

The *Tristan* Progression as an Energetic Voice-Leading Paradigm:
A Study in *Kinetic Displacement Intervals* (KDIs)

Paper Proposal for the 2008 Meeting of the Society for Music Theory (Nashville, TN)

PROVISIONAL ABSTRACT

This study explores the connections between voice-leading, musical gesture, and psychodynamic processes in several passages from *Tristan und Isolde*. Taking a broad cue from Ernst Kurth, it asks what might be gained by bracketing questions of chord identity and structure, to focus instead on the voice-leading that produces and interconnects them. Striving for a holistic image of gesture, voice-leading, and stage action, the study examines the *energetic voice-leading gestalts* that govern medium-length musical spans (8-16 bars), asking how these emergent gestalts both impart musical continuity and mirror the psychological states of the drama's characters.

Part I lays the study's theoretical foundations, arguing that in the context of certain kinetic gestalts, pitch-class relationships can be heard to embody kinetic vectors similar to those of pitches moving through a space imbued with vertical coordinates. The basic unit of measurement here is the *kinetic displacement interval*, or KDI, which gauges the kind and intensity of voice-leading displacement from one tertian verticality to another. Part II examines an energetic voice-leading paradigm manifested in *Tristan's* opening progression, which couples upward-striving pitch-space motion with efficient voice-leading that pulls inexorably "downward." I then explore deformational instances of this energetic paradigm in several texted examples from Act III.