

Earth, Fire, Water: Matter and Meaning in Rituals

An international symposium organized by the Toronto Semiotic Circle
To honor the memory of Japanese semiotician Masao Yamaguchi (1932-2013)

Victoria College, Northrop Frye Hall Room 007, May 31 – June 1, 2013

Rituals have been the object of intense scrutiny by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Other disciplines such as theology, philosophy, and history also have discussed the forms and functions of rituals as universals of human behavior. Comparative examinations of the diversity of rituals in cultures and religions across space and time show that rituals always involve stereotypic actions and gestures which are very often performed in relation to, or by means of elemental forms of matter, usually mediated by specialized artifacts. The purpose of this symposium is to focus, from a semiotic point of view, on the use of earth, fire, and water in a variety of rituals and to explore the ways in which these terrestrial elements are endowed with specific spiritual meanings through prescribed manipulations in specified contexts.

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Program

Friday, May 31

9:00 - 9:15 Opening and Introduction

9:15 - 10:15 **Dragos Gheorghiu** (National University of Arts, Bucharest): "Clay, Water, and Fire: An Experimental and Experiential Approach to the Rituals and Materiality of Prehistoric Settlements".

10:15 - 10:45 Coffee break

10:45 - 11:45 **Peter Jackson** (History of Religions, Stockholm University): "Meditations on Combustive Transformations: Clues to the Ritual Agency of Fire and its Exegesis".

11:45 - 12:45 **Giulio Silano** (St. Michael College): "Water in Christian Narrative and Rituals".

12:45 - 2:00 Sandwich lunch break (on site)

2:00 - 3:00 **Enam Huque** (OISE): “*Banger bia* (frogs’ wedding) in a Time of Drought: Remembering a Lost Ritual by Neighbourhood Children to Call for Rain in Bangladesh”.

3:00 - 4:00 **Andrew Houlson** (Environmental Sciences):” Sacred Water or Scared Water?”

4:00 - 5:00 General discussion.

Saturday, June 1

10:00 - 11:00 **Paul Bouissac** (Victoria College) “Playing with Water and Fire in Circus Performances: Slapstick as Secular Ritual”.

11:00 - 12:00 **Gary Genosko** (Ontario Institute of Technology): “The New Fundamental Elements of a Contested Planet”.

12:00 – 1:00 **Chris Drohan** (Arizona State University and Sheridan College) “The Experience of Liquefied Space: Adventures in Antediluvian Toronto”.