

**Colloquium January 31, 2025**  
**Bryan Parkhurst (Oberlin College and Conservatory)**

**Title:** "How to Do Things with Words, to Words: Music Theory and Problematizing Lexicography"

**Abstract:**

Terminological critique has taken center stage in music theory, notably and recently with JMT's symposium on the term "tonality" and its manifold connections to racism. But what I will call "problematizing lexicography"—paradigmatically, the use of genealogy, etymology, psychoanalysis, and the drawing of metaphorical associations in formulating and cultivating characteristically ethical and political uneasiness about music-theoretical taxonomic labels—has been with us for a while. I want to take a brief stroll through the recent history of this disciplinary trend and try to get the lay of the land. My goal is to conceptually situate, not to attack or dismantle, problematizing lexicography as a critical project. To that end, I'll suggest that a suite of prominent, standard-issue ideas from the philosophy of language can help us to conceptually parse, with a bit more subtlety than has so far graced the public debate (including my own interventions in it), just what's going on in salient instances of the problematizing lexicographic genre of critique. Those prominent, standard-issue ideas are: *persuasive definitions*, *speech acts*, *thick terms*, *presuppositions*, and *conversational implicatures*.

**Bio:** **Bryan Parkhurst** teaches music theory at Oberlin Conservatory and philosophy at Oberlin College. He has written many articles about the connections between the history of music theory and the history of philosophy. Right now he is working on a book called "Theory as Practice." In 2018 he won the Emerging Scholar award from the Society for Music Theory. Lately he has been thinking about partimenti, topoi, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Hegel, in that order. He used to be a professional harpist and hopes to become one again someday. As a child he was the last protégé of legendary harp pedagogue and feminist icon Alice Chalifoux. This spring he will be teaching a seminar on Schenkerian analysis *for the first time ever* and is feeling nervous about it.