, the reconstructed version of Example 12b).

At this point, one of our clever students may object and point out that it does not entirely make sense to say that a theme could start with a continuation phrase, a unit that is normally associated with ‘being-in-the-middle’ of a formal process. And so we could point out that we again face a case of conflicting intrinsic and contextual functions. Considering the opening phrase of Example 12a in isolation, we see that its content is highly suggestive of a continuation. Yet its placement at the very opening of the movement suggests that it also fulfills an initiating function. Indeed, our very first analysis of this phrase as an antecedent of a period reflects that functional reality. Here, then, we see how invoking the concept of formal dissonance sanctions a degree of flexibility in our analytical methodology.

With these notions in mind, we can look again at the second phrase of Example 5a. As already discussed, I see the first phrase as a compound basic idea, not as an antecedent. But when the original basic idea returns in mm. 5–6, we are clearly prompted to consider the possibility that this second phrase will function as a consequent, one that would lead to strong cadential closure. In fact, one of the conventional hybrid theme types that I have established consists precisely in this functional option: an initiating compound basic idea followed by a concluding consequent.<sup>20</sup> But when we view the second phrase in light of its intrinsic functionality, we see that by ending with a half cadence, it has all of the essential characteristics of an antecedent phrase, one that could begin a theme. Indeed, we could easily place this phrase in an initiating context and follow it with a regular consequent, one that ends with a perfect authentic cadence, as shown in Example 5c.

How, then, do we deal with the situation in Example 5a. To be sure, the return of the basic idea in mm. 5–6 strongly projects the sense of consequent function, but yet by ending with the weak half cadence, we feel that this function has ‘failed’ so to speak, and we could perhaps recognize that what we initially perceive as a consequent could be *reinterpreted retrospectively* as an antecedent, as signaled by the half-cadential closure. The double arrow ( $\Rightarrow$ ) in my analysis refers to this sense of one formal function ‘becoming’ a new function, an idea elaborated upon in much greater detail in the work of Janet Schmalfeldt.<sup>21</sup> We must still ask, however, if there is a clear sense of formal logic in speaking of a compound basic idea being followed by a phrase that ends up as an antecedent. Again, if we recall that the non-cadential, prolongational closure effected in m. 4 is followed by genuine cadential closure at m. 8, we can still acknowledge that, in the sense of the period form, a weaker articulation of ending for the first phrase is matched by a stronger sense of end for the second phrase.

And now, we seem to have come full circle, since the idea that this theme may be interpreted as a period was our first hypothesis, only to be rejected when I insisted that the opening phrase cannot be seen to close cadentially, and therefore cannot be deemed an antecedent. But if we had been content from the beginning to label the theme as a

<sup>20</sup> *Classical Form*, 61; *Analyzing Classical Form*, 101.

<sup>21</sup> Janet Schmalfeldt, *In the Process of Becoming: Analytical and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

normal period, we might have missed the opportunity of uncovering the interesting compositional details that lead to a more enriched analysis of what is really going on. In other words, when we begin to modify our definitions of fundamental categories of form, it might seem that we are being flexible in our approach. But this kind of flexibility oftentimes results in a simplistic analysis that fails to do justice to the complexities of the music. Instead, if we adopt a more rigid attitude toward our categories, but then allow for the possibility of bringing multiple categories to bear on a given situation, we can be led to a more comprehensive, if at times more cumbersome, analytical perspective. For the goal of a formal analysis, after all, is not to make definitive interpretations but rather to raise – and to relish – any reasonable alternatives that may present themselves. What the examples I have discussed show is that the identification of phrase functions is not a mechanical procedure and that the obvious first choice for a label may not prove to be the only interpretation. At all times, we must use our musical instincts, in combination with principles offered by the theory, to explore beneath the obvious surface of a theme's formal organization.

In teaching classical form, I try to instill in my students (though not always so successfully) to avoid the tendency of quickly slapping down a formal label and calling it quits for the analysis. Rather, I encourage them to probe the many musical details that may invite a more nuanced interpretation, one that highlights ambiguities and a multiplicity of perspectives. For indeed, the music of the classical style may seem straightforward on the surface, especially in relation to the polyphonic intricacies of a Bach fugue or the chromatic densities of a Wagner opera. But behind the apparent simplicity of texture and directness of expression, music by the classical composers is rich in subtleties and presents complexities of compositional technique unrivaled by other composers, especially in the realm of musical form.