

GERMANISTIQUE : colloque à l'université de Yale sur le rythme (26-27 février 2010)

dimanche 20 juin 2010, par [Rhuthmos](#)

SEM - Materializing Signs

in Rhythm, Gravity and Figures

The 21st Annual Graduate Student Conference in Germanic Languages and Literatures at Yale University - February 26-27, 2010 - *Organizers : Jason Groves ; Joachim Harst ; Kristina Mendicino*

- In 1997, Thomas Schestag posed the question, "In welcher Sprache kommt Sem zur Sprache," only to answer, "in keiner" - and then, "in allen." As Schestag says, sem is all about coming. While /sem/ comes, in language, in a variety of forms - seeds, semen, seminars, seminaries, dissemination, semiotics, - we are here also interested in seminal work where /sem/ - as sense, meaning, significance - is still coming.
- In particular this conference proposes to re-turn to the materiality of signs. In an early materialization of /sem/, Homer's Achilles points to (sêmainei) the gravestone (sêma) of an anonymous person, thereby making this stone the turning point (sêma) of the chariot race in Patroclus' funeral games. In a sense, this stone will be the turning point of our reflections ; it will serve us as a model from which we will develop the various relations that /sem/ entertains with notions as different as rhythm, gravity, and figurality.

Is it really true that "semata"
signify only as signs, or can we read
alternative genealogies of the sign
proceeding from gravestones, chariot
races, and their rhythms of turning ?

- In Homer, "sêma" as tombstone is
first of all the one point of reference
around which the race revolves. It
thereby helps to produce the "sêma"
of the funeral games, eternalizing the
name of Patroclus. At the same time,
it foreshadows the fame of Achilles,
whose death is not told in the Iliad :
Since Patroclus died for Achilles, it is
only the "sêma" of the games which
figuratively fulfills the claim of the
Iliad to immortalize the hero's fame.
But if "sêma" thus seems to stabilize
signification, it only does so by threatening
instability : In the chariot races,
the turning point is also not to be
touched – lest the chariots crash.
Hence, the gravitational center also
threatens stability, becoming a stumbling
stone. /sem/ thus questions
several concepts of "semiotics", such
as the primacy of the sign, the rhetorical
figure as tropos, or turning-away
from the literal, and Christian typological
reading strategies that
presuppose a stable figure. /sem/
threatens instead to turn things
around, putting forth gravity, rhythms,
dynamics as elements of signification.
It thus materializes both as the cornerstone
and stumbling block of
sense.
- In a wider sense these stones may
involve figures of conversion – of
verse, of faith ; signs of death and the
body (sôma), the grave (sêma) – and
even the antigrav (Kleist). Hence, the
conference inverts Thomas Schestag's
question of how Sem "zur Sprache
kommt," in order to pursue how language
"zum Sem kommt".

• **SATURDAY, 27th : WLH 309**

10:00am Breakfast

2nd panel : 11:00am Grave stones

Chair and discussant : Marc Petersdorff (Yale)

Vita Zilburg (Berlin) : "Lies nicht mehr – schau !" – Paul Celan's techniques of materialization

Christin Grunert (Tübingen) : Drostes "Die Mergelgrube" – Geowissenschaftliche Phänomene als poetologisches Prinzip

Christian Villiger (Zürich) : Rilkes Stein. "Materialitäten" des Gedichts

3rd panel : 2:00pm Rhythmic Semantics I

Chair and discussant : Martin Wagner (Yale)

Lars Korten (Berlin) : Semantik von Rhythmus und Metrum im 18. Jahrhundert

Alexis Briley (Cornell) : Hölderlin's poetic "Mittel"

Daniel Alder (Zürich) : Das flüssige Sem in Schillers Gedicht "Die Macht des Gesangs"

4th panel : 4:00pm Rhythmic Semantics II

Chair and discussant : Joachim Harst (Tübingen/Yale)

Lorenz Wesemann (Jerusalem) : Y - (Heine, Nächtliche Fahrt)

Pascal Michon (Lyon) : Rhythm as Organization of "Signifiante" in Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances"

Kristina Mendicino (Yale) : Incipit parodia : ad infinitum