Signs in Motion: Semiotic Perspectives on Migration

Call of the Section Media Semiotics: Refugee Flight, Migration, and Diaspora—Media Practices of Liminality

The 18th International Congress of the German Semiotic Association, **Signs in Motion: Semiotic Perspectives on Migration**, will be held at the University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, from September 28 to October 02, 2027.

To achieve its goals, the German Semiotic Association organizes conferences, colloquia, workshops, courses, and lecture series in core areas of its research fields. Moreover, the association holds an international congress every three years.

As part of the 18th International Congress **Signs in Motion: Semiotic Perspectives on Migration**, the section Media Semiotics (Mark Dang-Anh, Stefan Meier, Daniel Rellstab) will organize a panel on the topic "Flight, Migration, and Diaspora—Media Practices of Liminality", and invites paper proposals.

Call for Papers

Refugee flight, migration, and transnational or trans-local (seasonal) work-related travel are forms of social mobility characterized by unique transitions, thresholds, and transformations. These forms of mobility not only lead to physical relocation, but also mark processes of social, cultural, and communicative "in-betweenness" or liminality (see Turner, 2005). These transitional phases are often precarious and ambivalent, characterized by uncertainty, indecision, and a search for reorientation or a new direction. They are also marked by community-building practices, organized resistance, and solidarity. In an era of profound mediatization (Hepp 2014), liminal situations are increasingly constituted symbolically and communicatively through digital media and structured and managed socially and administratively. Administrative platforms, news portals, online social networks, and messaging services—along with their affordances and algorithmically organized public spheres—provide the communication infrastructure through which transitions are documented, negotiated, legitimized, controlled, and appropriated. Through these platforms, individuals and families who are forced—economically, politically, socially, and/or culturally—to separate and/or move remain connected to their places of origin and destination, as well as the social and institutional contexts there. Likewise, novel symbolic media practices are emerging that establish new social and cultural contexts (Dang-Anh 2024).

This panel views liminality as a media-mediated semiotic practice, not as a stay in "non-places" (Augé, 2019) or a lingering in a threshold state. Translocality — transitions from one material or discursively constructed social space and/or fixed location to another (see Domke 2014; also Foucault 1992 on heterotopias) — arises, persists, and changes through processes of sign production, sign interpretation, and multimodal communication. Digital images and multimodal narratives about oneself and others experiencing flight, emigration, travel, or migrant labor form complex ensembles of signs that facilitate the communicative construction of boundaries, affiliations, identities, and visions of the future. Thus, liminality appears as a

semiotically generated, process-oriented activity that finds expression in everyday, sign-based media practices.

The panel invites presentations that examine media practices of liminality using theoretical and/or empirical approaches and spatial, geo-, and/or media-semiotic or multimodal concepts (e.g., Lotman 2010; Scollon/Scollon 2003). Studies drawing on interdisciplinary discourse and/or media research are also welcome. The focus is on semiotic communication practices and the appropriation of liminal social lifeworlds in their mediated form. The presentations can explore questions such as the following:

- How are spatial thresholds semiotically marked?
- How do communicative transitional spaces emerge?
- What semiotic resources are used to express concepts such as uncertainty, hope, belonging and otherness?
- How are social relationships established and maintained through communication at the place of origin and destination?
- How do governmental applications, platforms and algorithmic and other technological structures shape sign-production processes, including interpersonal communication and dynamics?
- What visual or multimodal forms of expression can be found in discourses on flight, migration, transnational (seasonal) labour and 'residence'?
- What role does generative AI play in liminal practices?

Literature

Augé, Marc. 2019. *Nicht-Orte.* Übersetzt von Michael Bischoff. 5. Auflage. München: C.H. Beck.

Dang-Anh, Mark. 2024. Handling signs medially: On mediality and indexicality in semiotic media practices. In Martin Luginbühl & Jan Georg Schneider (eds.), *Media as Procedures of Communication* (Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 348), 220–245. Amsterdam: Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.348.09dan.

Domke, Christine. 2014. *Die Betextung des öffentlichen Raumes: Eine Studie zur Spezifik von Meso-Kommunikation am Beispiel von Bahnhöfen, Innenstädten und Flughäfen* (Wissenschaft Und Kunst). Vol. Band 26. Heidelberg, Germany: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Foucault, Michel. 1992. Andere Räume. In Karlheinz Barck, Peter Gente, Heidi Paris & Stefan Richter (eds.), *Aisthesis: Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik : Essais* (Reclam-Bibliothek), vol. 1352, 34–46. Leipzig: Reclam.

Hepp, Andreas. 2014. *Mediatisierung / Medialisierung.* In Jens Schröder (ed.), Handbuch Medienwissenschaft, 190–196. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler.

Lotman, Jurij M. 2010. *Die Innenwelt des Denkens. Eine semiotische Theorie der Kultur.* Übersetzt von Gabriele Leupold und Susi K. Frank. Berlin: Suhrkamp

Scollon, Ronald & Suzanne B. K. Scollon. 2003. *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World.* London: Routledge.

Turner, Victor. 2005. *Das Ritual: Struktur und Anti-Struktur* (Campus-Bibliothek). Neuauflage. Frankfurt; New York: Campus Verlag.

Information regarding the congress organization

The congress will be held from September 28 to October 02, 2027 at the University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany.

Please send your proposals in German or English (20 minutes), along with a short academic CV, by email to **daniel.rellstab@ph-gmuend.de** no later than **November 30, 2026**. The document should include title, name of the author, summary of the topic (max. 300 words), affiliation, email address, short bio, and a short list of publications (max. 5).

Talks should not exceed 20 minutes. Selected contributions will likely be published. The panel languages are English and German; slides and discussions should be in English.

Contact

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us: daniel.rellstab@ph-gmuend.de

Conference conception and organization: Prof. Dr. Daniel Rellstab (Chair of the DGS).

For additional information please visit <https://www.semiotik.eu/Kongresse>. We also recommend the calls of the other sections.