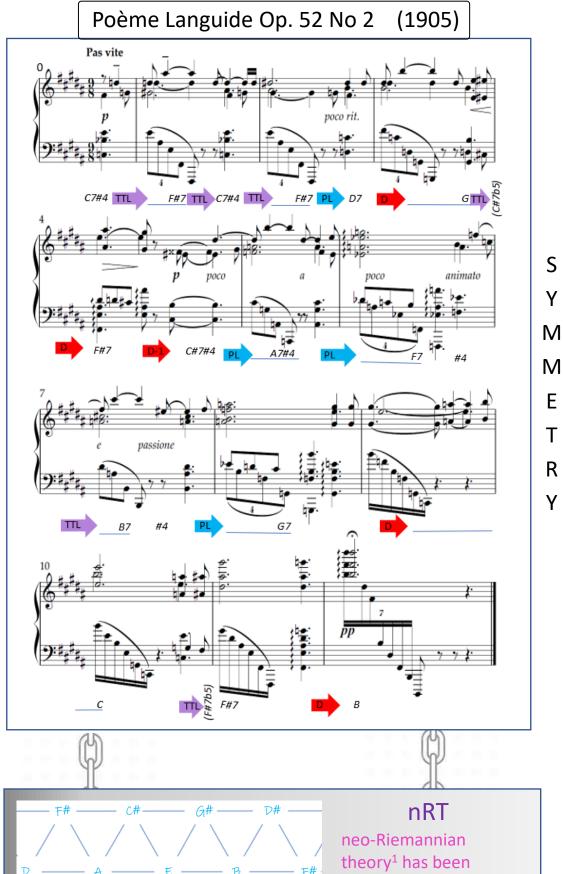
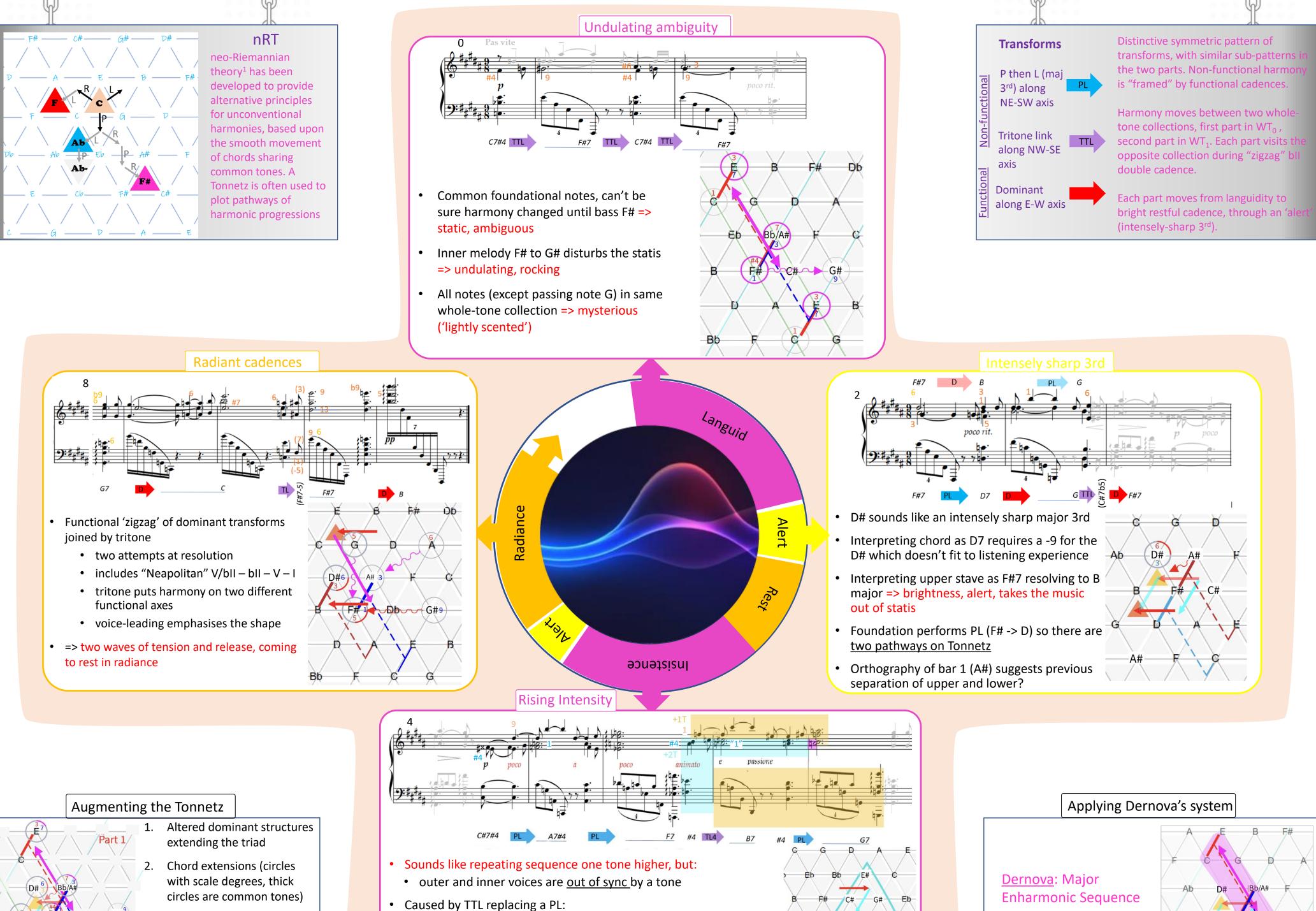
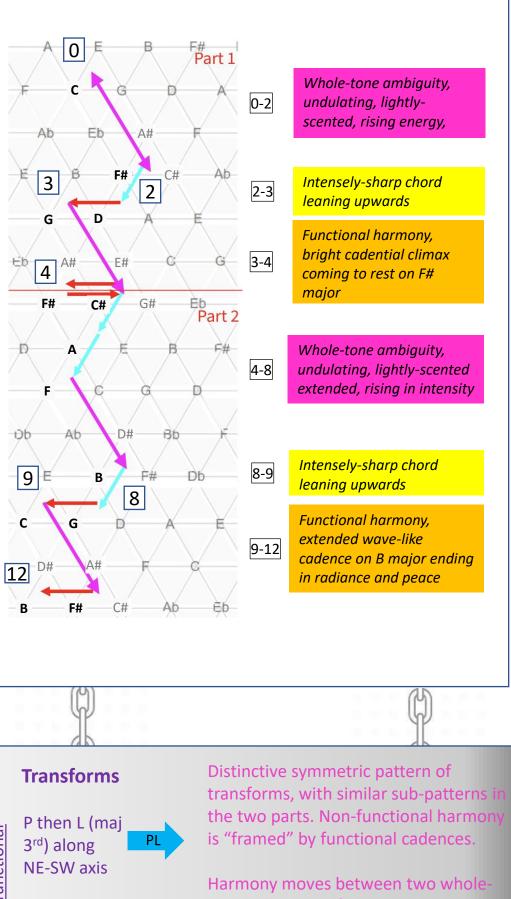
## neo-Riemannian Structures and Musical Affect in Scriabin's Poème Languide

Dr. David Mott, University of Southampton



		Structure and Affect	
bar	Affect	Musical characteristics	Loving encounter
0-2	Whole-tone harmony, <b>ambiguous,</b> <b>undulating</b> , lightly-scented	Tonal ambiguity with common tones over a tritone link and delaying the chord root, with semitone motif rising out of a #4 gives a feeling of undulation, and whole-tone harmony provides a subtle scented atmosphere, outlined with bell-like melodic leaps. A final rising melody note raises an alert of anticipation.	caressing
2-3	Intensely-sharp chord leaning upwards	The foundational harmony drops, exposing upper voices as an intense, super-sharp 3 <sup>rd</sup> both consonant and dissonant with the root harmony, that creates a feeling of arousal	firm caressing, becoming serious
3-4	resolving to: Functional harmony, <b>bright</b> <b>cadences</b> coming to rest on F# major	Tension in the intensely-sharp 3 <sup>rd</sup> is released into a progression of romantic cadences, formed by two dominant transforms linked by a tritone, over which the melody expands into a suspension that hovers in the air whilst a lower voice suspension comes to rest, ending the section with a restful, peaceful sigh. The piece is now in F# major, the dominant of the key signature.	anticipation, small climax, rest, sigh
4-6	Whole-tone harmony, ambiguous, undulating, lightly-scented, extending, <b>rising intensity</b>	The undulating scented whole-tone harmony returns in a different collection, with increased movement and energy, driving towards an unsettling rhythmic combination of 4 against 3, with a sense of agitation or excitement, disturbing the feeling of peace.	serious, urgent
6-8		The whole-tone phrase repeats with insistence, higher and more urgently, gathering further momentum and excitement from the rhythm of 4 against 3.	greater urgency
8-9	Intensely-sharp chord leaning upwards	The intensely-sharp 3 <sup>rd</sup> calls out, full of energy and tension as it promises to rise upwards, over a foundational arpeggio containing a tense suspension that is prematurely eased into the next chord	intense passion
9-10	resolving to: Functional harmony, <b>extended</b> <b>wave-like cadence</b> onto B major	The tension is released as the melody rises as promised into a sustained high note over a foundational arpeggio that releases further the tension in the suspension	strong climax
10-11	ending in radiance and peace	Wave-like, the intensity recedes into a sequence of romantic cadences, formed by two dominant transforms linked by a tritone, over which the melody rises again to a higher but more relaxed sustained note over an F#7 chord, the dominant of the key signature.	afterglow, reflection
11-12		The melody falls gently back by semitone then leaps once more into a final radiant perfect cadence, finally descending in a restful and peaceful arpeggio over B major.	radiance, rest, sigh





Affect on the Tonnetz

Voice leading (wavy lines) 3.

- 4. Multiple pathways
- Starting from F, middle voices repeat PL.PL two tones up (from C#)

Starting from F, outer voices follow TTL.PL one tone up (from C#)

+2T

C#

D#

-Fx/G

D#/Eb Bb

D

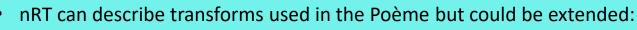
- Whole-tone and octatonic 5. axes (blue and green) Makes Visible:
- Extensive use of altered dominants
- Many common tones from extensions and transforms, allowing smoother voiceleading
- Strong connection to wholetone collections
- Pitch retention loops (e.g. f# in part 1)
- Intensely sharp chords as alternative pathways
- Voice-leading by tone drives harmonic change



Part 2

In 1<sup>st</sup> statement, PL.PL moves harmony up two tones (C# -> F)

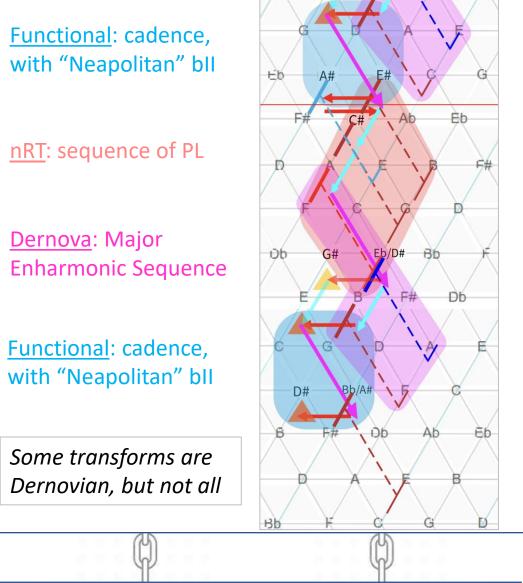
- Replacing PL by TTL drops harmony relatively by <u>one</u> tone (B7 instead of C#7) C#
- Did Scriabin wish to maintain the movement of the rising semitones in middle voices?
- Sequence feels insistent but strange



- by adding the tritone link as a transform
- by representing concurrent pathways of related triads
- Scriabin's tritone links, extended chords and PL transforms increase use of common tones
- Augmented Tonnetz can show Scriabin's harmonic patterns in the Poeme
  - non-triadic chords, tritone links, whole-tone collections, parallel triad movements
- Dernova's system applicable to some but not all the patterns
  - nRT might benefit from exploring her patterns as 'compositional strategies' (Cohn<sup>1</sup>)
- Musical affect can be linked to Scriabin's unusual harmonies and voice-leading
  - some links can be seen on the Tonnetz
  - supports narrative of a "Creative Act", from languidity to radiance

[1] Cohn, R. (2012) Audacious Euphony: Chromatic Harmony and the Triad's Second Nature. Oxford University Press. [2] Guenther, R. (1979) Varvara Dernova's "Garmoniia Scriabina": A Translation and Critical Commentary. PhD, The Catholic University of America.

[3] 'Languide is the prelude to a creative act' – Simon Nicholls



Varvara Dernova is a Russian theorist who constructed an analytic system for Scriabin's music that identified patterns of harmonic progressions based upon the tritone, or 'dual polarity'. These include the tritone link, where two dominant chords are related by a tritone, and the major enharmonic sequence where chords move between enharmonically equivalent collections<sup>2</sup>.

V2