



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

AMS AMERICAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY

Communications

Author(s): Martin Scherzinger

Source: *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Fall 2007), pp. 715-717

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [American Musicological Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jams.2007.60.3.715>

Accessed: 17/05/2013 21:54

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press and American Musicological Society are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the American Musicological Society*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Communications

To the Editor of the **Journal**:

In the previous issue of this journal, Kevin Korsyn criticizes my review of his book *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research*.¹ He draws attention to an article I wrote for a 2005 special issue on deconstruction and music in *Muzikološki Zbornik / Musicological Annual*, “Music in the Thought of Deconstruction / Deconstruction in the Thought of Music (For Joseph Dubiel)” (henceforth “Deconstruction” in *MZ*);² his response to that article;³ and my reply to him.⁴ The article, which is not primarily concerned with Korsyn’s work, describes a resonance between musical thought and Derrida’s model of language in the context of various musical analyses. In it I offer a tentative definition of deconstruction with reference to a genealogy of musical thought in nineteenth- and twentieth-century continental philosophy from Kant to Derrida. Since I repeat some points I make in “Deconstruction” in my review of Korsyn’s book, Korsyn feels I willfully ignored our exchange in *MZ*. He also feels the exchange left “telltale marks” on my review, the tone of which had become less “amiable” than it was in “Deconstruction.”⁵

This all strikes me as unfortunate. I wrote the review long before I wrote “Deconstruction.” It was more than a year after I submitted my review to this journal (in 2004) that the editor of *MZ* asked me to participate in the special edition. Since the process from writing to publication at *MZ* was rapid, my article was published in the late fall of 2005. Although it was written more than a year after the review, “Deconstruction” thus predated the publication of my review, which appeared only in the fall of 2006. Admittedly, Korsyn could not

1. Kevin Korsyn, “Communications,” this **Journal** 60 (2007): 464–71. My review was in vol. 59 (2006): 777–85.

2. Martin Scherzinger, “Music in the Thought of Deconstruction / Deconstruction in the Thought of Music (For Joseph Dubiel)” *Muzikološki Zbornik / Musicological Annual* 41, pt. 2, Special Edition: *Glasba in Destrukcija / Music and Deconstruction* (2005): 81–104.

3. Kevin Korsyn, “Music, Deconstruction, Amnesia: Notes on the Musicological Reception of Deconstruction,” *Muzikološki Zbornik / Musicological Annual* 41, pt. 2 (2005): 147–52.

4. Martin Scherzinger, “In Quest of the Waning Name: A Short Response to Kevin Korsyn,” *Muzikološki Zbornik / Musicological Annual* 41, pt. 2 (2005): 154–55.

5. Korsyn, “Communications,” 466–67.

have known the chronology muddled by the exigencies of publication. He correctly points out that the reference to “Deconstruction” is incomplete. When I returned to my review for this journal nearly a year later, I did not catch all the points of overlap. I apologize for this oversight. I now realize I should have apprised the journal’s editors before publishing this material in *MZ*, even though the editor of *MZ* granted me full permission to reprint material for the (still, at that point, unpublished) review. What is misleading about Korsyn’s letter is that, while he takes great pains to describe the details of the incomplete reference, he takes issue only with those sections of my review that are in fact accurately cited. His opening gambit is not relevant to the intellectual dispute.

Korsyn claims that my tone became less amiable in the review, but this is not so. He makes much of a small difference between the two versions of my several paragraphs, but these changes simply reflect a different context of writing.⁶ Korsyn’s complaint hinges on the idea that I changed my mind about my own position on account of reading his response to my article in 2005. He uses a half-sentence from my reply to his response—“While Korsyn is basically correct here”—to conclude that I should have admitted that I had “been wrong,” which in turn would render my “original objection null and void.”⁷ This logic, suggesting that noting a grain of truth in an argument should signal a wholesale conversion to it, is odd in the context of a debate grounded in dialectical thought (which far from rendering antitheses “null and void” acknowledges their productive valence). But more important, the full sentence also reinstates my original position rather clearly: “While Korsyn is basically correct here, I prefer—in a deconstructive setting . . .—to mark the ‘unguessed-at-dimension’ . . . which, on close listening, imposes itself on our listening experience, rather than to mark the already-secured contexts . . . , however much these might be inscribed in our musical understanding in the first place” [parenthetical asides omitted].⁸ The point is that Korsyn’s insight that “norms have to operate for us to understand an individual [musical]

6. In the review I write: “This is not to say that Derridean deconstruction is out of place across the terrain of music and musical thought” (783) to signal that the argument is about deconstruction in the context of a general review; and in the article “Deconstruction” I write: “This is not to say Korsyn’s broad argument is not plausible” because deconstruction is already the context for the argument (89). I did not intend (and still cannot detect) either a “difference in tone” or a sign of becoming less “amiable.” I am also not sure which of my “sympathetic remarks” I seem to have “left out” in the review, as alleged by Korsyn (“Communications,” 467). In fact, as Korsyn very briefly notes, my review is also complimentary about his book (464). Finally, Korsyn’s most “troubling” grievance with me is my “failure even to mention a well-known essay” by Adam Krims (467). Korsyn offers this as evidence of a “disturbing pattern” on my part. This is puzzling. I do not know why Korsyn asserts that an essay, which I read only once many years ago, was an “obvious inspiration and model for [my] own” (467).

7. Korsyn, “Communications,” 466.

8. *Ibid.*, quoting Scherzinger, “In Quest of the Waning Name,” 155.

phrase in the first place,”⁹ while basically correct in itself, is not a deconstructive moment. Perhaps the tone of my response was too understated and accommodating of another point of view to make it unmistakable that I had not shifted from my original position. To my way of thinking, the “absent prototype” (an eight-bar norm in the context of a work by Mozart) has little affinity, as claimed by Korsyn, with the irreducible undecidability of Derrida’s *différance*.

But this debate is not worth rehearsing here. I don’t think the definition of deconstruction is either important enough or trivial enough to get personal about. Instead, I will again acknowledge the validity of Korsyn’s different point of view without accepting the accuracy of its theoretical nuances, in the hope that we can amiably agree to disagree. This has been a sad exchange because, all told, Korsyn’s book remains a work of impressive ambition and scope.

MARTIN SCHERZINGER
Eastman School of Music,
University of Rochester

9. Korsyn, “Amnesia,” 149.