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In Quest of the Waning Name: A Short Response to Kevin Korsyn

First, a note of gratitude: I would like to thank Leon Stefanija for asking me to participate in this wonderful special issue, and also Kevin Korsyn for his engaging response to my essay. Furthermore, my writings on deconstruction in music and musicology would not have been possible without the support and the pioneering musical imaginations of, amongst many others, Kofi Agawu, Benjamin Boretz, Scott Burnham, Suzanne Cusick, Joseph Dubiel, Charles Fisk, Scott Gleason, Lydia Goehr, Marion Guck, Christopher Hasty, Berthold Hoeckner, Brian Hyer, Ellen Koskoff, Jonathan Kramer, Lawrence Kramer, Kevin Korsyn, Adam Krims, Richard Leppert, Fred Maus, Robert Morris, Alexander Rehding, Robert Snarrenberg, Ruth Solie, Gary Tomlinson, Leo Treitler, Gretchen Wheelock, and especially Rose Rosengard Subotnik. My critique is motivated by a fundamental embrace, appreciation, and profound gratitude.

Second, by way of self-citation, a *mea culpa*: "Of course, the charge of misreading [deconstruction in the context of musicology] is foolishly in danger of presupposing the 'proper' coordinates of the deconstructive maneuver, as if these can be *aprioristically* established" (82). As is clear from my *Prelude to an Idealization*, then, I offer but a "narrowly idealized construal of deconstruction" to launch the critical, historical and analytic speculations in my present essay (83). Thus, it is not only with regard to my deconstructive analysis of Mahler's Seventh Symphony in 1995 (which apparently "perpetuated as many misconceptions [about deconstruction] as anyone's") that I need to acknowledge compressed appropriations, conceptual limits and layers of misreading, but also here and now, and again and again (158).[1]

Third, on the topic of affinities between music theory and deconstruction: Summarizing a point I made in "The Return of the Aesthetic: Musical Formalism and its Place in Political Critique" (written three years before the appearance of Korsyn's *Decentering Music*), I note a *general* affinity between David Lewin's transformational stance and Derridean deconstruction. In the latter article I also note a more precise affinity between deconstruction and some work by Benjamin Boretz; and in the present article between deconstruction and some work by Joseph Dubiel. The point of these resemblances is to amplify the ways in which music *qua* music can be construed "as a performative dramatization of Derrida's theory of language formation; an idea that resonates with music's privileged position in Continental philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (89). Derrida's association of philosophy with the death of music underscores this point. "Traditional" as they might seem, then, perhaps it is not surprising that certain kinds of *musical* ambiguity, polyvalence, dispersal, contradiction, and illusion resonate uncannily with the philosophical figure of deconstruction (158).

Finally, on the topic of reverting to commonsense in the context of a musical phrase: Kevin Korsyn claims (more or less correctly in my view), "we do not first understand a musical phrase, and only subsequently place it into the context of things like generalizations about typ-

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[1] I did not consider the Mahler analysis, which I wrote as a first-year graduate student in 1994, as a significant contribution to the debate about deconstruction in music and musicology, and hence did not mention its particular limits in my present essay.

ical phrase structure; such norms have to operate for us to understand an individual phrase in the first place, and as our understanding of norms changes, our hearing of individual musical events changes as well" (160). While Korsyn is basically correct here, I prefer – in a deconstructive setting (that does not identify with 'container' theories!) – to mark the "unguessed-at dimension" (or in Derrida's terms, the "inexhaustible reserve, the stereographic activity of an entirely other ear"), which, on close listening, imposes itself on our musical experience, rather than to mark the already-secured contexts (or generalized norms), however much these may be inscribed in our musical understanding in the first place (82).[2] Whether or not these respective analytic moves are labeled *deconstructive* is not, in my view, urgent. The question is: Are we interested in listening out for "norms" that "operate for us ... in the first place" (160)? Or do we prefer to listen out for that of which we do not know what it is; to that (un)nameable thing which it is wearing itself out trying to name?

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[2] On the subject of phrase structure expansions in Mozart's K. 283, Korsyn states that I "mudd[y] the issue by incorrectly summarizing [his] discussion". He writes: "My point was rather that while mm. 11-16 can be explained as a repetition of mm. 5-10, in which a hierarchical opposition of original/repetition can still be maintained, mm. 1-10 constitute a paradoxical sort of originary repetition, in which the phrase could be considered an expanded repetition of itself, a repetition without original" (2005, 161). I wrote: "Moreover, argues Korsyn (following William E. Caplin), the ten-bar prototype of this expansion is itself an expansion of an "eight-bar norm," figured as an "absent prototype" (2005). How exactly could the latter summary be corrected to conform to the former? And how can this alter the argumentative thrust regarding norms and prototypes?