MTO 23.4 Examples: Johnson, Tonality as Topic

(Note: audio, video, and other interactive examples are only available online)
http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.17.23.4/mto.17.23.4.johnson.php
Example 1. Full score of Schoenberg’s Op. 19/4 with Almén’s (2008) topically oriented section labels

A invokes a dance topic. B suggests a recitative topic. A’ parodies each of these.

His tetrachords supply me with tonal *figurae* while his larger source sets might be profitably understood as pointing outward towards the octatonic and whole-tone collections.

Example 3. A section of Schoenberg’s Op. 19/4 with narrative-generating *figurae* shown

Though (013) is the most common trichord within a diatonic collection, the overlapping iterations obscure the tonal topic.

| Ich darf nicht dankend an dir niedersinken. | I must not kneel in thanks before you. |
| Du bist vom geist der flur, aus der wir stiegen: | You came from the spirit of the fields, from which we rose: |
| Will Sich mein trost an deine wehmut schmiegen, | If I try to ease your melancholy, |
| So wird sie zucken, um ihm abzuwinken. | You turn away in rejection. |
| Verharrst du bei dem quälenden beschlusse, | Must you remain with your agonizing decision, |
| Nie deines leides nähe zugestehen, | Never to acknowledge the nearness of your sorrow. |
| Und nur mit ihm und mir dich zu ergeben | And only to walk with it and me |
| Am eisigklaren tiefentschlafnen flusse? | Along the river trapped in icy sleep? |

Example 5. Final /cadence/ and clear manifestation of the tonal topic in Schoenberg’s Op. 14/1, mm. 29–30, with /V7/ and /tonic triad/ boxed

A /perfect fifth/ of G-D also alludes to tonality as topic in m. 29
Example 6. Schoenberg’s Op. 14/1, mm. 6–8 with successive *figurae* contributing to a tonal topic

Example 7. Schoenberg’s Op. 14/2, mm. 17–21 with successive potential tonal *figurae* locking together above the mostly /diatonic/ bass descent
Example 8. Central section of the tonal-topic’s network of signifieds for early twentieth-century music

Some items appear multiple times displaying the complex, rhizomatic structure of this portion of the semiotic code.
Example 9. *Wozzeck*, Act II, Scene 1, mm. 116–119

This reduction shows the plain /C-major triad/ beneath Wozzeck’s slightly more chromatic recitative.

Example 10. Section of the tonal-topic code pointed towards in *Wozzeck* (Example 9)
Example 11. Ives’s *Psalm 67*, beginning; The treble voices open with the /C-major triad/, helping to manifest the tonal topic within a “polytonal” framework of multiple /triads/.

Example 12. Section of the tonal-topic code pointed towards in *Psalm 67* (Example 11)
Example 13. Bluebeard’s Castle, “Fifth Door” Scene, Rehearsal 73, reduction

In this case, /C-major triad/ combines with /homophony/, /pentatonicism/, and /wind instruments/ to give a huge pastorally inflected tonal topic.

Example 14. Section of the tonal-topic code pointed towards in Bluebeard’s Castle (Example 13)
Example 15. Bartók’s String Quartet no. 5, II, mm. 45–47

The /C-major triad/ is boxed. Note the stratification in texture, with the first violin as a solo instrument, much like the *Wozzeck* example

Example 16. Section of the tonal-topic code pointed towards in Bartók’s fifth String Quartet (example 15)
Example 17. Polymorphia, Ending, mm. 63–67

The indeterminate clusters and graphic score notation give way to a *fortissimo* /C major/ cluster in the final measure, closing the piece on a humorous and uncanny note.
Example 18. Section of the tonal-topic code pointed towards in *Polymorphia* (Example 17)

The dotted orange box suggests the signifieds I analyze in Schoenberg’s Op. 19/4