

Beyond Energetics: Gestalt Psychology in Ernst Kurth's *Musikpsychologie*¹

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Introduction

Example 1 provides the opening measures of the Prelude from J. S. Bach's E major Partita for Violin, a passage that Ernst Kurth describes with characteristic vividness in his *Grundlagen des linearen Kontrapunkts* (1917). After an initial "surmounting" of the highpoint E6, a "downward spinning forth" ensues, spanning an octave and then another, leading to a "nadir of relaxation," E4. From this moment of decay, a "linear heightening" develops, this time more gradually, leading back to the originating apex pitch (E6). The entire passage encompasses a *Bewegungsphase* or phase of motion.² As

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 2013 meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Charlotte, NC. I thank Lee A. Rothfarb for his helpful comments on that presentation and the anonymous reviewers of *Theoria* for further suggestions. All translations here are my own unless otherwise stated.

² The Bach passage appears in the section entitled "the melodic *Fortspinnung* technique in the polyphonic style." Kurth provides a brief description before the musical example and a more detailed one after (1917, 228–9):

[A similar idea is shown in] the following monophonic opening phrase, for instance, as the continuation takes on flowing motion after surmounting a climax. And this continues to fade until a nadir of relaxation, [only] to develop again toward enhanced formation, e.g.: [example] . . . The animated falling motion of the theme [mm. 1–2] displays the effect of its lively energy through a downward-directed spinning forth that spans first one and then a further octave (the note E4 of the third measure), following which is an elongated linear heightening that develops in many [smaller] phases, in a balance of motions (which is directed again to the original highpoint, E6).

[Analog zeigt z. B. der folgende einstimmige Satzanfang, wie die Weiterspinnung eine nach Überwindung eines Höhepunktes verlaufende Bewegung aufnimmt und diese zuerst weiter bis zu einem Tiefepunkt der Entspannung abklingen läßt, um von diesem aus von neuem zu steigender Formung zu entwickeln, z. B.: . . . Die belebte, abwärtsstürzende Bewegung des Themas findet die Auswirkung ihrer lebendigen Energie zunächst durch eine um eine weitere Oktave (Ton E4 des dritten Taktes) abwärts führende Fortspinnung, der

Kurth cautions earlier in *Grundlagen*, one must not confuse *Phase* with *Phrase*: while *Phrase* refers to the segmentation of a melodic line according to metric-rhythmic relationships, *Phase* is a unifying, “uniform span of tension-release” that prevails like a “single breath.”³

Example 1. Bach Violin Partita in E, Prelude, mm. 1–10. Reproduction of Kurth 1917, 228, No. 45.



Heinrich Schenker, in an infamous passage in *Meisterwerk*, hardly contains his annoyance at Kurth's observations:

[Kurth] succumbs to this continual deliberate evasion of any precision in concept and word as a result of his basic viewpoint that melodic construction ('line', 'spinning-out') is an independent force which, above and beyond a naturally given, founda-

eine langgedehnte, in mehreren Phasen sich entwickelnde Liniensteigerung in einem (wieder genau bis zum ursprünglichen Gipfelton E6 leitenden) Ausgleich der Bewegungen folgt.]

Lec A. Rothfarb also identifies this example as a *Bewegungsphase*; see Rothfarb 1988, 35–6.

³ Kurth 1917, 21: „Innerhalb solcher [melodischer] Strecken, die als geschlossene Formung einer Bewegungskraft, als ein nicht mehr in Abschnitte zerfallendes, lineares Ganzes erstehen, herrscht aber ein einheitlicher Zug einer Erspannung, wie ein einziger Atem, in dem die Erfassung aus melodischer Energie keine Unterbrechungen und kein volles Absetzen mehr erfährt.“

tional vertical conception, sets its own goals and boundaries both high and low, in mountain and valley, and so forth. . . . [H]is interpretation constantly dangles between acknowledgment and denial of chordal foundations and remains, like [his] guiding idea in general, in a state of indefiniteness.⁴

Fighting words to which we will return.

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Together with *Grundlagen*, Kurth's later analytical monographs, *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners "Tristan"* (1920) and *Bruckner* (1925), were veritable “hits” in the 1920s and 1930s; *Grundlagen* and *Romantische Harmonik* in particular were reprinted several times, translated into Russian, and in the latter case, used as a university-level classroom text.⁵ Kurth was one of the most eminent music scholars in his day, both in German-speaking countries and abroad.⁶ And with this status, he attracted composers and theorists who wanted to learn from him (Paul Hindemith, Ernst Krenek), align themselves with him (Hugo Riemann), and discredit him (Schenker).⁷

⁴ Schenker 1925, 95; 1994, 51. This is a passage to which Schenker's students would frequently allude. Helmut Federhofer (1981) points to Oswald Jonas's criticisms of Kurth's analyses in *Einführung in die Lehre Heinrich Schenkers* (1972), esp. pp. 46, 93. More recently, John Koslovsky (2009) relates that Salzer's derision of *Bewegungsmusik*, “undirected” music that lacks the basic principle of counterpoint: that is, the coordination of two or more independent lines,” in favor of *Kunstmusik* that is “based in counterpoint [and] expresses structured and goal-directed polyphony” is an implicit critique of Kurth (224–6).

⁵ Rothfarb 1988, 17.

⁶ Babbitt (1991), writes with regard to Kurth's article, “Zur Motivbildung Bachs” (1917): “There were other important *Bach-Jahrbuch* articles, such as one in 1917 on motive structure in Bach by Ernst Kurth, who is now very celebrated. There you had, purely with regard to Bach, something that was of fundamental concern to composers five years later. A devastatingly saturated series of conversations about motivic saturation began to appear in journals” (127). For a recent assessment of Kurth's impact in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly on function theory, see Holtmeier 2011.

⁷ Suggestions that Kurth was a major influence on contemporary composers appear in Arnold Schoenberg's essay “Linear Counterpoint” (1931), where the author writes disparagingly, “[I]n order not to lose all safety, building on sand, [people who ‘huilt on Kurth’] chose ruins as their foundations.” Later in the essay, he mentions Hindemith and Krenek as “certain genuine talents” who at the same time demonstrate a “disturbing lack of responsibility”; trans. in Schoenberg 1975, 292 and 294. Rothfarb (1988, 225–6, 233n33) discusses Krenek and Hindemith's documented interests in *Grundlagen*, as well as the former's visit to Kurth.

Riemann refers to Kurth as a “fearless comrade-in-arms (*Mitstreiter*) for the theory of tonal imagination” in a review of Kurth's 1917 book; see Riemann 1918, 27. Kurth, in a response article (1918), acknowledges a superficial similarity in their ideas but distances himself from Riemann's *Lehre von den Tonvorstellungen* and expresses dismay that Riemann mischaracterizes his work. Finally, I would not be the first to suggest that Schenker's displeasure with Kurth stems more from the similarities rather than differences between them; see Rothfarb 1988, 37.

Why were Kurth's works so widely read? To start, his analytical style epitomized an ongoing aesthetic movement that at the time, historian Rudolf Schäfke termed "energetics" (*die Energetik*). Schäfke notes that while the Pythagoreans first established the concept of "music as motion," and while "tension" and "force" are inherent in writings from antiquity, such figurative language lay dormant "under the cover of other dominant views." Only in the 20th century did theories of music reliant on metaphors of force and motion attain currency, most notably in the works of Schenker, August Halm, and Kurth.⁸ Among these, it is Kurth whom Schäfke identifies as "that representative of energetics who possesses the best training in respect to psychology, philosophy, art history, aesthetics, and their methodologies."⁹

Today, English-speaking readers are acquainted with Kurth's work and its surrounding cultural-historical context thanks in large part to the pioneering scholarship of Lee A. Rothfarb. Through Rothfarb's seminal translations, the analytical monographs and Kurth's energetic outlook have proven their staying power. Yet for many, a modicum of skepticism persists. Patrick McCreless's words, though thirty years young, capture this unease:

Kurth's dependence upon an analytical terminology which is psychological and metaphorical in character, and which indeed constitutes a personal and almost mystical language unique to his theories was an obstacle to the acceptance of those theories in his own day and remains so for us now.¹⁰

Our understanding of Kurth's ideas remains largely at a standstill. For with few exceptions, modern scholars have filtered his work through the single lens of energetics.¹¹ I propose that we move beyond this term. In so doing, we stand to gain a fuller picture of the philosophical and theoretical foundations that undergird Kurth's analyses, and we stand to gain more from his analytical insights.

⁸ Schäfke 1934/1964, 395–6.

⁹ "In diesem seinem großen Werk [d.h. *Bruckner*] erweist sich Kurth als derjenige Vertreter der Energetik, der die beste Schulung in Hinsicht auf Psychologie, Philosophie, Kunstgeschichte, Ästhetik und deren Methodik besitzt" (Schäfke 1934/1964, 397). Rothfarb 1992 and 2002 are the most comprehensive English-language sources on the topic of energetics.

¹⁰ McCreless 1983, 57.

¹¹ For instance: Almén 2005, Eitan and Granot 2006, Monahan 2008, Samarotto 2009, Larson 2012, and Wörner 2012. Of course, even while emphasizing energy and forces as central to Kurth's writing, previous English-language authors, notably Rothfarb (1988, 1991) and Felix Wörner (2012), have documented various philosophical-intellectual currents that inform Kurth's ideas.

In this spirit, the remainder of this essay focuses on one source of inspiration: the broad philosophical-scientific research program known as "Gestalt psychology."¹² When Kurth was writing in the 1920s, the major works in Gestalt psychology were still to come. Nevertheless, as Rothfarb notes, "Kurth intuitively explored in the aural-temporal domain what Gestaltists later scientifically explored and experimentally verified in the visual-spatial domain."¹³ And by the 1930s, this connection was overt. The evidence I draw upon comes not from Kurth's analytical tomes but from his last book, *Musikpsychologie* (1931). I will begin Part I with a brief overview of *Musikpsychologie*, which has only recently received attention from English-speaking scholars.¹⁴ I will then discuss Kurth's early encounters with Gestalt psychology and its adherents. In Part II, we will turn our attention to Kurth's experiential approach to harmony and form, examining a number of music examples from 1931 that evince a Gestalt perspective. Though his emphasis on the "whole" will be our main concern, his approach implicates other ideas: listening in the moment and retrospectively, familiarity and expectation, and embodiment and metaphorical language.

I: *Musikpsychologie* and Gestalt Psychology

A departure from Kurth's three prior treatises, *Musikpsychologie* is dedicated to neither a particular composer nor style period. Rather it presents a theory of music-as-experienced, bringing into focus the psychological and metaphorical language to which McCreless alludes. Moreover, Kurth envisioned his final book as the foundational document for an entirely new discipline, one that would lie at the center of Guido Adler's

¹² "Gestalt psychology," as Mitchell G. Ash notes, has several referents (Ash 1995, ix). Today, it is most often associated with the so-called Berlin school of Gestalt theory, namely Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Koffka, along with their students; the latter two, in particular, were responsible for generating interest in the movement in the United States (see Heidbreder 1933, 334). This term has also been used to encompass psychologists and philosophers who were not part of the Berlin school but whose research investigated the experience of form or wholes. I use the term in the latter sense, following Kurth.

¹³ Rothfarb 1991, 21.

¹⁴ In her dissertation, Youn Kim (2003) provides an overview of *Musikpsychologie* within a survey of four very distinct theories of "musical hearing." Her discussion of Kurth touches upon the influence of Gestalt psychology on his ideas, though her conclusions are different from those presented in this paper; see Section 5-2-1. I take up some of these threads in my dissertation, while also examining more traditional music-theoretical topics in Kurth's monograph, in particular his ideas about diatonic harmony, the tonal system, and their manifold extensions; see Tan 2013.

proposed *Musikwissenschaft*.¹⁵ Music is a psychically conditioned phenomenon, Kurth pronounces, thus any investigation of the (perceptual/cognitive) “psychic functions” (*psychische Funktionen*) that shape the experience of “fundamental musical givens” (*musikalischen Grundgegebenheiten*) necessarily brings into consideration more narrowly focused research areas.¹⁶ Kurth outlines the goals of his music psychology and its intended audience in the Foreword:

What is here regarded as “*Musikpsychologie*” is neither a psychology of tone nor an aesthetic of music;¹⁷ thus this is not an investigation of artistic production, but rather of psychic functions (features) that form first, the basis of musical hearing in general, and consequently any aesthetics, theory, study of style, and further areas of music research. . . . For this reason the contents are governed by the interaction of two areas, music and psychology. The goal of this study is to locate the connection to psychology for all phenomena that are subject to tonal laws, and therefore, to assemble, above all, material on the frontier of both sciences [music and psychology]. . . . This book is therefore designed for those musicians who have an interest in psychology, but at the same time, it seeks to be useful to psychology itself, even if the individual reader should have no closer relationship to music. For the task throughout was to extend music’s basic processes toward concepts that already belong within psychology, and also to present them without the presumption of specialized music-theoretical knowledge.¹⁸

¹⁵ Kurth was a prized pupil of Adler’s at the University of Vienna and thus keenly aware of the disciplinary divisions and their roles as Adler had put forth in his 1885 article “Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft”; see Muggleston 1981 for a full translation.

In a letter to Alexius Meinong (12. September 1919), Adler suggests several of his former students for a position at the University of Graz where Meinong was professor and Chair of Philosophy. Adler describes Kurth in the most glowing terms: “The most capable of all of them is the professor at the University of Bern, my former assistant, Dr. Ernst Kurth, who is also an excellent music director, just the sort that would be particularly desirable for Graz”. [„Der tüchtigste von allen ist der Privatdozent an der Berner Universität, mein einstiger Assistent Dr. Ernst Kurth, der ist auch ein vorzüglicher Musikdirektor, wie es für Graz besonders erwünscht wäre.“] See Meinong 1995, 270.

¹⁶ Kurth 1931, 57.

¹⁷ Throughout *Musikpsychologie*, Kurth attempts to distance his approach and purview from Carl Stumpf’s *Tonpsychologie*. For more on Kurth’s views about tone psychology and modern comparisons of the two fields, see Tan 2013, 62–79.

¹⁸ Kurth 1931, x.

Was hier als Musikpsychologie betrachtet wird, ist weder eine Tonpsychologie noch eine Ästhetik der Musik; daher auch keine Untersuchung des künstlerischen Schaffens, sondern jener psychischen Funktionen, die erst dem musikalischen Hören überhaupt zugrunde liegen, somit auch jeglicher Ästhetik, Theorie, Stilistik und

Kurth’s concern for “musical hearing in general” and his desire to reach an audience without specialized training underscores the purported universality of his ideas. More to the point, he conveys that there are not only basic processes *within* music but also basic perceptual responses *to* music that “general psychology” can aid in elucidating.¹⁹ He employs two strategies to pitch his book to a wide readership. First, he demonstrates the relevancy of his theory for a variety of repertoires, hypothesizing, for instance, how listeners in his own day would process tonal designs typical of the long nineteenth century (more on this below). And second, he reframes and refreshes observations in his prior writings, referencing a wide array of literature from the burgeoning discipline of psychology.²⁰

In particular, Kurth was drawn to a general research program that had gained widespread interest since the late 19th century. Gestalt psychology, writes American psychologist and Kurth contemporary Edna Heidbreder, is based on the premise that “the perception itself shows a character of totality, a form, a *Gestalt*, which in the very attempt at analysis is destroyed; and this experience, as directly given, sets the problem for psychology.”²¹ Kurth wishes to portray his own theory of music experience as in

weiteren Gebieten der Musikforschung . . . Der Stoff unterliegt damit der Wechselbeziehung zweier Gebiete, der Musik und der Psychologie. Von allen tongesetzlichen Phänomenen war die Verbindung zur Psychologie zu suchen, somit vornehmlich an der Grenze beider Wissenschaften ein Material aufzuschichten. . . . Damit ist dies Buch für jene Musiker bestimmt, die Interesse für Psychologie haben, zugleich will es aber dieser selbst dienen, auch dann, wenn der einzelne Leser keine näheren Beziehungen zur Musik haben sollte. Denn es galt, durchgängig deren Grundvorgänge bis zu Begriffen hinauszuleiten, die bereits der allgemeinen Psychologie angehören, und auch ohne Voraussetzung musiktheoretischer Sonderkenntnisse darzustellen.

¹⁹ This is not to suggest that Kurth ignores individual differences among listeners, performers, and composers; quite the contrary, he addresses musical aptitude and expertise throughout, in particular noting the effects of *Gewöhnung* (habituation). Nevertheless, that Kurth generalizes observations borne of introspection will likely raise a few eyebrows today.

²⁰ As Ash (1995, 7) writes, “Even though a community of experimenting psychologists was fully formed by 1910, academic psychology did not ‘differentiate’ from philosophy in Germany until 1941. That ambiguous disciplinary location was of central importance for the history of Gestalt psychology.”

A letter from experimental psychologist Herbert Jancke to Kurth reveals the latter’s heightened interest in scientific research in the years preceding *Musikpsychologie*. Jancke expresses his own excitement about Kurth’s new research direction and suggests that his colleague read a work by Störing. Judging by *Musikpsychologie* alone, it does not appear that Kurth profited greatly from Jancke’s suggestion (though Störing appears in the bibliography and in a few footnotes). Herbert Jancke to Ernst Kurth, 22 September 1929, J 1.1, Volltextbriefe zum Inventar Nachlass Kurth, Institut für Musikwissenschaft, Universität Bern.

²¹ Heidbreder 1933, 331.

step with this broader philosophical-scientific movement—a movement, he observes, that emerged as a response to Wilhelm Wundt's structural psychology:

To that extent, music psychology fits into an approach that today, more and more, imparts an imprint on the whole field of psychology. For a long time a trend prevailed in psychology that pushed the individual elementary sensations strongly into the foreground, almost becoming ends in themselves. Against this trend, a view has recently emerged that directs its main attention to entire “Gestalt-complexes,” that is, recognizes the essential factor in the characteristic organization of the psychic impressions overall.²²

Moreover, he notes that the Gestalt approach crosses disciplinary boundaries, remarking, “today the view focused on the experience of the whole dominates all specializations . . . from speech and sensory psychology to the aesthetics of art.”²³

Christian von Ehrenfels's essay “On Gestalt Qualities” (1890), as Kurth himself recounts, is commonly regarded as the founding document of Gestalt theory. In it, Ehrenfels responds to an observation made by physicist Ernst Mach: in geometry we perceive “space-forms” (*Raumgestalten*) such that the color or size of a shape, for instance a circle, may vary (small blue circles, big green circles) without any disturbance to our perception of its circularity; likewise, we perceive analogous “tone-forms” (*Tongestalten*) in music perception. Mach attributed both types of stable perceptions to a broad notion of “sensations” (*Empfindungen*) or physiological responses. Ehrenfels disagrees with Mach's physiological explanation, noting that “sensations,” in the strict sense of immediate responses to a stimulus, are incongruous with the perception of music, a temporal art. Sympathetically, Ehrenfels surmises that what Mach had attempted to explain was the “immediacy of certain impressions and . . . their independence from all intellectual processing on the part of the perceiving subject.” He presents several examples, including the following incipits in Example 2:

²² Kurth 1931, 24:

Damit fügt sich auch die Musikpsychologie einer Betrachtungsweise ein, die der gesamten Psychologie heute mehr und mehr das Gepräge verleiht. Lange herrschte in ihr eine Richtung, welche die einzelnen Elementar-empfindungen stark in den Vordergrund rückte, fast zum Selbstzweck werden ließ; ihr tritt neuerdings eine Betrachtung gegenüber, welche auf die gesamten „Gestaltkomplexe“ ihr Hauptaugenmerk lenkt, d. h. in der eigentümlichen Gliederung psychischer Gesamteindrücke das Wesentliche erkennt.

²³ Kurth 1931, 26: „Heute beherrscht die aufs Erlebnisganze gerichtete Anschauung trotz einzelner Abweichungen alle Sondergebiete von der Sprach- und Sinnespsychologie bis zur Kunstästhetik.“ Heidbreder (1933, 333) writes similarly: “Learning, thinking, striving, acting, have all been treated as *Gestalten*. The concept has invaded the whole field of psychology. It has even been extended beyond the borders of psychology.”

Example 2. German folksong referenced by Ehrenfels

Muss i denn, muss i denn zum Städ-te-le hin-aus Städ-te-le hin-aus und du mein Schatz, bleibst hier?

Muss i denn, muss i denn zum Städ-te-le hin-aus Städ-te-le hin-aus und du mein Schatz, bleibst hier?

The similarity between the two melodies in Example 2 is, “to anyone even halfway musically inclined,” Ehrenfels writes, “immediate and capable of being recognized without reflection (via ‘sensation,’ according to Mach).” He then queries, “is a melody (i) a mere sum of elements, or (ii) something novel in relation to this sum, something that certainly goes hand in hand with, but is indistinguishable from, the sum of elements?” He surmises that Mach chose the term “sensation” out of a desire to convey the simplicity of these formations (circle, melody), and he would surely pick option (ii). That is, Mach tried unsuccessfully to describe their “Gestalt qualities.”²⁴ Rather than an attribute of the objects at hand, a Gestalt quality is a feature that the mind supplies to interpret the data it perceives.²⁵ Indeed, for a *temporal* Gestalt quality like melody, Ehrenfels notes, “at most *one* element can be given completely in perceptual presentation, the remainder being present via memory-images (or images in expectation relating to the future).”²⁶

²⁴ Ehrenfels 1890, 249–50, trans. Smith 1988, 82–3.

²⁵ Johnston 1972, 303.

²⁶ Ehrenfels 1890, 263–4, trans. Smith 1988, 94.

Unaware of Ehrenfels's article, Edmund Husserl published *Die Philosophie der Arithmetik* in 1891 in which he coined the term “figural moment” (*das figurale Moment*) to describe the “especially powerful stimulus which is exercised upon the isolating perception by every sort of series, class, or system as well as by every configuration based on relations of distance and direction” (quoted in Johnston 1972, 303). In his lectures on internal time-consciousness from 1905 (published in 1928), Husserl uses melody as an example of a “temporal object” in perception. He notes that on the one hand, a listener retains each tone within a melody after it sounds (otherwise, we would be unable to recognize relations between notes), but on the other hand, each tone is modified in consciousness after it sounds (otherwise, we would perceive tones within a simultaneity rather than in a succession). Every aural sensation thus evokes “a similar presentation provided with a temporal determination”—individual tones have their “definite place and their definite measure of time” (Husserl 1964, 30). In *Musikpsychologie*, Kurth only mentions Husserl in passing as one of many figures concerned with *Ganzheitserlebnisse* (experiences of the “whole”). But as we shall discuss further below, the *dynamic* retention of tones is critical to Kurth's conception of melody, as it was in Husserl's.

In *Musikpsychologie*, Kurth concentrates on aspects of Ehrenfels's work that combine Gestalt qualities, music, and creativity. For instance, he refers to Ehrenfels's "Gestalt qualities of a higher order": similarities that arise when Gestalt qualities are compared. Kurth writes, "Ehrenfels also mentions the phenomenon of the similarity of *different* melodies and touches on the imaginative meaning of the Gestalt comprehension: 'The mind that brings psychic elements into new connections, changes more than combinations: it creates something new.'" ²⁷ It is no wonder that as the author of what are ostensibly three in-depth style studies, Kurth would find this idea extremely compelling. For as Ehrenfels writes, "What we call a feeling for style in a given province of art almost certainly consists principally in nothing other than the capacity to grasp and to compare Gestalt qualities of the relevant category." ²⁸

It is very likely that Kurth was first exposed to these ideas at the University of Vienna, where he studied from 1904 to 1908. Ehrenfels obtained a habilitation under Franz Brentano at the university in 1888; he previously earned a doctorate at the University of Graz under Alexius Meinong, a life-long friend and correspondent of Kurth's advisor, Adler. Mach, too, had obtained both his doctorate and habilitation at the University of Vienna, and he returned to the city after posts in Graz and Prague to fill a new chair in the history and theory of inductive sciences. Though Mach was forced to resign prematurely in 1901 due to a stroke, he continued to live in Vienna for several years after. And finally, as Luitgard Schader has argued, Kurth's philosophy professors, Friedrich Jodl and Wilhelm Jerusalem, both personal acquaintances of Mach, would have imparted their knowledge of Gestalt principles in their teachings. ²⁹

Yet as an exchange between psychologist Albert Wellek and Kurth following the publication of *Musikpsychologie* suggests, the latter had only limited knowledge of the

²⁷ Ehrenfels 1890, 282–3, trans. Smith 1988, 109; quoted in Kurth 1931, 26n2. In addition to a philosopher Ehrenfels was a poet, a playwright, and a musician with a passion for Wagnerian opera; see Johnston 1972, 302, and Ash 1995, 89.

²⁸ But he also notes that similarities between higher-order Gestalts resist conceptual formulation because of the "almost boundless" range of possible Gestalt qualities involved; Ehrenfels 1890, 278; trans. Smith 1988, 105–6. For instance, one may recognize a resemblance among relatives in a family, but this resemblance may be impossible to formulate as identity relations among individual traits.

²⁹ Schader 2001, 56ff. In an earlier article, Schader (2000) contends that there is a strong possibility that Max Wertheimer's article on apparent motion, "Experimentelle Studien über das Sehen von Bewegung," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* 61 (1912): 161–265, had an influence on Kurth's *Grundlagen* and "Zur Motivbildung Bachs," both from 1917. Wertheimer's article describes the visual illusion he called "phi-phenomenon": the perception of pure movement between two stationary lights that alternate in quick succession. See also Hans-Peter Rösler (1998) for a discussion of previous German-language literature that connects Kurth to Gestalt psychology.

various schools of Gestalt psychology that arose after Ehrenfels's essay. Kurth mentions roughly a dozen psychological sources in *Musikpsychologie* without grouping any of the authors, and he leaves out Wolfgang Köhler entirely in his initial presentation. ³⁰ As Wellek makes clear in his letter, however, the differences among the schools were less important than the general shift in perspective away from the older approach (elementary analysis). Wellek writes:

The major differences, in my opinion, only exist between the new psychological school and representatives of the antiquated school who are now dispersed all over, whereas within the authoritative newer schools there is considerable agreement in all fundamental issues. As such, as far as I see, only three schools come into consideration on the whole today: the Berlin, the Leipzig, and the Vienna school, that is, the circles around KÖHLER, KRUEGER, BÜHLER; to all of which I maintain direct relationships. Here there exists, as I said, fundamental agreement in almost all fundamental questions, so for instance regarding the primacy of the whole, the merely abstract character of "elements," the phenomenological output method, etc. ³¹

Felix Krueger, whom Wellek mentions above, appears in *Musikpsychologie* most frequently after Ehrenfels. Whereas Kurth invokes Ehrenfels essay to underscore the primacy of the whole in music experience, he appeals to Krueger's research when he emphasizes that even the simplest musical phenomena appear to us as *Komplexeindrücke*, that is impressions of a complex or system. ³² As Kurth notes, Krueger establishes the following three axioms for the relationship between parts and whole:

1. Each experiential *whole* from the outset *outweighs its parts* in clarity and immediate urgency, and in this way, has importance as a special quality.

³⁰ See Kurth 1931, 25–7, especially 26n2. The works he cites includes those by Müller, Krueger, Bühler, Wertheimer, Driesch, Burkhardt, Hennig, Witasek, and Messer. In another letter to Kurth, Jancke writes that he has spoken to Wertheimer about *Musikpsychologie*. Though Wertheimer was unaware of this recent book, he was familiar with Kurth's earlier writings and was very sympathetic towards them. Herbert Jancke to Ernst Kurth, 19 June 1932, J 1.5, Volltextbriefe zum Inventar Nachlass Kurth, Institut für Musikwissenschaft, Universität Bern.

³¹ Albert Wellek to Ernst Kurth, 6 November 1932, W4.1, Volltextbriefe zum Inventar Nachlass Kurth, Institut für Musikwissenschaft, Universität Bern.

³² See Kurth 1931, 142. Earlier on in *Musikpsychologie*, Kurth refers to the term *Komplexqualität*, citing Krueger's "Komplexqualitäten, Gestalten und Gefühle" (1926) (Kurth 1931, 25n3); he refers to this work again in 142n1 and 143n2. Krueger was critical of what he viewed as a lack of originality with the Berlin school of Gestalt psychology and proposed an alternative "holistic psychology" (*Ganzheitspsychologie*) that, inspired by Wilhelm Dilthey, emphasized the role of feeling and will. See Ash 1995, 311. Krueger is notable, too, as Wellek's teacher—both belonged to the so-called Leipzig school. Ehrenfels (1890, 259) likewise refers to melodies as "complexes of tone presentations (*Complexe von Tonvorstellungen*)."

2. The actual observation of the whole and the characteristic of the qualities that lead to a whole inhibit the separate perception of parts or partial moments; conversely, usually to a lesser extent, the specific phenomena of wholeness are affected through isolated capture of parts.

[3.] Those distinguishable parts in a psychic complex are at all times qualitatively co-determined through their grouping together and through the quality of wholeness of the complex.³³

With these axioms in mind, Kurth notes that in the musical world,

Rather than combination, [the relationship of components] is one of interaction. Thus it is not merely the components of the [individual] tone that appear to change in the new larger unity; rather, even the phenomenon of a tone changes in the two-note interval, the two-note interval in the multiple-note chord, in chords within chord progressions, etc.³⁴

He uses Krueger's axioms to establish the relationship among components and the overall complex in our impressions of tone combinations. Kurth refers to this relationship in two complementary ways, as both the "law of resultant formation (*Resultantenbildung*)" and the "law of components (*Komponentengesetz*)."³⁵ In taking a two-term approach, he privileges neither the complex itself—the resultant—nor the components of this complex. Kurth's laws cover three aspects:

1. The effect of components in themselves upon the whole;
2. [T]he reciprocal effect of the whole upon the components; and
3. [T]he modified effect of each component upon the individual remaining components.³⁵

³³ Points 1 and 2 are quotations from Krueger 1926, 24, and appear in Kurth 1931, 142n1; emphasis in original. Point 3 is a quotation from Krueger 1926, 55, and appears in Kurth 1931, 143n2.

³⁴ Kurth 1931, 142–3:

Statt von Zusammensetzung ist vom Zusammenwirken zu sprechen. Somit zeigen sich nicht bloß die Komponenten des Tones in der neuen größeren Einheit verändert, sondern auch das Tonphänomen selbst im zweitönigen Intervall, dieses im mehrtönigen Akkord, die Klänge wieder in der Klangbewegung usw.

³⁵ Kurth 1931, 143:

1. der Wirkung der Komponenten an sich auf das Ganze;
2. der Rückwirkung der Komponenten an sich auf die Komponenten und
3. der modifizierenden Wirkung jeder Komponente auch auf die einzelnen übrigen Komponenten.

And echoing Krueger's third point, Kurth writes the following:

In all three phenomenal parts, the components not only emerge quantitatively but also experience qualitative transformations. The overall impression is thus always based on the simultaneity and equilibrium of these three reciprocal influences. A fundamental psychic function for all mixtures of tones is thus based on the fact that the addition of new elements always translates into the alteration of all prior ones.³⁶

Kurth takes a step beyond Krueger by including a temporal aspect: as new components enter the complex, our impression of the complex and all of its former elements changes; in turn, these newly entering elements sound different in the context of the whole. His focus is first and foremost the perpetual evolution of our experience during the act of listening.³⁷

II: Examples from Musikpsychologie

Ehrenfels's and Krueger's ideas help shape the broad questions that Kurth tackles in *Musikpsychologie*—questions that are central to his analytical outlook in previous writ-

³⁶ Kurth 1931, 143:

In allen drei Teilerscheinungen äußert sich, daß die Komponenten nicht nur quantitativ verschieden auftreten, sondern qualitative Veränderungen erfahren. Der Gesamteindruck beruht somit stets in Gleichzeitigkeit und Gleichgewicht zwischen diesen dreierlei gegenseitigen Beeinflussungen. Eine psychische Grundfunktion beruht also bei allen Tonmischungen darin, daß stetig der Zutritt neuer Elemente in Veränderung aller bisherigen umgesetzt wird.

³⁷ As noted above, Ehrenfels discusses temporal Gestalt qualities in his essay, citing melody as one example. He writes, "Yet even here the analogy with and the possibility of transformation into a change that is continuous requires that we do not deny Gestalt qualities, but rather speak of a constant variation of such qualities themselves" (Ehrenfels 1890, 269, trans. in Smith 1988, 98). Though Kurth makes no mention of Ehrenfels's distinction between temporal and non-temporal Gestalt qualities, his "law of resultant formation (*Resultantenbildung*)"/"law of components (*Komponentengesetz*)" is relevant to both.

Kurth's criticism of Carl Stumpf also hinges on the relationship between components and complexes. While Stumpf (1883–90, vol. 2, 136) writes, "the degree of fusion of two given tones would in no way be influenced by the addition of any third and further," Kurth (1931, 149), calling on common sense, disagrees:

With regard to fusion, one must also recognize the interval as a unity in a double sense: first as a unity from the fusion of its own two tones towards a specific sounding impression, but then (which surpasses Stumpf) also as a unity that itself becomes a fused and characteristic element within the chords. Practice has mainly considered the latter, but theory has hardly touched upon it.

For a close examination of Kurth's critique of tonal fusion both in *Musikpsychologie* and his habilitation thesis *Die Voraussetzungen der theoretischen Harmonik* (1913), see Tan 2013, 154–75.

ings. I examine three, alongside musical examples that Kurth offers.³⁸ First, what immediate experiential effect does the transformation of the whole and its components engender? Chordal dissonance and harmonic reinterpretation will address this question. Second, what role does familiarity have on our perception of the whole? Kurth provides one answer in the context of a common-practice cadential formula—with some less-common transformations. Lastly, we will return to Example 1 to consider: Beyond sounding pitches, what do we capture in our experience of a musical Gestalt quality?

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There are several ways in which an experiential change can occur without any alteration of pitch. It is this continual transformation of a Gestalt quality—be it the “wholeness” of the single tone, the tone within the single chord, or the larger harmonic progression—that leads to the sensation of unrest or *tension*. Kurth discusses several related examples:

[The] preparation of dissonance also demonstrates that we hear the dissonant condition less as a phenomenon in itself but rather as a change of condition in the tone—thus as something relative, as inherent in the concept of dynamic perception. This change is incidentally a principle that is to be encountered equally in the phenomenon of the chordal tension and the most peculiar psychological possibilities of dissonant “reinterpretations.” A change in the tension state in the same tone is also found in rich technical application, in the case where a *dissonance can remain stationary*. . . . Remaining stationary (instead of being continued) is possible when a dissonance continues to be dissonant in a new chord (e.g., becoming a suspension from a seventh, or the like), only then to be resolved afterward; however, it does not need to be a dissonance of the same force of tension in the new chord.³⁹

³⁸ With his musically untrained audience in mind, Kurth omits staff notation in *Musikpsychologie*. Hence all music examples are my rendering of his prose.

³⁹ Kurth 1931, 187:

Diese Dissonanzvorbereitung beweist auch, daß man den Dissonanzzustand weniger als Erscheinung an sich, sondern als Zustandswechsel im Ton aufnimmt; somit als etwas relatives, wie es im Begriff der dynamischen Empfindung liegt. Dieser Wechsel ist übrigens ein Prinzip, dem auch gleich im Phänomen der Akkordspannung und den höchst sonderbaren psychologischen Möglichkeiten der Dissonanz-, Umdeutungen“ zu begegnen sein wird. Ein Wechsel des Spannungszustandes im gleichen Ton findet auch reiche technische Ausnützung in den Fällen, wo eine *Dissonanz liegen bleiben* kann. . . . Ein Liegenbleiben (statt einer Weiterführung) ist nämlich dann möglich, wenn eine Dissonanz in einem neuen Akkord wieder Dissonanz ist (z. B. aus einer Sept zu einem Vorhalt wird oder dergleichen), um dann mit dieser erst nachträglich aufgelöst zu werden; hingegen braucht sie im neuen Akkord nicht Dissonanz gleicher Spannkraft zu sein.

In the above, Kurth relates dissonance preparation to other contexts where one has the impression that the dynamic inclination of a stationary tone changes.⁴⁰ He mentions harmonic reinterpretations, which we will discuss shortly, as well as cases where a given chordal dissonance “remains stationary,” becoming a different type of dissonance in the following chord. For the latter, Kurth cites the example of a chordal seventh that, rather than resolving immediately, becomes a dissonant suspension; the progression in Example 3 illustrates. He emphasizes that within this cadential formula, the transformation of $\hat{1}$ from consonant preparation (beat 1) to chordal dissonance (beat 2) to dissonant suspension (beat 3) engenders changing degrees of unrest on the part of the listener.

Example 3. Changing dynamic inclination of $\hat{1}$

C: I ii⁶ V⁴ I

That we can also sense a qualitative change in a tone after it has passed is especially true when the next event in time is unexpected. This is the basis for what Kurth calls the “half-enharmonic reinterpretation” (*halbenharmonischer Umdeutung*) whereby some (“half”) of the tones in a chord resolve against prediction, often as their enhar-

⁴⁰ Elsewhere, he remarks that for a long time, composers treated “weighty dissonances” (chordal dissonances and suspensions) with extra care, making sure to prepare the dissonant note within the prior chord. That this occurs not only in vocal music but also in instrumental music, suggests that there is something more to preparation than simply a vocal aid: “The transformation of the tone into a dissonance during its immobile state is a strong architectonic progression that is sensed markedly in vocal music, especially throughout the 16th century, as well as in instrumental music up into the Viennese classical period” (Kurth 1931, 186).

monic equivalents.⁴¹ Here he provides examples that would have been common in the repertoire of his time:⁴²

For example, if one [1.] reads an established chord $C\flat-D\flat-F\flat-A\flat$ (an inversion of the dominant seventh chord $D\flat-F-A\flat-C\flat$) as altered seventh chord, $B-D\flat-F-A\flat$ and treats it harmonically according to this spelling, or [2.] when one resolves $G-B-D\flat-F$ towards the F major chord, where the original dissonant tone, F, is reinterpreted as the fixed, held tone and G, B, and $D\flat$ are tension tones.⁴³

Kurth's first example, realized in Example 4, is a $V\frac{4}{2}$ chord in $G\flat$ that is enharmonically respelled to create an "altered seventh chord." Though he is vague on the relationship of this "half-enharmonically reinterpreted" chord to its surroundings (one simply "treats it harmonically according to this spelling"), I suggest two possible contexts: at (a) as an altered $vii^{\circ 7}$ chord with lowered $\hat{2}$ in C; and at (b) as an altered pre-dominant seventh chord built on \sharp^4 .⁴⁴

In the next instance, realized in Example 5, Kurth discusses the resolution of what could be a $V7/\flat 5$ in C or an inversion of a French augmented sixth in F (with $D\flat$ as the lowest note)—among other interpretations. Rather than a dissonant seventh that resolves downward in the next chord, the F is sustained and becomes a consonant tone in the chord of resolution. This example resembles Example 3, beats 2 to 3, but with

⁴¹ Kurth distinguishes "half-enharmonic reinterpretation" from "enharmonic reinterpretation," whereby every note in a chord is enharmonically altered and the chord assumes a new function; for instance $C\sharp$ major triad respelled to become a $D\flat$ major triad, such as when V in the key of $F\sharp$ becomes $\flat VII$ in $e\flat$ minor (Kurth 1931, 234n3).

⁴² Robert Wason discusses several creative instances of augmented-sixth/diminished-third treatments in the repertoire of Munich School composers. See Wason and Errant 2010, xiv-xvii.

⁴³ Kurth 1931, 191n1:

Z. B. wenn man einen als *b-des-f-as*, also alterierten verm. Septakkord, eingeführten Klang als *ces-des-f-as* (Umkehrung des Dominantesptakkords [*sic*] *des-f-as-ces*) hest und dementsprechend harmonisch weiterleitet, oder wenn man *g-b-des-f* nach dem F-Durakkord auflöst, wobei der ursprüngliche Dissonanzton *f* zum festen Halteton *g*, *b* und *des* zu Spannungstönen umgedeutet werden.

⁴⁴ In *Romantische Harmonik*, Kurth analyzes a passage from *Rheingold* (Act 4, m. 5) that contains this progression. There, he interprets the altered seventh chord as $vii^{\circ 7}/\flat 5$ of V (secondary dominant) leading to V. See Rothfarb 1988, 168. In his article "Supplement to the Theory of Augmented Sixth Chords," Daniel Harrison points to this progression (spelling and all) in Liszt's *Orpheus* as an example containing a "rare" dominant-functioning augmented sixth chord. See Harrison 1995, 179 (Ex. 6).

arguably a more pronounced change in tension state due to semitonal voice leading in the inner parts.⁴⁵

Example 4. Two possible resolutions of Kurth's "altered seventh chords"

$V\frac{4}{2} \equiv vii^{\circ 7} \text{ I}$ $V\frac{4}{2} \equiv \sharp iv^{\circ 7} \quad V\frac{4}{2} = \flat$
 in $G\flat$ in C in $G\flat$ in f

Example 5. Common-tone resolution of $G7/\flat 5$

$G\flat 7$ $F6$

For both Examples 4 and 5, Kurth stresses, we sense a qualitative change within the *first* chord after the second chord enters. That is, our perception of the Gestalt quality of the first chord is altered, and moreover, the concomitant notes stand in a different relationship with one another within the two-chord complex. This is what Kurth means when he states that "reinterpretation" is felt as the "transference of energies."⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ This chord resembles a textbook "common-tone augmented sixth" chord, whereby, in the words of Edward Aldwell and Carl Schachter, "the interval of the augmented 6th [in this case $D\flat$ and B] resolves normally by expanding [here, contracting] into an octave." Taking Kurth's spelling, this chord also resembles what the authors call a "common-tone 'dominant seventh' chord; mm. 30-7 from Schubert, "Gute Nacht!", *Winterreise*, D. 911 contains an example. See Aldwell and Schachter 2003, 557-8.

⁴⁶ Kurth 1931, 191: „Das beruht auf der Möglichkeit, die Dissonanzspannung an anderer Stelle aus dem Klang abzuleiten als sie eingeführt war; und dies setzt eben wieder voraus, daß sich etwas von ihrer Spannung auch

Example 6, below, displays two typical cadential formulas, each of which contains a “traditional extension” (*althergebrachte Erweiterung*) or secondary dominant. Kurth insists that in both cases we feel these “tension chords” (secondary dominants) directed toward the bass tone, $\wedge 5$, of the 6/4 chord; “V6/4” is thus the suitable label.

Example 6. Kurth’s cadential formulas

C: I V⁷ V^{6/4} I I vii^{°7} V^{6/4} I

One may also encounter progressions like those in Example 7.

Example 7. Secondary dominant chords resolving to “imaginary 6/4” chords

C: I V⁷ V^(6/4) V⁷ I I vii^{°7} V^(6/4) V⁷ I

Here, rather than a 6/4 chord, the sonority following the secondary dominant looks like a root-position tonic chord (on the left) and a first-inversion tonic chord (on the

über den ganzen Akkord ergoß. Die ‚Umdeutung‘ als Verstandestätigkeit, als theoretisch entsprechende Leseweise, beruht erst auf Energien-Umschaltung.“

right).⁴⁷ Kurth emphasizes, however, that the 6/4 form and the broader cadential formula are nevertheless referential. That is, listeners familiar with Example 6 would likely attribute the effect of the 6/4 chord—as a partial goal with $\wedge 5$ in the bass that delays the ultimate arrival of the dominant harmony—to the sonorities that appear in its place in Example 7. Kurth explains,

This phenomenon indicates nothing less than that one, *by mere will*, attributes the effect of the 6/4-chord to a chord that *in no way contains* the 6/4-chord construction. Not that we are, perhaps, to assume a “mistake in hearing” with the masters, but rather an extraordinary power of the dynamic hearing. It is extreme or, if one may put it this way, crass evidence for the significance and *imaginary* force of the *perception of structure*: it can prevail even in the simple will, *against the actual existing chordal relationships*.

Perceptually, the Gestalt quality of the familiar cadential complex endures, even with an unexpected change to one of its components. In order to underscore the robust influence of the whole, Kurth suggests a special label for the chord on beat three:

I designate such cases as the “imaginary” 6/4 chord and propose the following notation: V(6/4). The parentheses are supposed to indicate that, with respect to the preceding (V), the 6/4-interpretation does, indeed, lie hidden, but does not find expression in the actual chordal voicing.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Kurth 1931, 202n1:

At the same time, one finds on occasion the further characteristic that this chord progression also appears without there being a true 6/4-form. In formulas like C (V⁷)–V^{6/4}–V–I or (VII)–V^{6/4}–V–I, the antepenultimate chord does not appear with G in the bass (6/4 form), but with C or E.

[Dabei nun findet sich zuweilen noch die weitere Besonderheit, daß diese Klangfolge auch erscheint, ohne daß wirklich 6/4-Form vorliegt; in Formeln also wie C (V⁷)–V^{6/4}–V–I oder (VII)–V^{6/4}–V–I erscheint der drittletzte Akkord nicht mit g im Baß (6/4-Form), sondern mit c oder e.]

⁴⁸ Kurth 1931, 202n1:

Diese Erscheinung beweist nichts geringeres, als daß man *mit bloßem Willen* 6/4-Akkordwirkung in einen Akkord *hineinhört*, der *gar nicht* 6/4-Akkordlagerung *enthält*. Nicht etwa ein „Gehörsfehler“ ist bei den Meistern anzunehmen, sondern eine außerordentliche Macht des dynamischen Hörens; es ist ein extremer oder, wenn man so sagen darf, krasser Beleg für die Bedeutsamkeit und die *imaginäre* Kraft der *Strukturempfindung*: sie kann sich sogar im bloßen Willen, *gegen die wirklich vorhandenen Klangverhältnisse durchsetzen*. Ich bezeichne derlei als „*imaginären*“ 6/4-Akkord und schlage die folgende Schreibweise vor: V(6/4); die Klammer soll andeuten, daß im Hinblick auf die vorübergehende (V) die 6/4-Auffassung zwar verborgen liegt, aber nicht in der wirklichen Klanglagerung zum Ausdruck kommt.

As William Rothstein has noted, Heinrich Schenker, too, was interested in inverted cadential 6/4 chords.⁴⁹ In the unpublished early version of *Der freie Satz*, Schenker presents the Handel excerpt shown in Example 8, remarking that $\hat{1}$ in the soprano only *appears* to change from a dissonant chordal seventh in m. 5 to a consonance in m. 7.

Example 8. Schenker's voice-leading reduction of Handel, Chaconne, HWV 435, Variation 11, mm. 5–8. Reproduction of Rothstein 2006, 271, Example 19(b)

Schenker contends:

[T]he fact that the passing seventh within the II harmony [$\hat{1}$ in the soprano] has not yet resolved, indicates that the six-three chord on the downbeat [of m. 7] does not represent a true inversion . . . because the dissonant seventh cannot possibly continue as a consonant interval. If, in spite of the six-three chord, we think at this point of the root of the V harmony, to which the preceding II also points, we will better understand the correctness of the voice leading.⁵⁰

For Schenker, this example “prove[s] that free composition has sufficient means to compel us to imagine a six-four suspension without needing to present it to us literally,” and felicitously, this “leads us to many advantages for the voice leading (in the

⁴⁹ See Rothstein 2006 and Rothstein 1991, where the author discusses the “Schrock cadence,” named for a former graduate student who called attention to inverted cadential 6/4s in the music of Bach and Mozart.

⁵⁰ „. . . dass die Sept [Durchgang bei] der II. Stufe, g2 des Soprans, ihre Lösung noch nicht gefunden hat, darauf hin, dass bei dem Sextaccord des Niederstreiches die Sext [] nicht eben eine wirkliche Umkehrung, hier einer I. Stufe, vorstellt, da sich in dieser Konsonanz unmöglich die Dissonanz der Sept fortsetzen könnte. Denken wir uns aber dagegen, trotz Sextaccord, den Grundton der V. Stufe an dieser Stelle, worauf ja auch die vorausgegangene II. hinweist, so begreifen wir umso besser die Richtigkeit der Stimmführung.“ From §17 („Von 4–3 bzw. 6/5–5/3“) in a chapter entitled „Von den Vorhalten, Synkopen und Rückungen.“ Oster Collection, file 51, items 1325–27. Trans. Rothstein 1999, 70; original appears in 270n49.

service for the thematic aspect, etc.).”⁵¹ His directive to “think” of the root of the V harmony, and moreover, his appeal to the imagination bear striking similarities to Kurth’s explanation of the “imaginary 6/4.” Yet there is a decided difference in motivation. While Schenker’s argument is fuelled by the desire to save otherwise-errant voice leading, Kurth’s discussion targets the “perception of structure,” that is, recognition of the Gestalt quality of the overriding cadential formula.⁵² And while Schenker limits his examples to the common practice,⁵³ Kurth notes that imaginary 6/4 chords are found “not unusually in Schubert, in isolated cases in Bruckner, and then frequently . . . in Scriabin.”⁵⁴ This tantalizing hypothesis calls for further inquiry, one that would complement Gabriel Fankhauser’s recent findings of inverted cadential 6/4s in the music of Liszt, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich, as well as Timothy Cutler’s work on the topic.⁵⁵

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Let us return to Example 1. In *Musikpsychologie*, Kurth revisits the internal growth and re-growth of phases of motion. His description aptly characterizes the opening measures of the Prelude: “The remarkably compact form of the tonal line exhibits the feature of every psychic force: in moments of attenuation, new escalations are able to stream in—in a sense to propagate. All melodic spinning-forth is based on this capac-

⁵¹ „Die nachstehenden Beispiele werden den Beweis dafür erbringen, dass der freie Satz eben über genügende Mittel verfügt, mit denen er die Vorstellung eines 6/4-Vorhaltes in uns erzwingen kann, [auch] ohne dass er diesen Vorhalt wirklich zu leisten brauchte, was, wie man sehen wird, zu mannigfachen Vorteilen der Stimmführung, (im Dienste des Thematischen usw.) führt.“ From §17 („Von 4–3 bzw. 6/5–5/3“) in a chapter entitled „Von den Vorhalten, Synkopen und Rückungen.“ Oster Collection, file 51, items 1325–27. Trans. Rothstein 1999, 269–70; original appears in 270n49.

⁵² Here, and in many other places, Kurth’s interests and ideas anticipate those of Leonard B. Meyer. A closer comparison of these two thinkers is a worthwhile pursuit that is beyond the scope of the present paper. Meyer discusses the requirements for a cadential “schema” along with its “rise and demise” in his 1992 essay “Nature, Nurture, and Convention: The Cadential Six-Four Progression” (repr. Meyer 2002, 226–51); see also Gjerdingen 2009 for an evaluation of Meyer’s essay.

⁵³ In the same passage of the unpublished *Freie Satz*, Schenker cites an example from the first movement of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto in G, op. 58, which Rothstein presents as Example 20. Schenker also provides an example from Brahms’s Piano Quintet in f, op. 34, first movement, which Rothstein presents as Example 21. See Rothstein 1999, 272–3.

⁵⁴ Kurth 1931, 202n1: „Dies findet sich nicht selten bei Schubert, vereinzelt bei Bruckner, recht häufig dann in Verbindung mit Alteration) bei Skrjabin.“ (Cutler 2009).

⁵⁵ See Fankhauser 2012 and Cutler 2009. Cutler maintains a list of “inverted V6/4s” online at www.music-theoryexamples.com, Chapter 7; examples from Bruckner’s and Scriabin’s oeuvres are notably absent.

ity for regeneration.⁵⁶ This is just the kind of expressive language that irritated Schenker, and he was quick to dismiss Kurth's approach for lacking specificity. In a later passage from the aforementioned essay in *Meisterwerke*, Schenker writes:

[Kurth's] opening words, on p. 1 [of *Grundlagen*] are: 'Melody is motion' [*Melodie ist Bewegung*]. And this, in turn, he sometimes calls 'streaming force,' sometimes 'energy of motion,' [*Bewegungsenergie*], 'phase of motion' [*Bewegungsphase*], 'linear force' and so forth. Words—words that say nothing about motion as such, nor anything about the particular motion in music or even the specific motion in an individual artwork.⁵⁷

For Schenker, Kurth's words rang empty. Yet for Kurth, words are everything. In reading *Musikpsychologie*, where *Bewegung* appears frequently, three points become clear. First, Kurth speaks of melody and motion with an embodied understanding that goes beyond contours in the score. Second, his usage of "Melodie" denotes more than a linear pitch succession. And finally, his energetic *Bewegungsphase* has a Gestalt quality that is captured retrospectively. Let us unpack these three interrelated observations.

When Kurth describes the "regeneration" of the tonal line, he makes an analogy to energy conservation in an oscillating system—one he first introduced in his habilitation thesis, *Die Voraussetzungen der theoretischen Harmonik* (1913) and used throughout his career. In *Musikpsychologie*, he explains this analogy as follows: "Music develops in a continual reciprocity of 'kinetic' and 'potential' energies. The collection of unspent force (or unreleased remnants of *Bewegungsenergie*) causes a high level of intensification, even in the single tone."⁵⁸ Applying this to the Bach example, the opening E6 is a storehouse of potential energy (unspent force), while kinetic energy (*Bewegungsenergie*) imbues the subsequent downward descent. The "nadir of relaxation" in m. 3 represents not a complete release of energy, but rather another energy conversion, which motivates the subsequent small upward surges and gradual rise of the line.

Crucially, Kurth has in mind not only objects we see in motion but also human locomotion. A melody is "moving" not simply because we associate it with motion "in the visible corporeal world." Rather, Kurth asserts, "we imbue the changing position

⁵⁶ Kurth 1931, 81: „So zeigt sich in der merkwürdig gedrängten Form der Tonlinie die Eigentümlichkeit jeder psychischen Kraft, in Augenblicken des Nachlassens aus sich selbst neue Steigerungen einströmen zu lassen, sich gewissermaßen fortzupflanzen; alle melodische Fortspinnung beruht in dieser Erneuerungsfähigkeit.“

⁵⁷ Schenker 1925, 96; trans. by John Rothgeb in Schenker/Drabkin 1994, 52.

⁵⁸ Kurth 1931, 112.

of [physical] bodies with that feeling of motion that in reality lies within us."⁵⁹ His emphasis on felt motion in *Musikpsychologie* is notable, yet antecedents for this position appear within his earlier writings. In *Bruckner*, for instance, Kurth warns that a mere description of musical contours in the score fails to capture the internal dynamics of music: "[W]e must guard against seeing all of this too much with the eye. Even the individually demonstrable lines are to be felt, not for their own sakes, but merely with regard to the totality out of which their entire structure is generated."⁶⁰ From this perspective, I interpret Kurth's opening phrase "melody is motion" as an abbreviation for a metaphorical expression: the experience of listening to a melody is like the experience of being in motion.⁶¹

Despite Kurth's clear emphasis on melody in the above expression, and despite Schenker's critique (echoed by others) that Kurth ignores the "chordal foundations" of Bach's music, the vertical dimension is inherent in Kurth's interpretive framework—even for monophonic textures. The key is realizing that when he uses "*die Melodie*" (or "*das Melodische*" or "*die Melodik*") he does so as a proxy for *Bewegungsenergie*. The melodic line (as linear succession) is the quintessential expression of the energy of motion, while harmonic effects express the conversion of kinetic energy to potential energy. Indeed, Kurth refers to the relationship between melody and harmony as the "complementary counter-principle" (*ergänzendes Gegenprinzip*) in *Musikpsychologie*.⁶²

⁵⁹ „[W]ir erfüllen umgekehrt die Lagenveränderung von Körpern mit jenem Gefühl einer Bewegung, das in Wirklichkeit in uns liegt“ (Kurth 1931, 108).

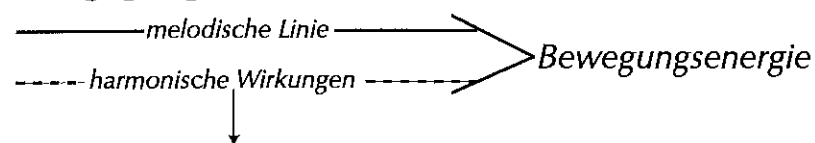
⁶⁰ Kurth 1925, 283; trans. in Rothfarb 1991, 155.

⁶¹ Though Kurth's own ideas about the body are far less explicit than those of modern authors, we can nevertheless identify shared concerns across the centuries. In a recent article, Arnie Cox proposes a "mimetic hypothesis" that accounts for "how music becomes internalized into the bodies and minds of listeners" (Cox 2011, [1]). Steve Larson's theory of "musical forces," which he first outlined in Larson 1997, also calls attention to the role of the body in the listening experience. Larson (2012) writes, "our immediate experience of musical motion is shaped primarily by our *embodied intuitive* understanding of physical motion—not by our *intellectual* understanding of physics." Following George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980/2003 and 1999), Larson explains that by "embodied," he means, "our understanding is shaped by the somatic 'feel' of what we know—that we 'know' with our bodies as well as with our minds" (22). The relationship between Kurth's ideas and recent theories of music and embodiment merits closer examination within a separate study.

⁶² Kurth 1931, 77n2. In this particular footnote, Kurth attempts to set the record straight, once and for all, about his views on harmony in Bach's music. A more extensive response to the claim that Kurth ignores "harmonic effects" appears in the Foreword to the third edition of *Grundlagen*. Rothfarb (1988, 125) characterizes the main problem of Kurth's analyses in *Grundlagen* as one of theoretical inconsistency: "Without a sufficiently comprehensive structural basis for coordinating melody and harmony . . . Kurth occasionally interprets melodic elements harmonically . . . or vice versa." Highlighting either melody or harmony, Rothfarb notes, leads Kurth "oc-

While the energy of motion engenders the sensation of forward direction, harmony is experientially “grounded” by what he describes in various places as a sensation of gravity (*Schwereempfindung*).⁶³ This downward-forward opposition illustrated in Example 9 creates a sense of propulsion, resistance, and striving.⁶⁴

Example 9. *Bewegungsenergie* in relation to the melodic line and harmonic effects



Over time, a phase of motion (*Bewegungsphase*) takes shape, one that hinges on the balance (*Ausgleich*) of smaller motions, the equilibrium of *Bewegungsenergie*, as well as the externalized, sounding pitches. This *Bewegungsphase* has a Gestalt quality: an all-encompassing, dynamic tension force of psychological origins. Kurth suggests further that the listener acquires, retrospectively, this Gestalt quality as a musical “afterimage” (*Nachbild*). (This is consonant with, yet not overtly derivative of, Ehrenfels’s earlier observation about temporal Gestalt qualities.) In the visual domain afterimages are easily produced; for instance, if you stare at a computer screen for too long, the images are likely to remain “in front” of you even after you have turned away.⁶⁵ Similarly,

casionally to undervalue or misinterpret the other.” This is a problem that also arises at times in *Romantische Harmonik*; see Rothfarb 1989, 142–4, for instance.

⁶³ See especially Kurth 1931, Section III. See Tan 2013, Chapter 5, for a discussion of gravity in *Musikpsychologie*.

⁶⁴ Given that for Kurth, musical experience is one of a nuanced interplay of forces, it is no wonder that he bristles at the suggestion of music critic Richard Wallaschek that melody is simply “disassembled harmony”; see Kurth 1931, 78n1.

⁶⁵ Regarding a more acute form of this, the eidetic ability, Kurth (1931, 88) writes,

First, one could think of a phenomenon that has received much attention in recent psychology of vision. There, there is an after-effect of impression that announces itself as a simple “representational image”; tests suggest that an image that existed for a time before the eye nevertheless also remains for a time in the inner eye after its removal, so that the study participant often identifies particulars after the event. The ability to produce such a “visual image” was called the eidetic ability and those endowed with this ability (mostly children), “Eidetics.” Although with some of them, the visual image is fixed, with others it is mobile through the imaginary life that plays into it, which often supplements, changes, and fills the image with life.

[Zunächst könnte man dabei an eine Erscheinung denken, die in der neueren Psychologie des Gesichtssinnes viel beachtet wurde. Dort gibt es ein Nachwirken eines Eindrucks, das sich als bloßes „Vorstellungsbild“ kundgibt; Versuche zeigen, daß ein Bild, das eine Zeitlang dem Auge vorlag, auch noch seiner Entfernung eine Zeitlang gleichwohl dem innern Auge vorhanden ist, so daß die Versuchsperson oft noch hinterher Einzelheiten entdeckt.

listeners retain a sense of the whole course of musical events after it unfolds—the acoustic properties of the events, to be sure, but more importantly, emotional and perceptual responses to these events. Kurth writes, “the progression of motion is a psychic reality of its own *formal content*, which creates a residuum in memory as an ‘afterimage.’”⁶⁶ Kurth also emphasizes that this kind of mental trace is *not* the memory of lingering individual notes or notes played in succession but rather the retention of a “simultaneous’ image of motion” and its propulsive quality. As he remarks, “after-images of motions impress for a longer duration than afterimages of [isolated] tones or chords; we retain a melody much more easily, are often literally tormented by it, than would be the case with individual tones or chords.”⁶⁷ Building on Ehrenfels’s observation that our grasp of the “whole” is immediate and Krueger’s axioms for the reciprocal relationships of whole and parts, Kurth draws attention to a listener’s ability to capture events in real time, shape them into a holistic “image,” and retain the dynamic experience. Indeed, as Kurth writes, herein rests “the basis for the application of Gestalt psychology as a whole to music”—“Gestalt-motion in place of combinatory activity.”⁶⁸

Die Fähigkeit, solche „Anschauungsbilder“ hervorzubringen, nennt man die eidetische Fähigkeit, und die mit ihr ausgestatteten Menschen (meist sind es Kinder) „Eidetiker“. Bei den einen ist dabei das Anschauungsbild starr, bei andern beweglich durch das hereinspielende Vorstellungslieben, welches oft ergänzt, ändert, das Bild mit Leben erfüllt.]

Kim (2003, 281) notes that this was a widely studied phenomenon at the time, and Helmholtz, Stumpf, and other contemporaneous musical sources discuss the related “after-sounding” (*Nachklingen*).

⁶⁶ Kurth 1931, 92: „Damit dringt für den Psychologen als Kern die Erscheinung heraus, daß der Bewegungszug eine psychische Realität von eigenem *Formgehalt* ist, der als ‚Nachbild‘ ein Residuum im Gedächtnis bildet.“

⁶⁷ Kurth 1931, 90: „Nachbilder von Bewegungen prägen sich auch zu längerer Dauer ein als Nachbilder von Tönen oder Klängen; man merkt sich weitaus leichter eine Melodie, wird öfter von ihr förmlich gequält, als daß dies mit einzelnen Tönen oder Klängen der Fall wäre.“

Kurth’s approach to melody in memory differs from two well-known contemporaneous accounts. According to Kurth, Riemann’s theory of tonal imagination unduly emphasizes, on the one hand, the ability to “read ahead” and on the other, the function of memory to retain tones and “unful” them “one *after* another” until the present moment (Kurth 1931, 96). Similarly, in his emphasis on the remembrance of motion—above individual notes—Kurth diverges from Husserl. Husserl posits that the recollection of melody (“secondary remembrance”) “has exactly the same constitution” as the immediate perception of melody (“primary remembrance”). Secondary remembrance, Husserl posits, involves the reconstitution of “now-points”: “we run through [it] in phantasy; we hear ‘as if’ first the first note, then the second, etc.” (Husserl 1964, 57).

⁶⁸ Kurth 1931, 86: „Damit ist aber der gesamten Gestaltpsychologie für ihre Anwendung auf die Musik erst der Untergrund gegeben, Gestaltbewegung an Stelle kombinatorischer Tätigkeit gesetzt.“ Kurth extends this idea further, turning his attention to the Gestalt quality of motives and large-scale form types. See Kurth 1931, Section IV, and Tan 2013, Chapter 7.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have considered Ernst Kurth's objective in *Musikpsychologie* to investigate "psychic functions that form the basis of musical hearing." And I have suggested that we stand to gain greater insight into Kurth's earlier analytical works with the theoretical perspective found in this final book. It is not, however, a question of substituting one label for another, replacing Kurth as "energeticist" with Kurth as "Gestaltist" or even "Gestalt psychologist." Rather, my aim has been to illuminate his awareness and enthusiasm for a scientific movement that was burgeoning at the time. After all, while Kurth makes notable contributions to an area of psychological research that was focused primarily on the visual domain, his approach is nevertheless idiosyncratic—it certainly garnered mixed reviews. Alfred Lorenz, for instance, declared Kurth's music psychology a "new, youthful science,"⁶⁹ and Theodor Adorno praised Kurth for explaining the subjective dimension of music in systematic terms.⁷⁰ For contemporaneous psychologists, however, his investigation lacked the scientific rigor to which they were accustomed. Albert Wellek, whose own work explored connections between music and mind, was particularly critical. Yet even he could not overlook the unprecedented scope, ambition, and originality of Kurth's project. Thus he concluded, and here, we will too:

[*Musikpsychologie*] is a work of greatness and novelty, impressive in itself, but one [that is] on the boundaries [of disciplines], assuming an equally deep, expert schooling in two so rarely combined subjects: music and psychology. If Kurth's competence in the first area is without doubt peerless, all of our objections may be reduced to one statement: on the foundation of psychology he is an outsider. He is a brilliant improviser, however, who reasonably invents a psychology on his own, which, if one looks beyond the form and the detail towards the essence, has significance almost everywhere.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Lorenz 1930, 183.

⁷⁰ Adorno 1933, 350.

⁷¹ Wellek 1933, 80.

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