Polytonality and the Emergence of Tone Fields in Germaine Tailleferre's Pastorale (1919)

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EPFL

Outline

1. What is polytonality?
2. The problem of polytonality
3. Tone fields to the rescue
4. Analyzing Tailleferre's *Pastorale*
5. Conclusions

What is polytonality?

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Polytonality vs atonality

"Il existe entre la polytonalité et l'atonalité les mêmes différences essentielles qu'entre le diatonism et le chromatisme." (Milhaud, 1923)

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	~~enharmonicism~~	enharmonicism
old:	diatonism	chromaticism
new:	polytonality	atonality

Diatonitism

"Le diatonisme implique la croyance en l'accord parfait (composé de sa fondamentale, de sa tierce majore ou mineure, et de sa quinte) comme en une réalité fixe reposant sur une gamme majeure ou mineure que le musicien utilisera dans la composition de ses thèmes."

"Diatonism implies the belief in the perfect chord (composed of its root, its major or minor third, and its fifth) as a fixed reality that relies on a major or minor scale that the musician in the composition of his themes."

What is polytonality?

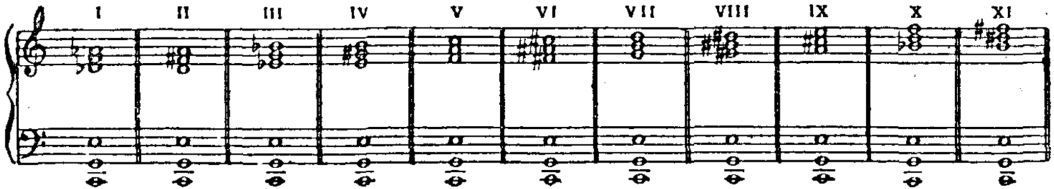

Figure 1: 11 possible combinations of two chords, one being C major.

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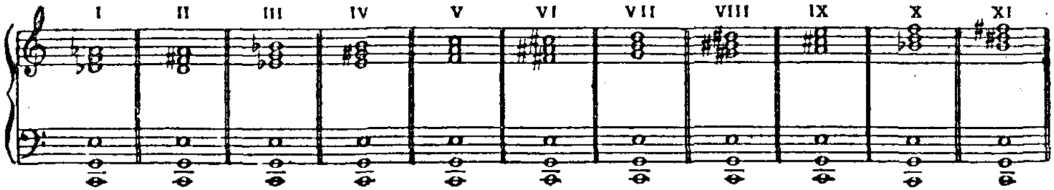

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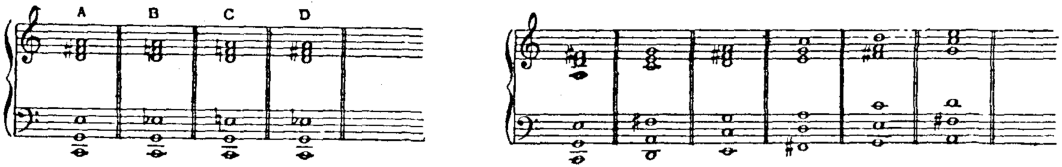


Figure 2: Major/minor combinations (left). Inversions (right).

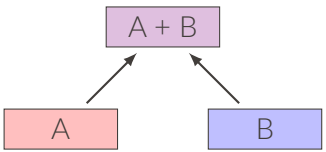
The problem of polytonality

The problem of polytonality

Knowing what you can do doesn't tell you what works well.

You need to know how to put the pieces together!

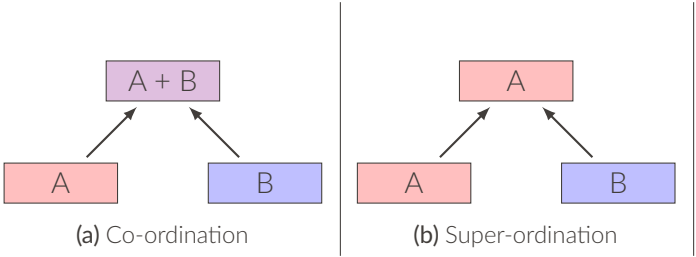
The problem of polytonality



(a) Co-ordination

Figure 3: Three scenarios.

The problem of polytonality



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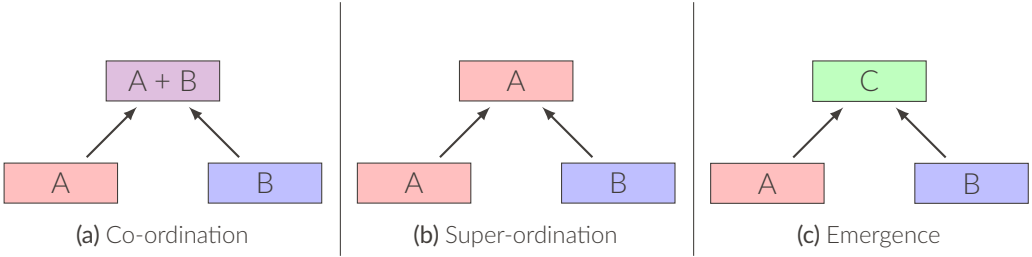

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Limitations

“D’ailleurs l’analyse d’un accord est une question conventionelle et arbitraire [...].”

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⟶ A description of the combinatorics of polytonality is not sufficient!

Tone fields to the rescue

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- **Series of fifths:** …– B♭ – F – C – G – D – A – …
- **Functions:**

	F♯	A	C	E♭
B	D	F	A♭	

Analyzing Tailleferre's *Pastorale*

Analyzing Tailleferre's Pastorale

The *Album des Six* (1920)

1. Prélude (Georges Auric)
2. Romance sans paroles (Louis Durey)
3. Sarabande (Arthur Honegger)
4. Mazurka (Darius Milhaud)
5. Valse (Francis Poulenc)
6. **Pastorale (Germaine Tailleferre)**

Figure 4: The *Groupe des Six*.

PLAY

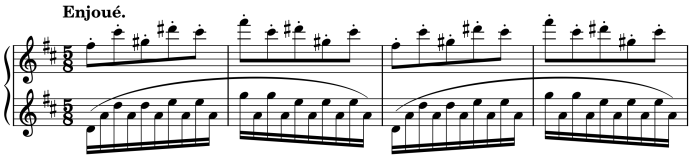
Overview

Bars	Form	Bass
1–8	4 + 4	D
9–16	4 + 4	G♯ – G
17–28	(8 + 2) + 2	F – E
29–36	4 + 4	D
37–48	4 + (4 + 4)	B – B♭
49–53	5	D

Analyzing Tailleferre's *Pastorale*

The foreground

Analyzing Tailleferre's Pastorale



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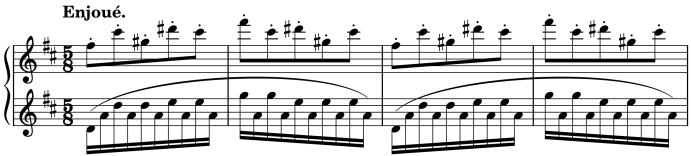

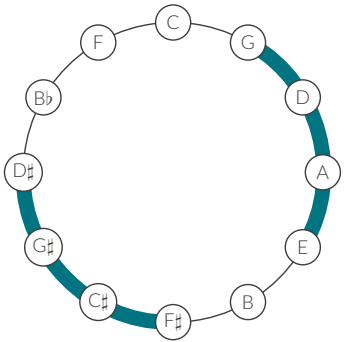

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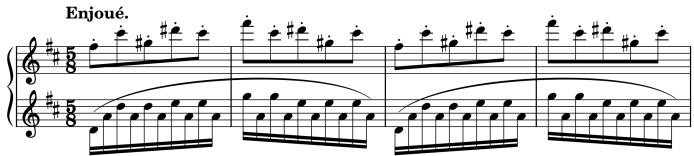
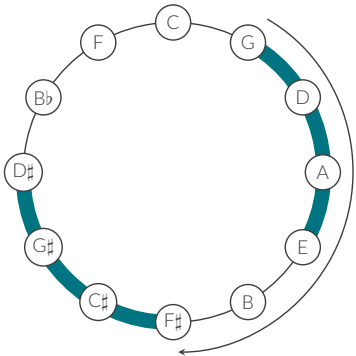


The two pitch-class sets X and Y can be related through transposition:

$$Y = T_5(X) = X + 5 \mod 12$$



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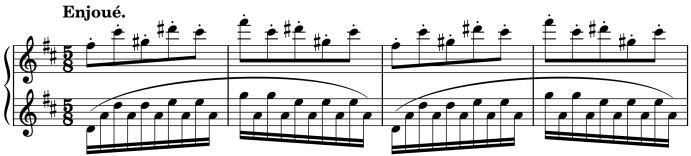

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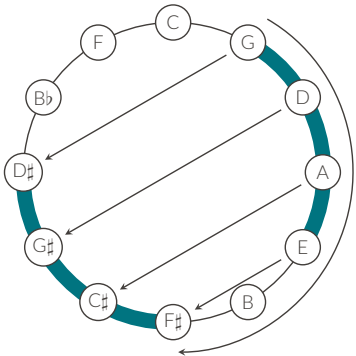
or through inversion:

$$Y = I_{10}(X) = 10 - X \mod 12$$



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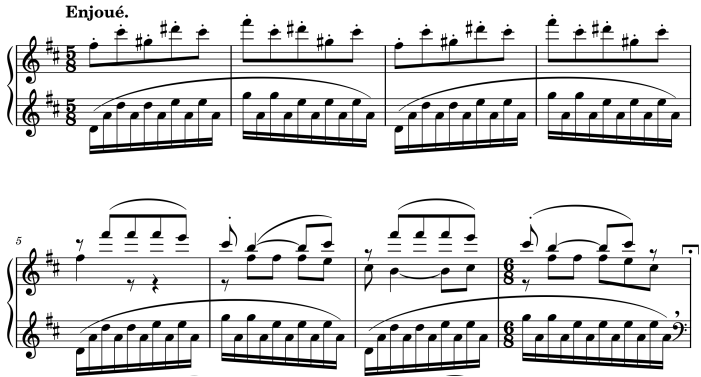

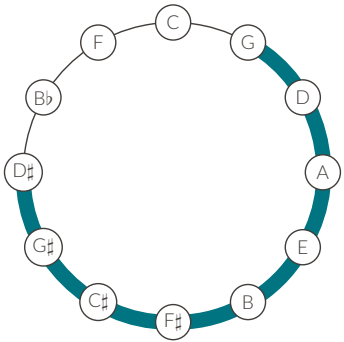

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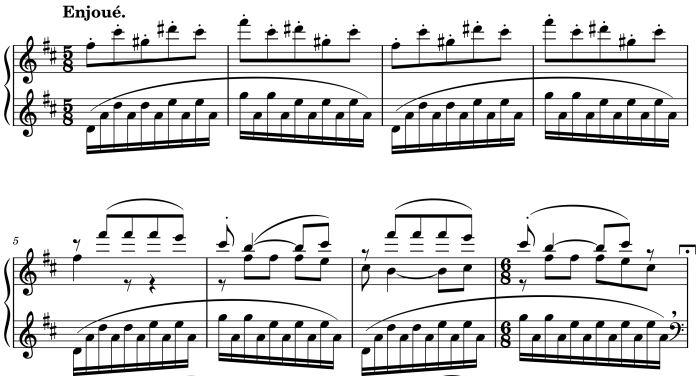

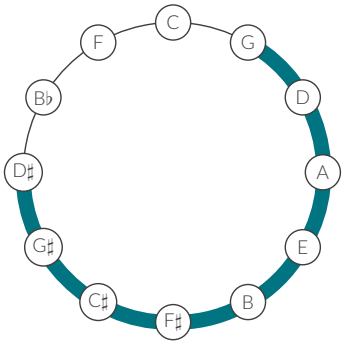

On the foreground, the first 8 bars establish two disjunct tetratons;
connected by B to form an enneaton

Analyzing Tailleferre's *Pastorale*

The background

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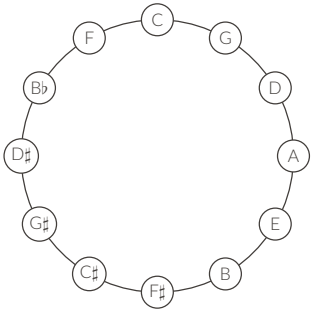

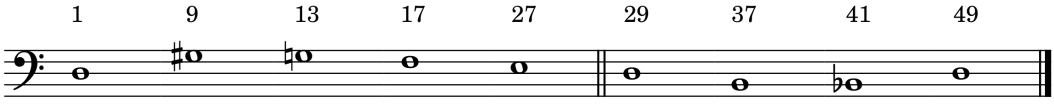

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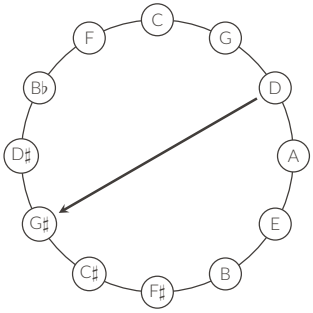

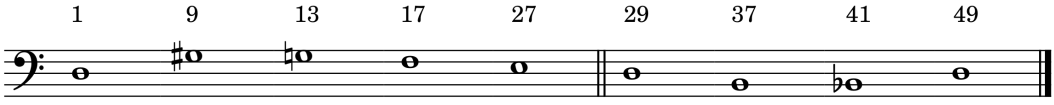

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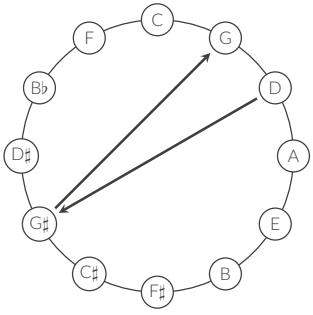

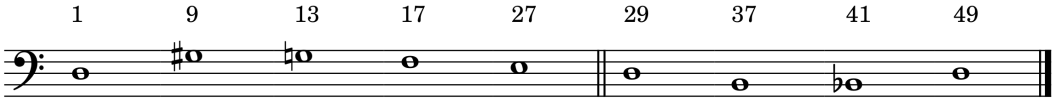

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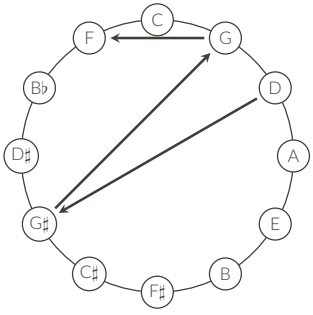

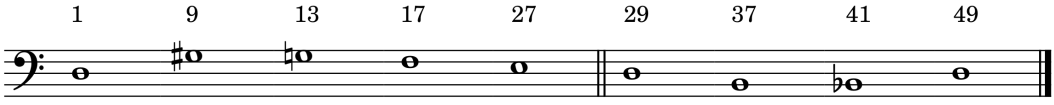

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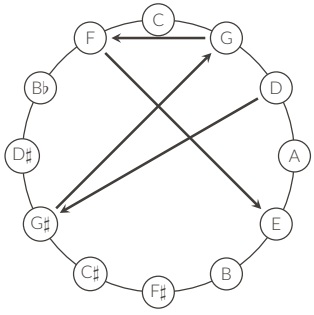

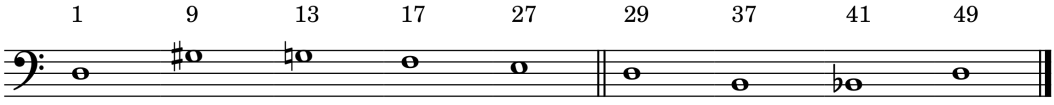

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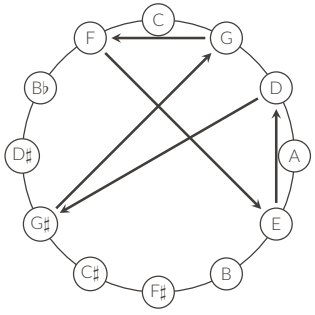

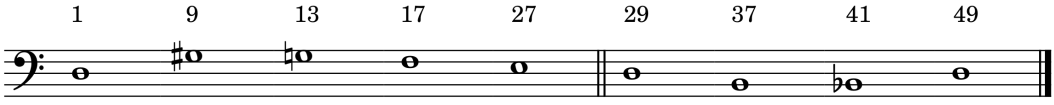

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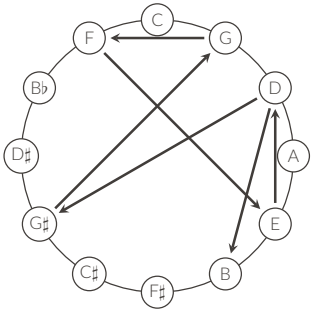

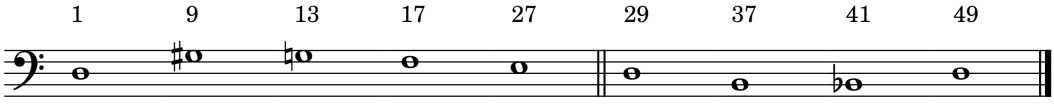

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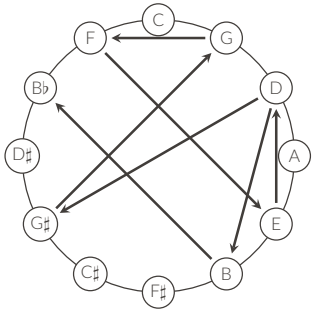

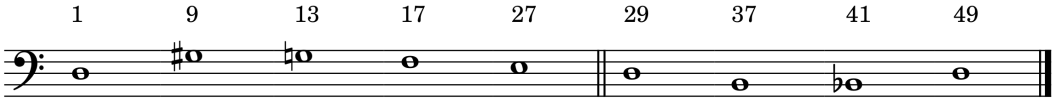

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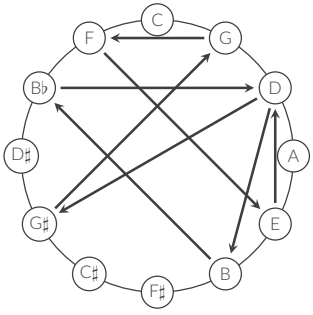

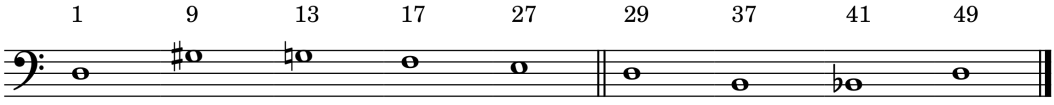

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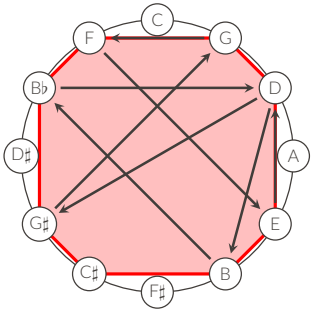

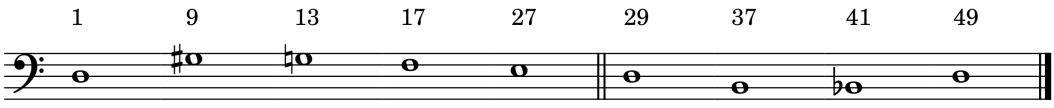

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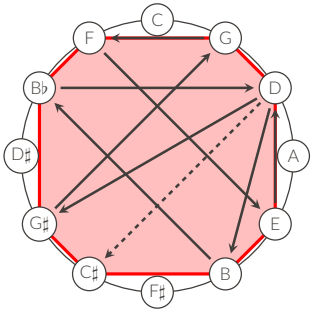

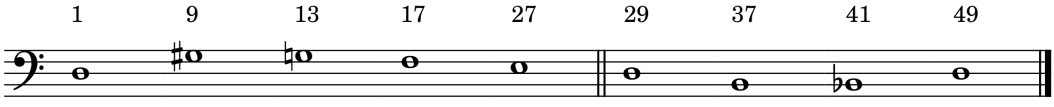

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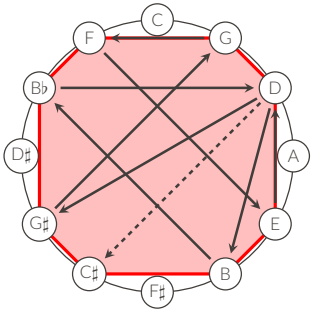
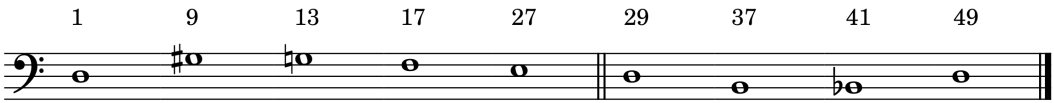


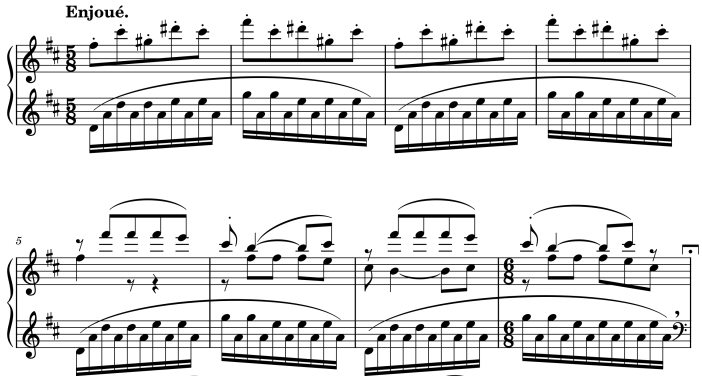


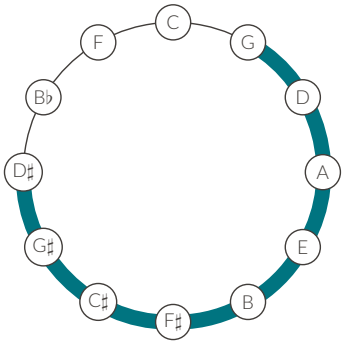
The background tonal structure of the *Pastorale* is given by an octatonic scale.

Analyzing Tailleferre's *Pastorale*

The middleground

Analyzing Tailleferre's Pastorale





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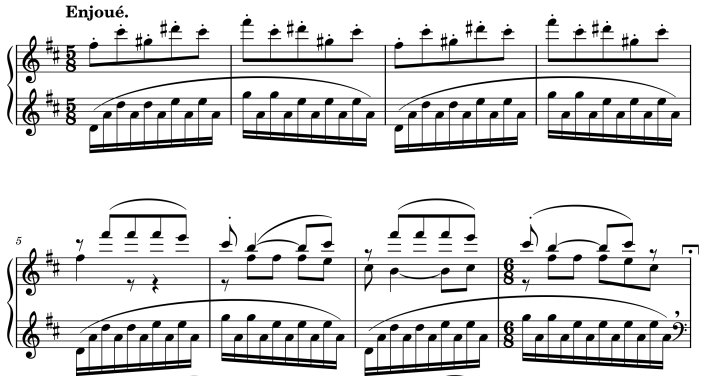
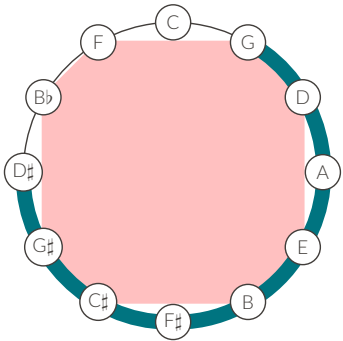
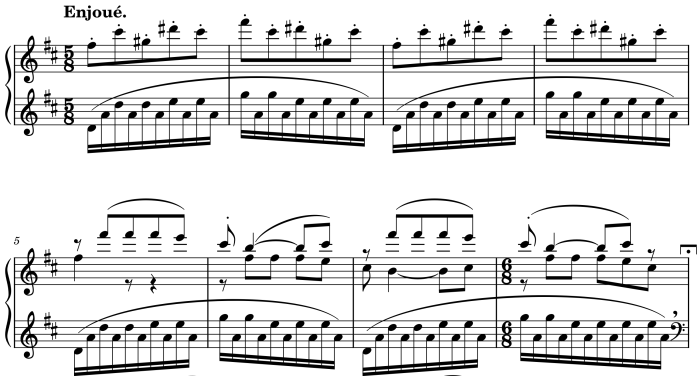
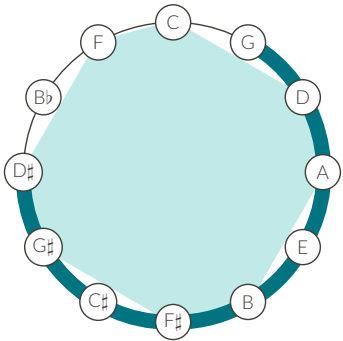


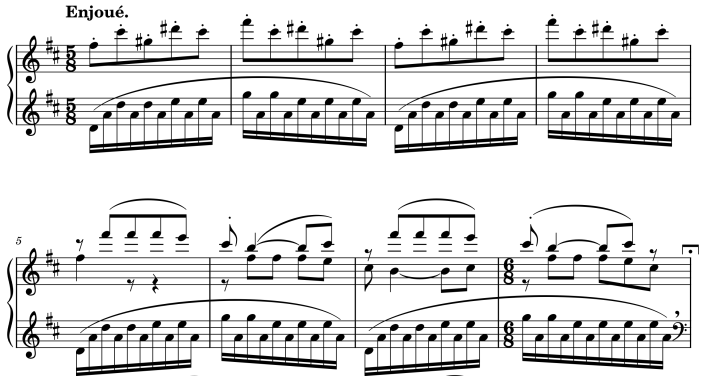


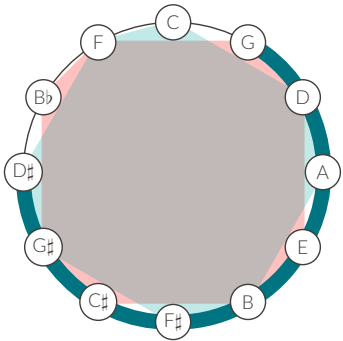
Analyzing Tailleferre's Pastorale



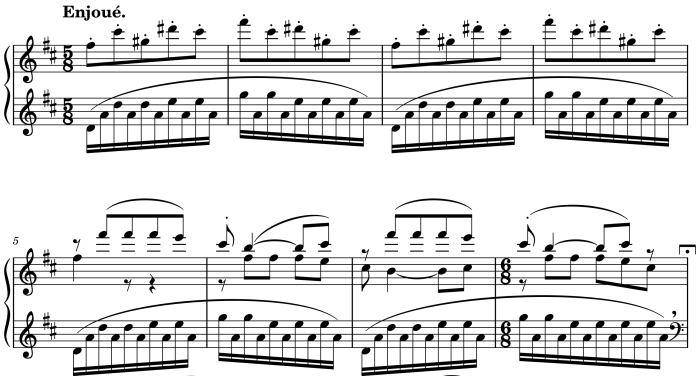


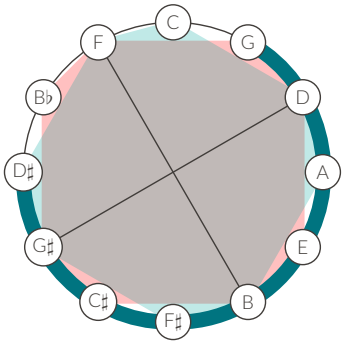
Analyzing Tailleferre's Pastorale



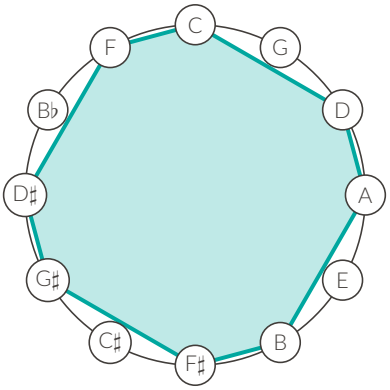


Analyzing Tailleferre's Pastorale





The middleground



Authentic (−P5) ⇒

⇐ Plagal (+P5)

Figure 5: Function on {D, G♯, B, F}.

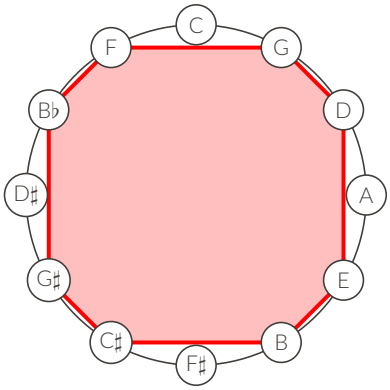
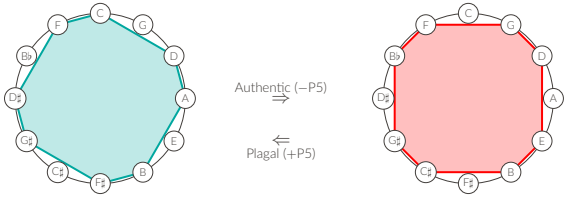
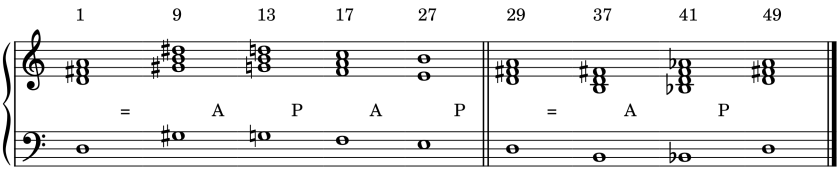


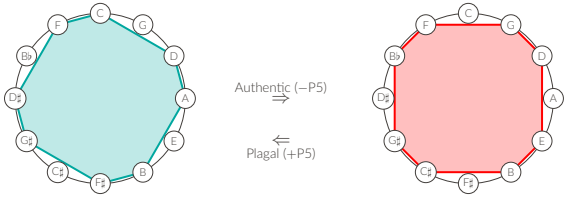
Figure 6: Function on {G, E, B♭, C♯}.

The middleground

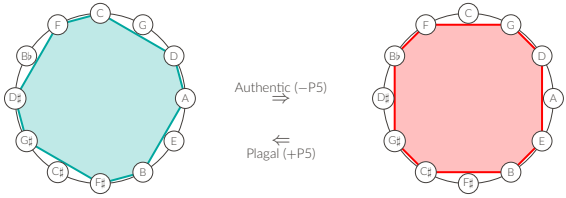




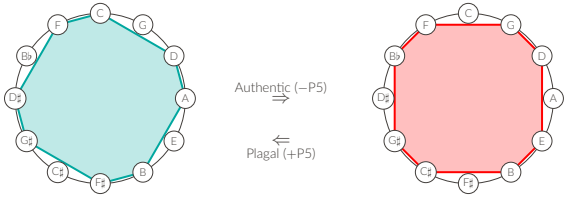
The middleground



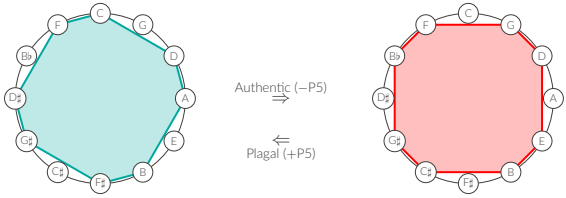
The middleground



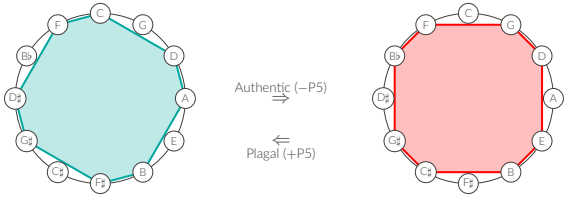
The middleground



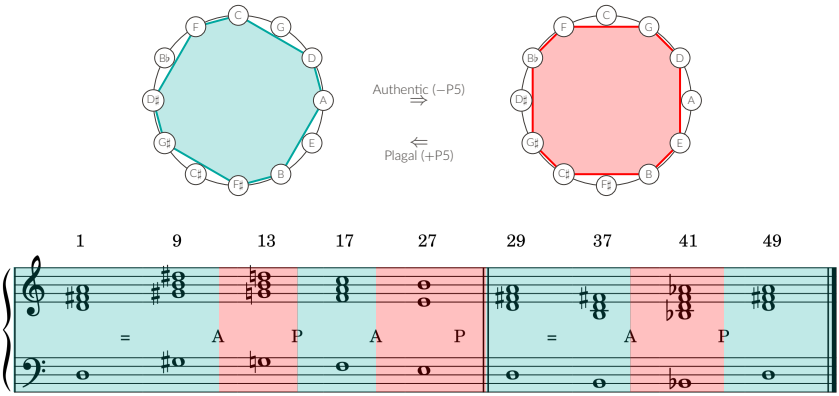
The middleground



The middleground



The middleground

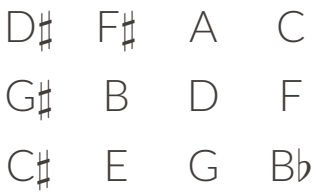


Two alternating Functions form the middleground structure of the piece.

Conclusions

Summary

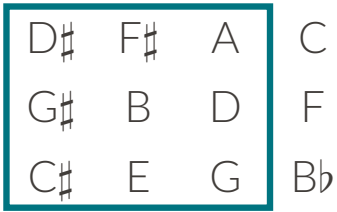
Layers



Summary

Layers

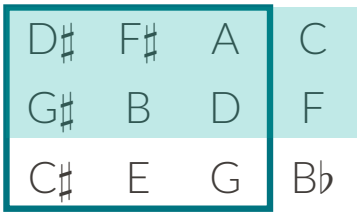
- **foreground:** series of fifths (tetraton and enneaton)



Summary

Layers

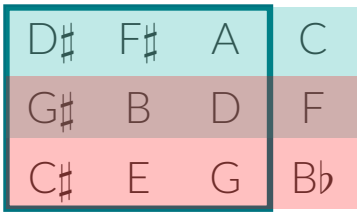
- **foreground:** series of fifths (tetraton and enneaton)
- **middleground:** octatonic on D and octatonic on G



Summary

Layers

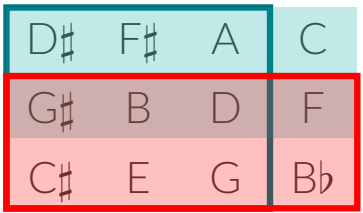
- **foreground:** series of fifths (tetraton and enneaton)
- **middleground:** octatonic on D and octatonic on G



Summary

Layers

- **foreground:** series of fifths (tetraton and enneaton)
- **middleground:** octatonic on D and octatonic on G
- **background:** octatonic on G



Conclusion?

Francis Poulenc to Paul Collaer (July 1922):

"Believe me, *polytonie* is a dead end that will go out of fashion within five years, unless it is the means of expression for some type of genius, like Darius [Milhaud]. I will not speak of atonality. It's shit [sic!]."

Conclusion?

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Germaine Tailleferre in a letter to Poulenc (August 1923):

"Je suis tes bons conseils et je ne fais plus de polytonie."
"I follow your good advice and don't write anymore polytonality."

Cited after:
de Médicis, F. (2005). Darius Milhaud and the Debate on Polytonality in the French Press of the 1920s. *Music & Letters*, *86*(4), 573–591

Thank you very much!

References

de Médicis, F. (2005). Darius Milhaud and the Debate on Polytonality in the French Press of the 1920s. *Music & Letters*, *86*(4), 573–591.

Haas, B. (2004). *Die neue Tonalität von Schubert bis Webern: Hören und Analysieren nach Albert Simon*. Wilhelmshaven, Florian Noetzel.

Milhaud, D. (1923). Polytonalité et Atonalité. *La Revue Musicale*, *4*(3), 29–44.

Polth, M. (2006). »Tonalität der Tonfelder. Anmerkungen zu Bernhard Haas, Die neue Tonalität von Schubert bis Webern. Hören und Analysieren nach Albert Simon, Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel 2004«. *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie*, *3*(1), 167–178.