

Call for Papers: Swiss Studies Network
at the GSA's 48th Annual Conference.
Courtland Grand Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia.
26–29 September 2024.

Aesthetics of the Neutral: Figurations and Countermovements in Swiss Literature

The idea of Switzerland's neutrality can be traced back to as early as 1515, while the country's status as a neutral nation was established *de jure* in 1815 (Riklin 1977, 367). What sets Switzerland apart from other neutral countries, however, is that its neutrality is not only "self-imposed," but also "self-defined" (Kriesi/Trechsel 2008, 20): The Swiss Constitution refrains from a definition of neutrality, allowing the state to continually adapt its neutrality policies and maintain flexibility in its interpretation. Consequently, Switzerland adapted, sometimes under pressure, its neutrality policies on various occasions over the twentieth century. Some variants, especially positions taken during World War II, have proven in retrospect to be problematic, sparking public debate and critique of their economic and political self-serving nature.

For the 2024 GSA conference the Swiss Studies Network invites contributions to discuss figurations of the neutral and its countermovements in Swiss history and literature. In line with Roland Barthes' assertion that "there is little place and little consideration for the *neutral*, which is always felt *morally* as an impotence to be or to destroy" (Barthes/Richard 1972, 96), we understand the neutral in a broad sense as "that which outplays (*déjoue*) the paradigm," and which in turn produces "a threat and a scandal for thought" (Blanchot 1993, 299), or as a "staging of an excess, a supplement that brings about a more radical way of seeing the conflict" (Rancière 2009, 3). This inquiry gives rise to a need for discussing the "vitality of the neutral" that through "dodging or baffling the paradigmatic" aims to suspend the conflictual basis of discourses (Barthes 2005, 211), and whose literary production – an aesthetic "maintenance of neutrality" (Schwartz 2013, 484) – demands careful crafting and balancing.

Within the context of Swiss literature's intricate connection to the nation's political history of neutrality, this year's Swiss Studies Network planned panel series especially aims to derive the narratological, rhetorical, and poetic processes that constitute an "aesthetics of the neutral" in the works of authors such as Gottfried Keller, Johanna Spyri, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, Carl Spitteler, Robert Walser, Friedrich Glauser, Annemarie Schwarzenbach, Max Frisch, Friedrich Dürrenmatt,

Adelheid Duvanel, Fleur Jaeggy, Fritz Zorn, Christian Kracht, Melinda Nadj Abonji and others. Focusing on the interplay (the *déjouement*) of an aesthetic of the neutral and its countermovements, we aim to identify literary genres, forms, scenes, and modes of “neutral” writing in Swiss Literature; figures and tropes of the neutral; and to theorize such writing by holding it up against notions such as *écriture blanche*, writing with a “significant absence” (Barthes 1977, 77), a “zero-degree, neutral, colorless writing” (Sontag 2005, xx) or Bataille’s notion of the *informe* (Manghani 2018).

While we especially encourage the submission of entire panel proposals, we are happy to accept proposals for individual papers and will work to combine them into suitable panels. Proposals are due by **February 25, 2024** and should be sent to Vera Thomann, University of Vienna (vera.thomann@univie.ac.at), and Hans Rindisbacher, Pomona College (hjr04747@pomona.edu). Inquiries can be sent to the same addresses.

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