

Nanopublication — The Tritone as Dominant Seventh Tension — Visual Embedding of Harmonic Function

by Arnaud Quercy [2] · Tritone (E, Bb) - Reflexions 9 · 2023

Claim 2: The Tritone as Dominant Seventh Tension — Visual Embedding of Harmonic Function

I embed the [4] tritone [1] within its dominant seventh context: E and Bb are the third and seventh of C7, and the dark rectangle encodes the root C — low register, low brightness, tending toward Red at full intensity. The complementary opposition Yellow–Blue-Violet enacts maximum chromatic tension, mirroring the tritone's harmonic instability and its imperative to resolve — whether through II–V–I motion or tritone substitution.

CONTEXT

The tritone E–Bb does not exist in harmonic isolation. In tonal and post-tonal practice, these two pitches function most powerfully as the defining tension of the dominant seventh chord — the third and seventh of C7. It is this functional embedding that the painting explores: not the tritone as abstract interval, but the tritone as engine of harmonic motion.

The dark rectangle encodes C, the root of C7. Its darkness is not arbitrary — it reflects low register and reduced brightness, consistent with the chromesthetic principle that register modulates luminosity. C at full brightness would be Red; rendered dark, it recedes into a near-black, anchoring the composition without asserting itself. The root is present but subordinate, as a bass note often is when the upper voices carry the tension.

The three chromesthetic elements together — Yellow (E), Blue-Violet (Bb), dark C — constitute a visual dominant seventh: the chord that most demands continuation. In standard II–V–I resolution, this chord resolves to the tonic; in tritone substitution, the substituted dominant (Gb7, whose third and seventh are Bb and E — the same pitches inverted) resolves by half-step motion to the same tonic. Either way, the interval's function is to be unstable, to pull, to require resolution.

The canvas holds this tension without resolving it. The complementary colors remain opposed; the dark root remains present; the resolution is withheld. The painting is the dominant seventh sustained — the moment of maximum harmonic tension before the cadence that never arrives.

REFERENCES

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- [4] Levine, M. (1995). The Jazz Theory Book. Sher Music. [Tritone substitution, dominant function]
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EPISTEMIC PROFILE

Claim type	artistic statement
Voice	first person
Epistemic status	first person attestation
Methodology	compositional intention
Certainty	high

CHECKSUM (SHA-256)

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