

LYING ABOUT TONALITY:

A New World of Topic in Twentieth-Century Modernist Music

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The Graduate Center, CUNY

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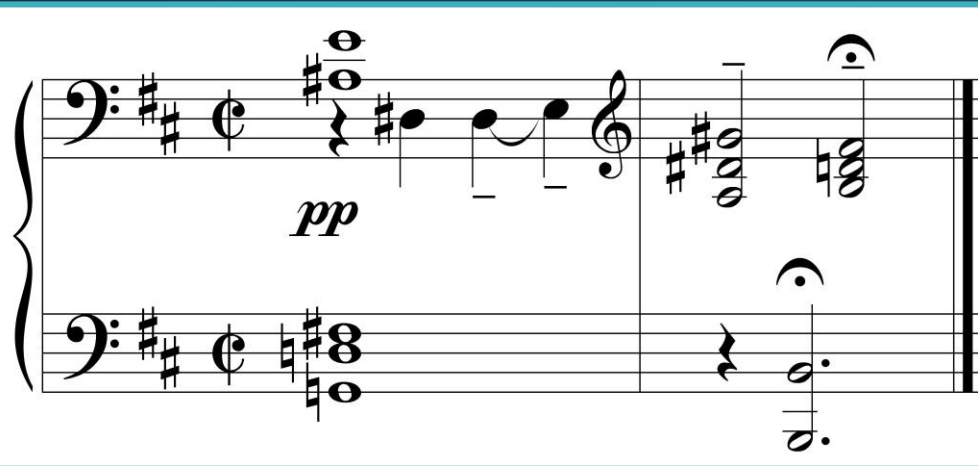


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Schoenberg Op. 14, no. 1 (1907-08)

Final Cadence



Ich darf nicht dankend an dir
niedersinken.
Du bist vom geist der flur, aus der wir
stiegen:
Will sich mein trost an deine wehmut
schmiegen,
So wird sie zucken, um ihm abzuwinken.
Verharrst du bei dem quälenden
beschlusse,
Nie deines leides nähe zugestehen,
Und nur mit ihm und mir dich zu
ergehen
Am eisigklaren tiefentschlafnen flusse?¹⁰

I must not kneel in thanks before you.
You came from the spirit of the fields,
from which we rose:
If I try to ease your melancholy,
You turn away in rejection.
Must you remain with your agonizing
decision,
Never to acknowledge the nearness of
your sorrow,
And only to walk with it and me
Along the river trapped in icy sleep?

By Stefan George
Trans. Bryan Simms (2000)

Schoenberg Op. 14, no. 1 (1907-08)

mm. 5–10

nie - der - sin - ken. Du bist vom Geist der Flur, aus der wir stie - gen.

will sich mein Trost an dei - ne Weh - mut schmie - gen,

p *pp* *V* *V* *It+6*

I must not kneel in thanks before you.

You came from the spirit of the fields,
from which we rose:
If I try to ease your melancholy,

You turn away in rejection.

Must you remain with your agonizing
decision,

Never to acknowledge the nearness of
your sorrow,

And only to walk with it and me

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Topic Theory in Early 20th Century

- Bradbury and McFarlane (1979): “apocalypse of cultural community.”
- Single composers:
 - Burkholder (2012): Stylistic Heterogeneity and Topics in the Music of [Charles Ives](#)
 - Narum (2013): Sound and Semantics: Topics in the Music of [Arnold Schoenberg](#)
 - Schumann (2015): Making the Past Present: Topics in [Stravinsky's](#) Neoclassical Works
- My goal: Open a World of Topic
 1. Schoenberg Op. 19/4
 2. *Signifier*: Compare to 18th cent. Topics
 3. *Signified*: Semiotic Code

Disclaimer

What about composer X?

What about 20th. c. tonal music?

Schoenberg Op. 19/4 (1911) - Sets

mm. 1–5: A section

The image displays two staves of musical notation for the first five measures of Schoenberg's Op. 19/4. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music is in 2/4 time. The top staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes markings for *poco rit.* and *pp*. The bottom staff includes a *ped.* marking and an asterisk at the end. The score is annotated with various set names and transformations:

- 8-28 octa (CIII) above measures 1-2
- 6-z23 above measures 2-3
- 5-28 octa CII above measures 3-4
- 5-33 wt above measures 4-5
- 4-19 below measure 1
- 4-z29 CII below measures 2-3
- 4-z29 (T₄) below measures 2-3
- 4-19 (T₁₀I) below measure 2
- 4-23 below measure 3
- 4-23 below measure 4
- 4-19 T₀I below measure 5

Colored boxes highlight specific musical groups: a blue box around measures 1-2, an orange box around measures 2-3, a green box around measure 3, and another green box around measure 4. A blue box highlights the final chord in measure 5.

- Forte (2003): “a meld of tonal materials drawn from ... octatonic, diatonic, heptatonic, and whole-tone sources” that provides “a remarkable structuring” beneath the “bagatelle-like, ‘playful,’ and ‘*leicht*’ surface.”

Schoenberg Op. 19/4 (1911) - Topics

Rasch, aber leicht (♩)
p

This system shows the beginning of the piece in 2/4 time. The right hand has a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. A blue bracket highlights the first two measures.

poco rit. - - - -
pp

leicht pp
p

This system continues the piece with a tempo change to 'poco rit.' and a dynamic change to 'pp'. A blue bracket highlights the first two measures, and an orange bracket highlights the next two measures. A blue arrow points from the 'A' topic label to the first blue bracketed section.

poco rit. p

This system shows further development of the piece with 'poco rit.' and 'p' dynamics. An orange bracket highlights the first two measures, and a green arrow points from the 'A'' topic label to this section.

f martellato
ff sf ff sf fff

This system features a 'f martellato' section with a green bracket highlighting the first two measures. A green arrow points from the 'A'' topic label to this section.

- Almén (2008):

A: dance topic

B: recitative

A': parodies

- “The various *topoi* function like evanescent masks, tried on for effect, but discarded in self-loathing and disgust.”
- “...the atonal language merely serves to increase the sense of dislocation.”

Schoenberg Op. 19/4 (1911) - Hybrid?

- Set-class (associational) + topics?
- Both do similar thing!
 - collections of pitches that manifest common relationships
 - regular rhythmic patterns
 - textural changes
 - Segment- or chunk-ability
- Forte: melded tonal materials ↔ Almén: topic-defining features

Figurae

- Stephen Rumph (2011; 2014): “shared structural features of topics” that do not signify *topically*.
 - /arpeggiation/ → marked fanfare, Mannheim rocket, hunt (parsimonious part writing)
 - /displacement/ → sarabande, gavotte, (unmarked) alla zoppa, learned-style (metrical consonance)
- Incorporate:
 - phonemes: “tuh” or “ah” → “minimal nonsignifying units of difference”
 - distinctive features: voiced (“duh” or “buh”) vs. unvoiced (“t” or “p”) → “combination”
- *Tonal figurae?*
 - /triads/, /metric consonance/, /pitch centrality/ → marked in modernism

Schoenberg Op. 19/4 (1911)

The image shows a musical score for Schoenberg's Op. 19/4, Op. 19, No. 4, in 2/4 time. The score is written for piano and features a complex, atonal melody. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, and *poco rit.*. The score is annotated with several colored boxes and lines: a blue box highlights the first measure, an orange box highlights a specific note, a green box highlights a group of notes, a purple oval highlights a group of notes, a yellow box highlights a group of notes, and a red triangle highlights a specific note. A blue box highlights the final measure, and a purple oval highlights a group of notes in the bass line. The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata.

- Tonality as topic: signify
 - /triadic/, /diatonic/
 - /tritone/
 - overlapping (013)
 - /pentatonic 5-cycle/
 - /whole-tone/
 - aggregate complete

Tonality as topic?

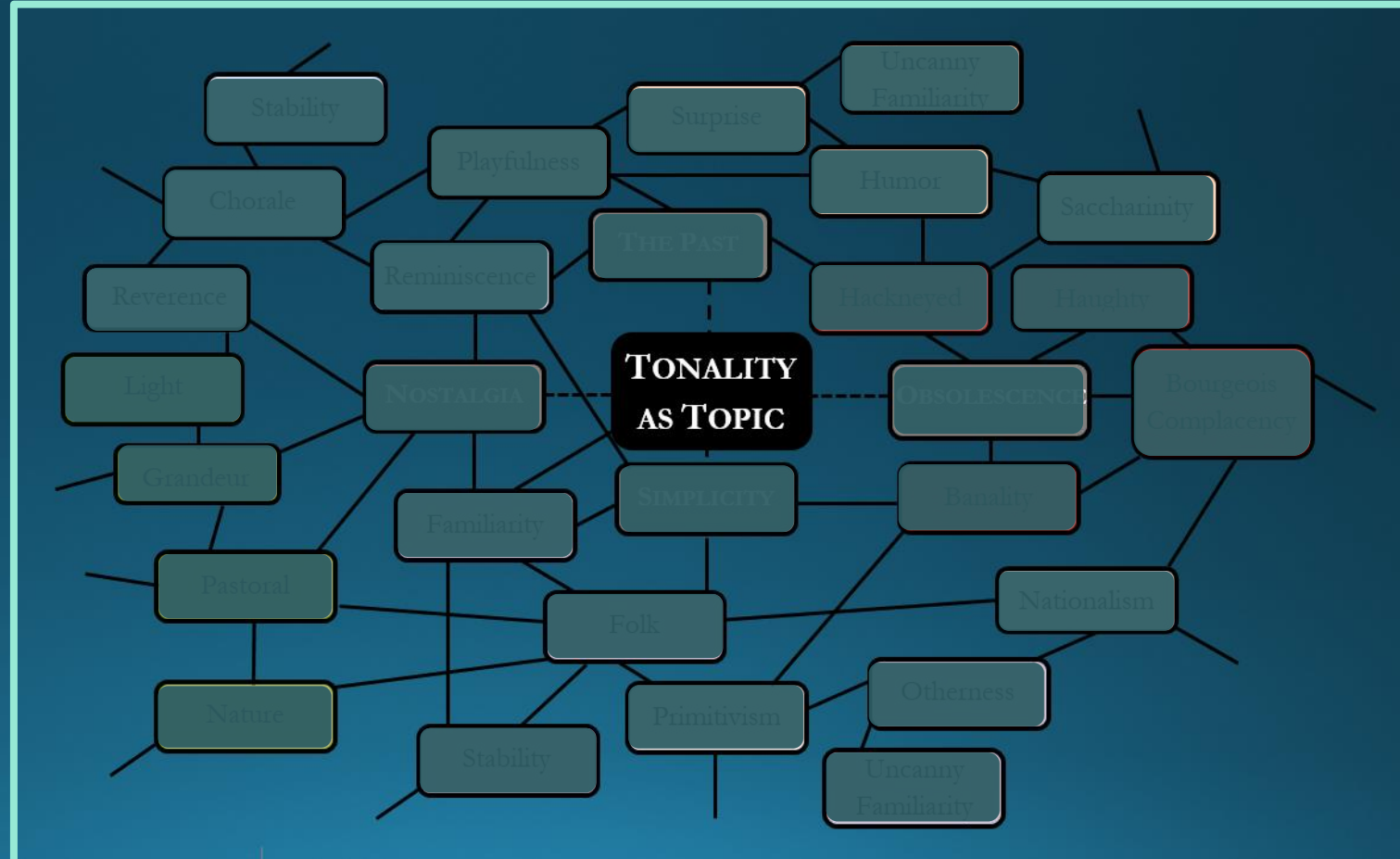
- Tonality as *fuzzy set* of practices (not a system)
- For modernists:
 - tonal *figurae* combine in “a prior universe made up of commonplaces of style known to the [contemporary] composers and their audiences.” (Agawu 2009)
 - “musical style or genre”—not a musical system—“taken out of its *proper* context and used in another one.” (Mirka 2014)
 - “the signified of a musical topic is a textual feature or cultural unit, not a **feature in the real world** (or even of the world physically contemporary with the signifier, since topics often refer to older cultural theories.)” (Monelle 2000)

Tonality as topic?

- Tonality as *fuzzy set* of practices (not a system)
- Eco (1976): signification occurs when there is “the *possibility of lying*.”
 - “...every time there is possibility of lying, there is a sign-function: which is to signify (and then to communicate) something to which no real state of things corresponds.”
 - Tonality creates conditions of possibility for topicality.

Signified of tonality-as-topic

- /C Major triad/ → simplicity, clarity
- As part of topic → topical world



Signified of tonality-as-topic

Berg. *Wozzeck* (1922) Act II, Scene 1, m. 116.

In ganz verändertem Ton

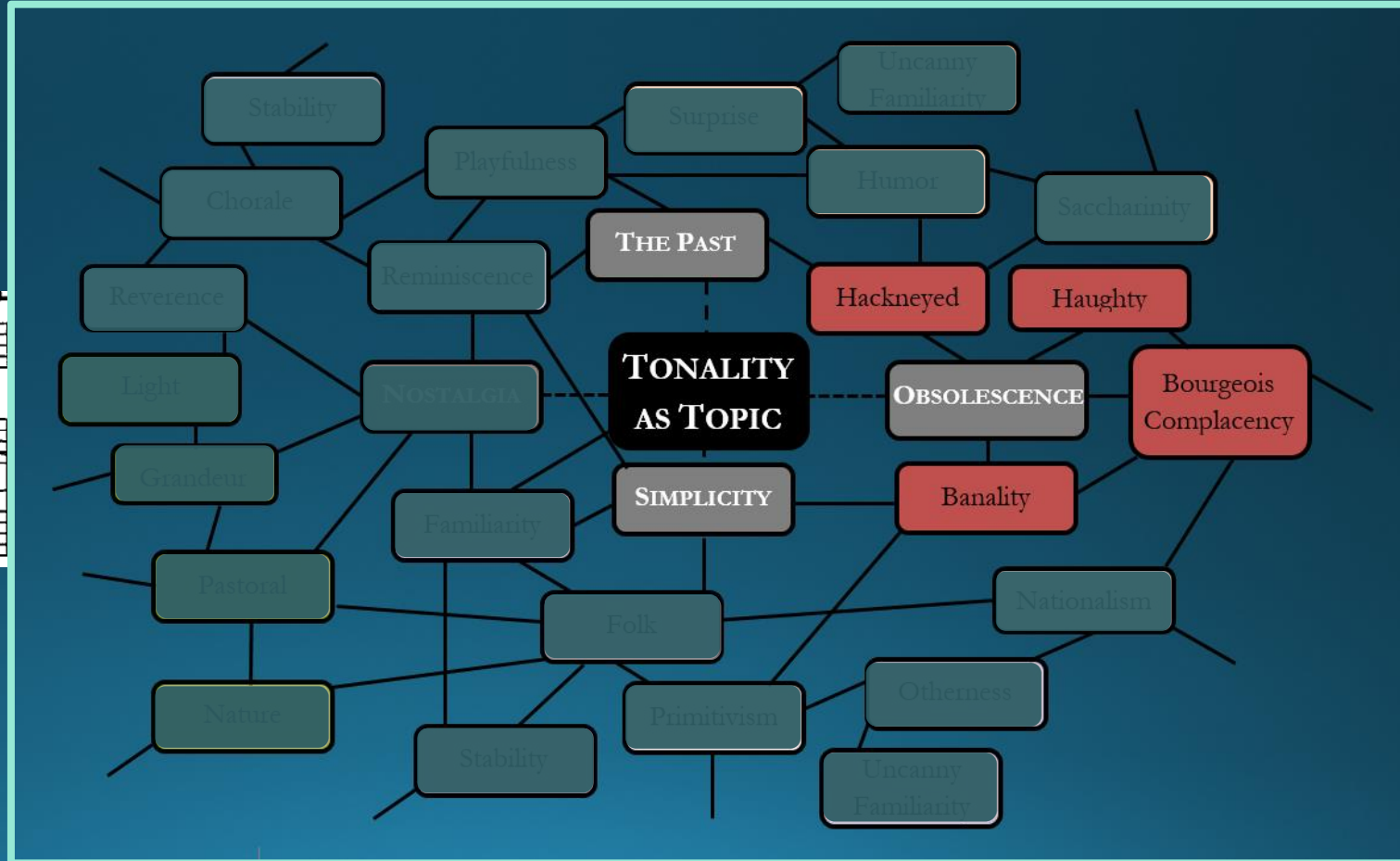
Wozz

Br, 2 Gg (m D)

pp

Da ist wie-der Geld, Ma-rie, die Löh-nung und was vom Hauptmann

Other *figurae*: /homophony/, /drone/, /dynamic extreme/

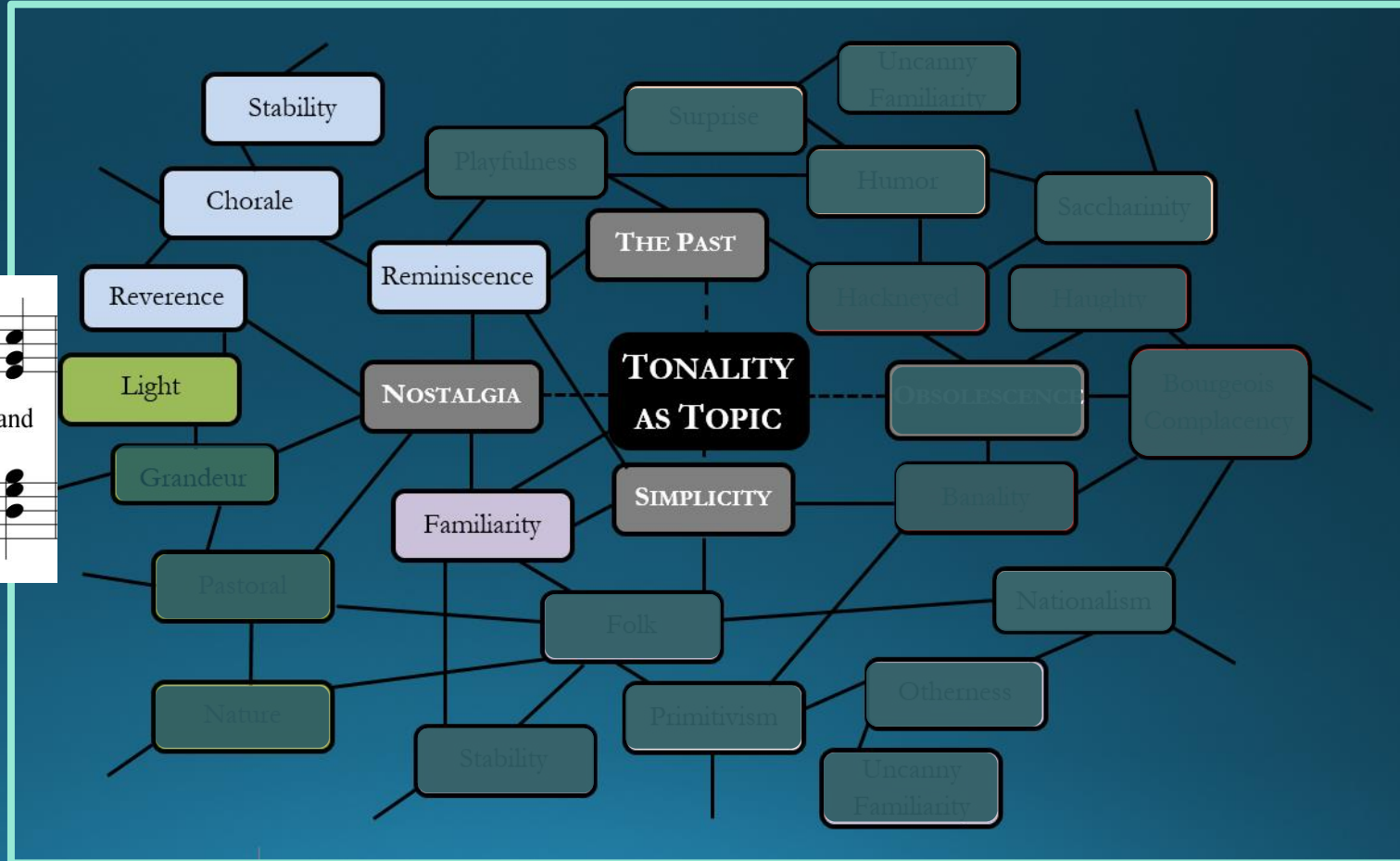


Signified of tonality-as-topic

Ives. *Psalm 67* (1894) Opening.

God be mer - ci - ful un - to us, and bless us; and

Other *figurae*: /homophony/, /triads/, /chorale/



Signified of tonality-as-topic

Bartók. *Bluebeard's Castle* (1930) "Fifth Door" Scene 1, RN 73.

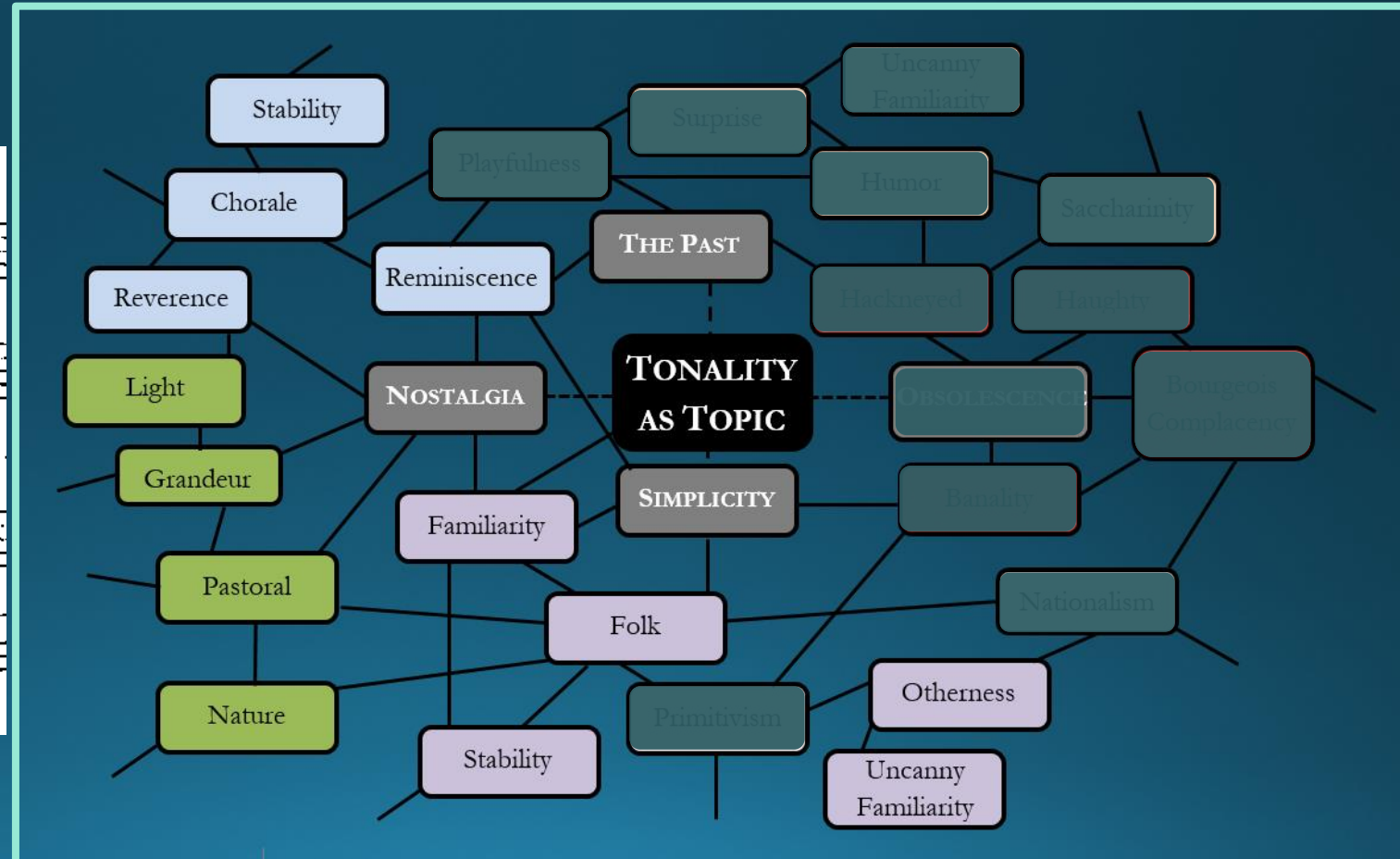
Judith (hält, geblendet, die Hände über die Augen)
Judit (Elvakulva a szeme elé tartja a kezét)

Ah!
Ah!

Larghissimo ♩ = 68

fff (Tutti ed Organo pleno)

Other *figurae*: /pentatonicism/, /parallel motion/, /triads/, /homophony/, /dynamic extreme/

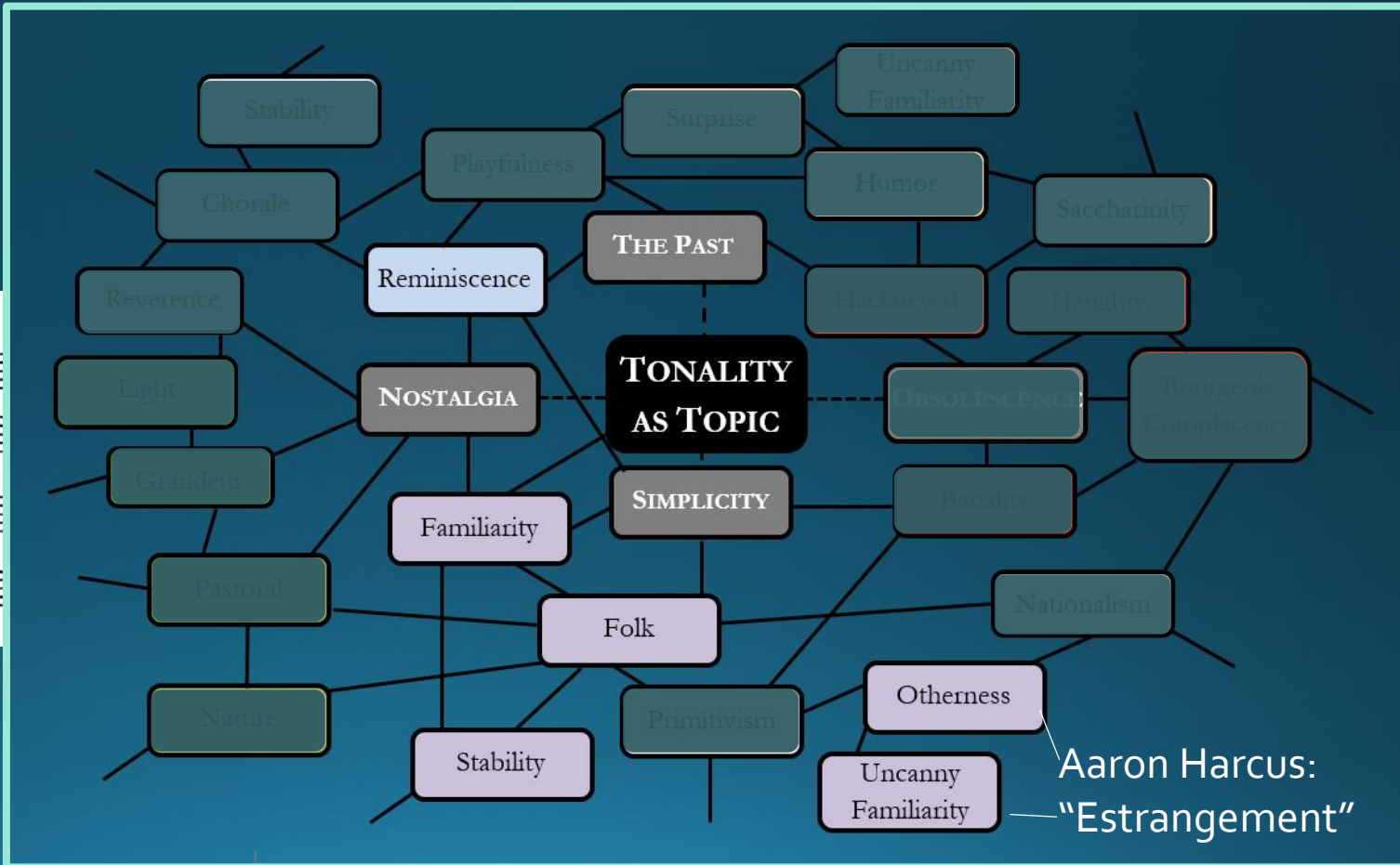


Signified of tonality-as-topic

Bartók. String Quartet V (1934), II, mm. 45–46.



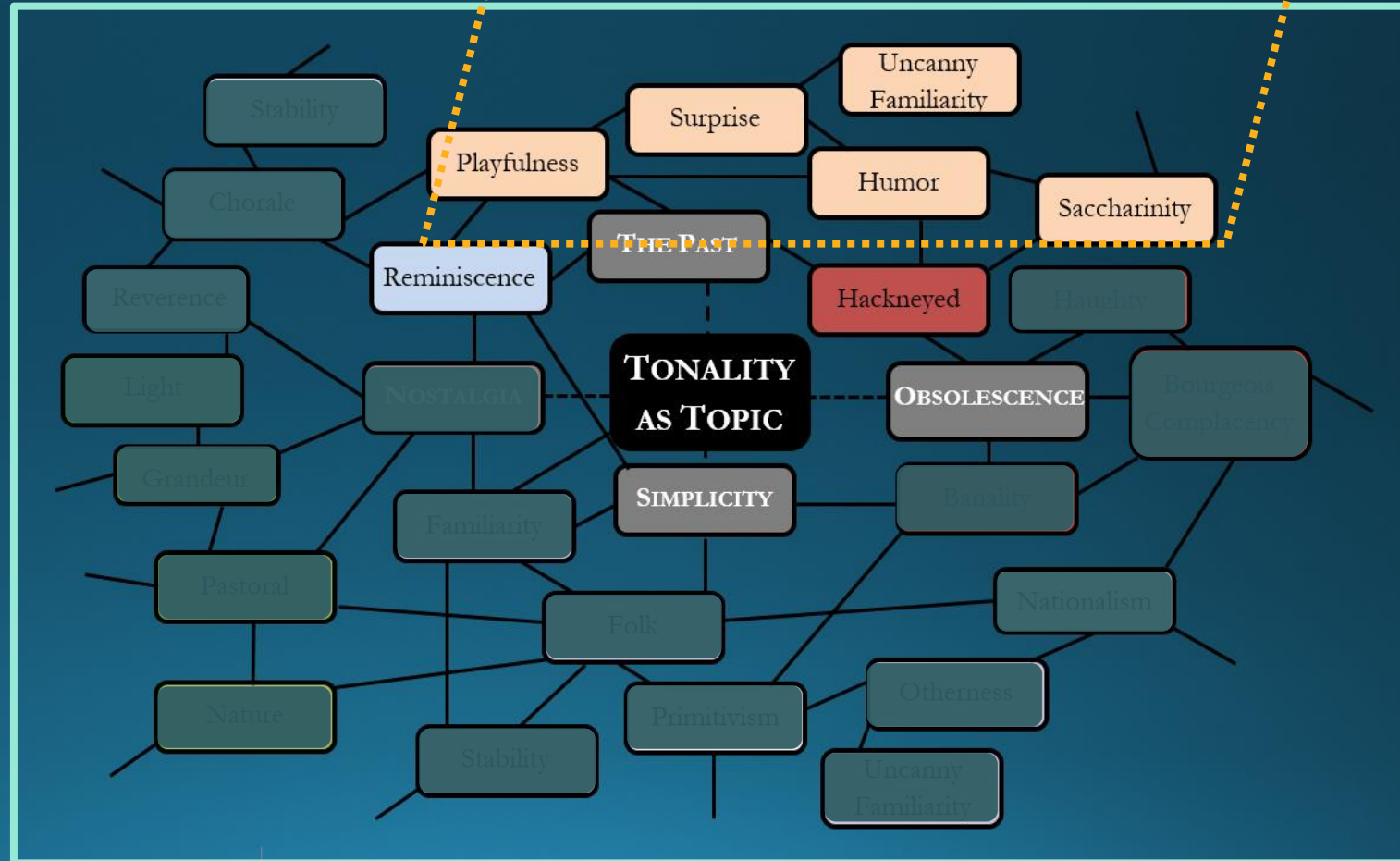
Other *figurae*: /triads/, /homophony/,
/dynamic extreme/



Signified of tonality-as-topic

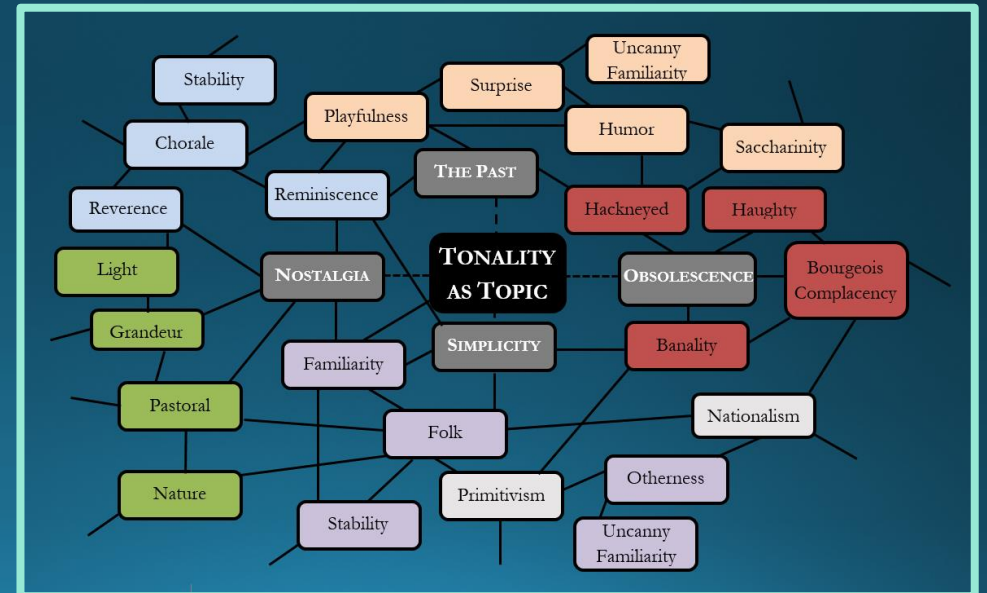
Penderecki. *Polymorphia* (1973) End.

Schoenberg, Op. 19/4



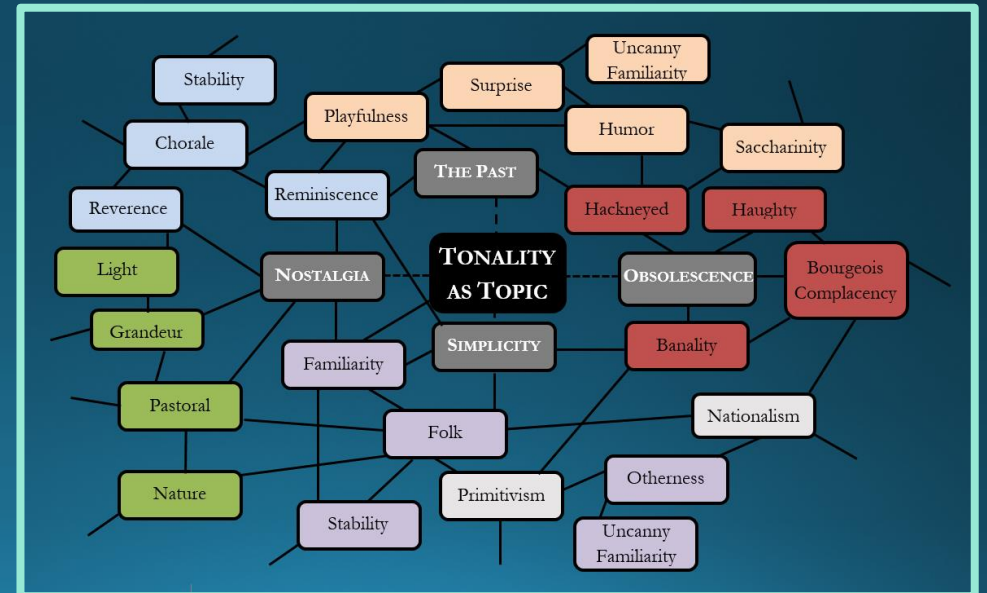
Tonality as topic

- Broad and unsystematic
- Just like “modernism”
- Not “just” early-20th c. atonal composers
- Berman (1980): “broad and open way”
- Harper-Scott (2012): “*all music of the twentieth century*”
- Reactions to modernization



Towards some Conclusions

- How is tonality topical in modernism?
 - Markedness reversal of phonemes → figurae in early 20th century
- Bring topic in from periphery
- Monelle (2006): “the nightmare of modernism made some of us think that musical meaning, in any ordinary sense, was finished.”
- Usual modes of meaning *via* tonal-topic
- Modernism: historicity and difference
- Tonality *signifies* reactions to modernization



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