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

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# 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