In his pioneering study of "Eighteenth-century theories of musical period," in 1956, Leonard Ratner wrote that

> the familiar distinction between half and authentic cadences is made by [Heinrich Christoph] Koch. Thus, a phrase that ends a period is called *Schlusssatz*, while all others are *Absätze*. *Absätze* are qualified by their cadences; those ending in the tonic are called *Grundabsätze*, while those in the dominant are called *Quintabsätze*. In this connection, [Johann Gotlieb] Portmann says: "Those phrases that end in the dominant are interrogative, and those that end in the tonic are respondent."

The 'familiar distinction' is not the only thing that Ratner succeeded in tracing back in the historical documents. His review mentions also discoveries by Kirnberger and Daube, on the background of a reference to Sulzer and Mattheson. In a paragraph that concludes a section of his article, Ratner summarizes:

> Putting these various items together—short, well-articulated phrases, harmonic underscoring of points of arrival by tonic or dominant cadences, question and answer relationships, the favoring of four and eight measure phrases—we are led inevitably to the idea of symmetry as an aspect of period structure.

The general picture that emerges from this account is that the various theorists, struggling to give an account of a new melodic style—an intriguing body of new musical reality that was raising before their eyes and ears—had each managed to contribute one of its aspects. After all, it was only a matter of time before someone would notice the symmetry of these melodies, someone else their dominant-tonic structure, someone else again the fact that phrases are usually 4 measures long. To put it shortly, it was a matter of time that the musical period, the new melodic style that emerged and established itself around 1740, would receive a coherent and complete description: it was a 'referent waiting for a name.'

The names of 'period,' 'phrase,' and 'cadence,' are, in fact, among the most important contributions of eighteenth-century music theory. Today, these terms bear a comparatively sharp meaning in the realm of music—so clear and independent indeed, that it is hard for us to experience them in their original, non-technical form: to imagine what their mention felt like when they were still borrowings from rhetoric, when their musical reference was at most

intuitively suspected—when 'phrase' (*Satz*, lit. 'clause') still reminded a musician of speech, and comparing cadences to punctuation marks was not a commonplace but a revelation.

The linguistic ancestry of the three names, and the initial ambiguity of their musical meaning are apparent in Heinrich Christoph Koch's *Musikalisches Lexikon*, as late as 1802:

> Just as in speech the sentence [*Periode*] ends with a full resting point of the spirit, that in writing is indicated with a dot [*Punkte*], a period in music must close with the fullest resting point of the spirit, which is called a cadence [*Cadenz*]. It appears, however, that there is no single meaning to this mark of the period, for many call 'period' that part of a composition that denotes only one complete sense—what in speech is called 'clause' [*Satz*].

Koch's main treatment of the issue of musical period, however, is not his *Lexikon*, but rather the second and third parts ("on the mechanical rules of melody") of his *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Komposition*, of 1787 and 1793 respectively. There, after presenting the usual analogy with speech in paragraphs 77–80, Koch documents in paragraph 81 a startling decision:

> Nevertheless I am abandoning this comparison.

Koch's reasons for abandoning the analogy do not need concern us here. The fact is that from that point on, the discourse is *exclusively musical*. This, in fact, is what makes Koch's treatise revolutionary, and the main reason why this study focuses primarily on him: his treatise is of course not the first mention of musical period, but it is, among other things, the first attempt to endow it with a constant and formal meaning within the realm of music, independently from the connotations of what was hitherto an informal analogy with speech. Koch, in other words, gave a referent to the name 'period.'

The implied paradox is the topic of the present paper. What was the musical period in the eighteenth century—a referent waiting for a name, as Ratner's history suggests—in which case the eighteenth century 'discovered' it—or a name waiting for a referent, as Koch witnesses—in which case the eighteenth century 'invented' it? And, at any rate, where does the direct contradiction between the two views stem from?

A review of the meaning of Koch's terms in the context of his own theory will shed a first light on these questions. Of the three key terms of Koch's theory of period, the three terms

that are still pillars in our own, contemporary account, two have on the main retained their original meanings—the meanings, moreover, advocated by Koch in his *Lexikon*: 'period' is still a complete, affirmative and conclusive musical thought—a sentence—and 'phrase' is still one complete sense, although not necessarily closed—a clause. The third term, on the other hand, means different, and in a sense opposite, things for Koch's theory and for ours. In this respect, Koch remained faithful to the original analogy, in which the 'cadence' was the equivalent of the 'dot'—the punctuation mark—in speech. Thus, a cadence for Koch is *always* closing—for it marks the end not of the phrase, but of the period.

Well into the theory—at paragraph 102—even after having abandoned the informal analogy, Koch restates the definition of 'cadence' as "the ending formula of the closing phrase." In this way, Ratner's report that "*Absätze* [open phrases] are qualified by their cadences" involves an extremely dangerous choice of words: the sentence can only be true if by 'cadences' we accept *our* notion. But then the whole report cracks down: by using the word in our sense, it cannot be said that 'the familiar distinction between half and authentic cadences is made by Koch.'

In fact, Koch does not talk about half cadences in the core of his theory. Half cadences do find their way into the treatise, but this only much later, at paragraph 113, in the discussion of *appendices*. For Koch, the half cadence is no more than an appendix, a tail to the last closing phrase of a movement: "if the appendix of a closing phrase contains no cadence [i.e., no resting point of the spirit], then it always has a V-phrase-ending... A section which closes with this half cadence really always presupposes another piece immediately following upon it." Koch is clearly referring here to the ending of the link between movements that was still common in the High Baroque: the so-called Phrygian cadence.

This is no more than an exception, a very superficial articulation of the paradigm. The half-cadence is by no means a substantive component of Koch's theory as it is of ours, and the distinction cannot be farther from 'the familiar' one: it has nothing to do with dominant/tonic, question/answer, *Quint-/Grund-absätze*. At least in this case, what has remained is the name, not the referent.

This could be no more substantial than a particularly confusing matter of names. But the difference between our conception of 'musical period' and Koch's, and the respective theories that result from those conceptions, is in truth much deeper than the potential misreading of the word 'cadence.'

The theory of musical period as it is understood and taught today rests on the harmonic distinction between tonic and dominant. Antecedent, question, 'openness,' are attributes of the dominant—consequent, answer, 'conclusiveness' belong to tonic. Harmony, and with good reason, is our criterion in the differentiation of what is a closing phrase and what is not. As such, in fact, it is almost infallible. There are, to be true, some cases where the antecedent of a period ends not in dominant, but in tonic (and then the relationship of answer and question rests on the fact that the closing phrase has a *perfect* cadence). These cases are all but relegated to the status of exceptions, more or less irrelevant, and do not undermine the preeminence of harmony at the core of the theory.

By contrast, Koch's book never refers to harmony. This is surprising and intriguing, given that harmony is so promising for a classification of phrases. But, ostensibly, Koch's theory, even without mention to harmony, is systematic, consistent, and complete. Koch's theory does not 'overlook' harmony—rather, it is 'independent' from it.

One of the very first examples that Koch provides for the foundational distinction between open and closing phrases sheds a clue as to reasons for this. Koch defines open phrases (*Absätze*, 'internal phrases' in the English edition of the book) through the illustration of two melodies, in examples 8 and 9 of his treatise (in paragraph 82). Both of these melodies—the paradigmatic exemplars of an open phrase—end in tonic.

This entails a profoundly different perception of the reality of musical period. What for our theory is an exception, for Koch is the paradigmatic instance of the system. This remains true throughout the treatise: dominant-ending is by no means a shared characteristic of *Absätze*—not even of most of them—and when it does occur, no particular mention of the fact is to be found. A later example, at paragraph 94, provides negative support of a curious nature. Regarding this example, Koch says that "in both phrases the fifth of an essential triad... forms the caesura note," implying that the last harmony of the first phrase is the

chord of C Major. This is a mistake: both phrases would undoubtedly be harmonized as ending in dominant, but it shows how late, if at all, does harmony enter Koch's reasoning.

Coming back to Ratner's account, now it is clear that the assertion that 'those [*Absätze*] ending in tonic are called *Grundabsätze*, while those in the dominant are called *Quintabätze*' is entirely out of place. These two terms are mentioned in passing by Koch at paragraph 100, and never again afterwards. Neither of them has an entry in the later *Lexikon*. Once more, therefore, the awareness and import of 'the familiar distinction' (between open and closing phrases) in Ratner's account comes more from our theory than from Koch's.

As will be argued, Koch's independence from harmony entails a complete shift in our conception of what the musical period is (and what it was in the eighteenth century). But we must first devote some attention to another interpretation, that stems from the work of Koch's English translator and foremost expert, Nancy Baker (who translated the *Versuch* for the first time in 1983).

In the introduction to her translation, Baker states that where Koch defines the the 'resting point' of a phrase,

> melody and harmony cooperate, for the melodic punctuation is created in large part by the accompanying harmony; together they convey varying degrees of rest.

These opinions, which are undoubtedly true, stem however more from Baker's knowledge than from Koch's text. At no point does he even hint at this 'cooperation,' let alone the idea that harmony creates the melodic punctuation. Rather on the contrary, as has been argued: Koch does without harmony altogether.

Baker, unlike Ratner, is aware of her projection of contemporary notions onto Koch's theory, and, in the absence of direct evidence in the text, looks for indirect support. The contention is that Koch *is*, even if he does not mention it himself, implicitly talking about harmony. In this respect, the crucial moment in Baker's introduction is:

> In volume 1 and his refinements of the definition in volume 2, [Koch] designates key or mode as simple harmony (*einfach Harmonie*). If the tones occur simultaneously, they are being used harmonically; if, on the other hand, they are heard in succession, they are

> being manipulated melodically. Therefore both harmony and melody share their origin in the primary matter of music... *The corollary to this is that harmony and melody are of equal importance in Koch's view.*

Having in mind that the 'corollary' will be the basis of an interpretation of the text that in effect contradicts its contents, the logical construction, in my view, fails to convince. The first part of the quotation, before the emphasis, is little more than the theoretical commonplaces of all time, and it does not reveal anything about Koch more than it reveals about any author that repeats those definitions. Are these firm enough grounds to perform the extrapolation of a very definite idea implied above?

The last quotation from Baker is preceded in her introduction by a sentence that is also relevant here:

> Koch aims to define the term harmony in a way that obviates the current disputes...

The 'disputes,' are, of course, Rameau vs. Rousseau, the rather metaphysical, but fascinatingly heated controversy on whether music owes its reality to harmony (according to Rameau) or to melody (with Rousseau). It is conceivable that some writers would want to 'remain neutral' and made all efforts to avoid giving the impression of taking a stand on the controversy. Maybe it is because of this that Koch did not mention harmony in the second part of his treatise (which was devoted to melody)? Baker's interpretation points in that direction. The following could be a paraphrases of her opinion: 'it must not be forgotten that harmony (and in particular its impact on melody) was somewhat taboo at the time—one must not be misled by this into thinking that Koch overlooked or ignored harmony.'

As has been argued, however, the absence of harmony in Koch's theory is more foundational, more a part of the system, than what would a matter of prudence in the external clothing. Baker's exegesis, for all its ingenuity, is a reaction to the puzzling fact that Koch fails to describe our referent with our names. It is this assumption—the assumption that 'musical period' is a timeless reality, a referent that is somehow 'out-there' in nature, waiting for a theoretical description—that creates the problem in the first place. It is this assumption too that creates the misreadings in Ratner's history.

Now, this kind of assumption is generally false. It does not even hold in such cases as the compilation of the periodic table—a case where you can really argue that the referents, the chemical elements, were 'out-there' in the reality of nature. The periodic table did not describe the elements, but *pre*scribed them. Even the atoms were, in this relevant sense, 'inventions' rather than 'discoveries.'

What would this mean for the history of 'musical period'? Doubtless, Koch knew as well as we do that there is an intimate connection between a melody and the harmony that supports it. So, if his task was the description of 'the mechanical rules of melody,' it is truly amazing that he did not come across this connection and benefit from it. But all wonder and surprise dissolve if we accept that he was *pre*scribing those rules. The *Versuch*, after all, is an essay 'on composition.' Koch is putting forth the rules for the creation of melody so that anyone, in an era that commended amateurism, can craft a tune. It is precisely because the intimate connection with harmony can be taken for granted that this topic could be postponed, for a later stage in composition—for a different chapter.

On the other hand, the fact pointed out above that Koch's paradigmatic instances correspond to our exceptional cases has potentially far-reaching consequences. If he deemed these instances to be representative, we have to face the possibility that, maybe, they *were* representative. Today, the almost exclusive emphasis on antecedent-consequent, dominant-tonic periods in our Classicism classes, tends to make us think of them as somehow 'natural.' But in fact, a good portion, if not even the majority, of *galant* and Classic melodies deviate from this model. 'Regular' periodic melodies have fairly sharply defined 'niches,' and so they appear associated with particular contexts: the theme-and-variations, or the refrain of rondos, principally. It is as if composers, in certain circumstances, entered 'the period mode,' so to speak. Not consciously, not systematically, and not exclusively—but significantly, rather as it can be said that Bach entered the 'old-style mode' for certain fugues, and then tended to write solemn subjects with long notes, cut time, and long final emphases on the subdominant. Thus Haydn's sonata forms for piano feature periods frequently as first themes, but orchestral ones do not. Beethoven's melodies are very seldom periodic, and if Mozart tends to the periodic model, his cultivation of opera (the realm where periodic melodies first

appeared) must be a factor in the equation.

The musical period was thus a *compositional* category, not an analytical one. ‘Period’ was not the way to go ‘by default,’ or the natural state of melody, as it is sometimes assumed today. It was, rather, an artifice, at a time when clarity and transparency, simplicity and symmetry were sought after, precisely because they were artificial. Symmetry was not ‘led to,’ as Ratner says, but aimed at. Our own, descriptive theory of period is, in a sense at least, an analytical overgeneralization of what in the eighteenth century was a compositional prescriptive model.

The eighteenth century, of course, was prone to presenting its own aims as laws of nature—its own prescriptions and inventions as universal descriptions and discoveries. In its apodeictic, law-sounding writing style, Koch’s *Versuch* is an instance of that. But on this point we are not forced to take the Enlightenment at its word, are we?

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A Referent Waiting for a Name

From Leonard Ratner, “Eighteenth-century theories of musical period,” *Musical Quarterly* **42**/4 (1956), pages 439–454.

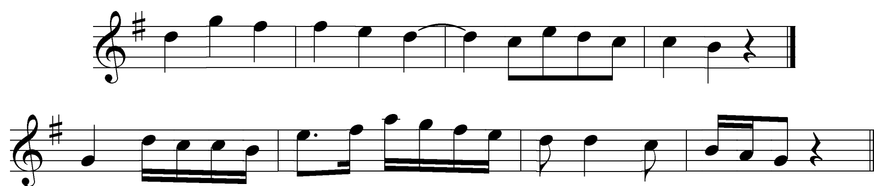
> The familiar distinction between half and authentic cadences is made by [Heinrich Christoph] Koch. Thus, a phrase that ends a period is called *Schlusssatz*, while all others are *Absätze*. *Absätze* are qualified by their cadences; those ending in the tonic are called *Grundabsätze*, while those in the dominant are called *Quintabsätze*. In this connection, [Johann Gotlieb] Portmann says: “Those phrases that end in the dominant are interrogative, and those that end in the tonic are respondent.” (442)

> Putting these various items together—short, well-articulated phrases, harmonic underscoring of points of arrival by tonic or dominant cadences, question and answer relationships, the favoring of four and eight measure phrases—we are led inevitably to the idea of symmetry as an aspect of period structure. (442)

From Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Frankfurt, 1802), and "The mechanical rules of melody," sections 3 and 4 of *Introductory Essay on Composition* [*Versuch einer Anleitung zur Komposition*], translated by Nancy K. Baker (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1983).

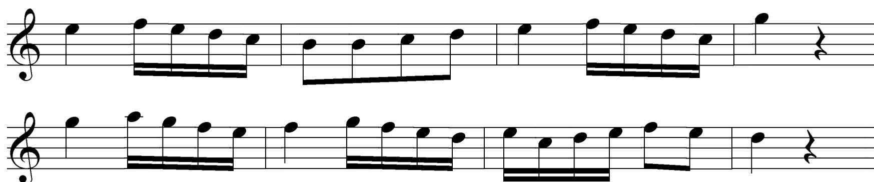
> Just as in speech the sentence [*Periode*] ends with a full resting point of the spirit, that in writing is indicated with a dot [*Punkte*], a period in music must close with the fullest resting point of the spirit, which is called a cadence [*Cadenz*]. It appears, however, that there is no single meaning to this mark of the period, for many call 'period' that part of a composition that denotes only one complete sense—what in speech is called 'clause' [*Satz*]. (*Lexikon, sive Periode*)

> §81. Nevertheless I am abandoning this comparison. (*Versuch*)



8 and 9: open phrases

10 and 11: closing phrases



67: a mistake

An Interpretation

From Nancy Baker's "Introduction" to her translation of Koch's *Versuch*.

Here again [where Koch defines the 'resting point' of a phrase] melody and harmony cooperate, for the melodic punctuation is created in large part by the accompanying harmony; together they convey varying degrees of rest. (xix)

In volume 1 and his refinements of the definition in volume 2, [Koch] designates key or mode as simple harmony (*einfach Harmonie*). If the tones occur simultaneously, they are being used harmonically; if, on the other hand, they are heard in succession, they are being manipulated melodically. Therefore both harmony and melody share their origin in the primary matter of music. . . *The corollary to this is that harmony and melody are of equal importance in Koch's view.* (xv–xvi; emphasis mine)

Koch aims to define the term harmony in a way that obviates the current disputes. (xv)

"A fragment of the history of musical period: Invention and discovery, the natural and the artificial"

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The notion of 'musical period' was born in the second part of the eighteenth century. Borrowed from the observation of language and the study of rhetoric, it received its first systematic treatment in the realm of music with the publication, in 1782, of H. C. Koch's *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Komposition*. Among the many particularities of Koch's treatment, perhaps the most prominent one is an absence of any reference to harmony. At first surprising to us—for harmony is at the base of our theoretical understanding of 'period,' through the foundational distinction between 'open' and 'closed' phrases—this points to an essential difference between Koch's conception and ours.

This paper aims at recovering the former, reading Koch's theory in its own terms (rather than in ours, which has led to some misconstructions by recent scholarship). By confronting the original meaning of such basic notions as 'cadence,' the accepted history of the theory of period is problematized: instead of being a succession of 'findings' or discoveries that add up—almost teleologically—into our coherent theory, it appears to be a series of 'inventions' through which the spirit of Enlightenment, the *galante* and the Classical, manifest themselves. Rather than representing the simplest (and, in a sense, 'the most natural') melodic construction, 'musical period' was, historically, the striving for *artifice*.

Federico Garcia was born in Bogotá, Colombia, and lives in Pittsburgh since 2001. An award-winner composer, his dissertation for the title of Ph.D. in Composition and Theory from the University of Pittsburgh, consisting of a Violin Concerto and a technical/historical monograph on Liszt's *Bagatelle Without Tonality*, was successfully defended on December, 2005. His musicological research focuses on the history of music theory, approached with the perspectives and methodologies of the history and philosophy of science. He has written and published on the music of J. S. Bach, and explored historical and technical aspects of nineteenth-century music and the 'breakdown' of tonality around 1900.