Engaging with urban studies: Language and the infrastructures of global urbanism

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The city has long been an object of cross-disciplinary study stemming from the so-called "spatial turn" within the humanities and social sciences. More recently, this subject has become the focus of a great deal of theoretical work by scholars in diverse fields such as geography, urban planning & design, architecture, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, or literature, among others. Departing from readings of the city as a transparent – or even universal – category, this growing body of work has shed light on it as a fieldin which social relations, and associated forms or material/symbolic distribution, are mediated by cultural and semiotic practices. In the language disciplines, engagement with this strand has been particularly fruitful in sociolinguistic areas of work approaching the study of linguistic landscapes of urban settings as a site of social production and circulation of meanings that is tied with wider political economic configurations. Drawing on such disciplinary developments, this panel examinessemiotic practices as embedded into materialized configurations of space that provide the conditions for certain activities to take place, or not, under the socioeconomic and political conditions of late capitalism. It does so with a focus on spatializing practices and re-articulations of citizenship that emerge out of various political projects of mobilization of global flows and resources, with attention to the ways in which such practices and re-articulations enable changing (but also competing) forms of governmentality.

Keywords: urban studies, space, language and communication, semiotics, political economy, governmentality, citizenship

1. Megalopolis prefigured: The semiotics of the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Bay Area

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The rise of the megalopolis – the highly interconnected multi-city region – is a turning point in history (Gottmann 1961: 772). A megalopolis imposes itself on the social, political and economical organisation of everyday urban life. At certain historical conjunctures, however, its material existence may be more elusive. It may linger as an open system of signs discursively producing the future, while remaining subjectable to continuous modification. This paper analyses the case of semiotic prefiguration of the Greater Bay Area (GBA), a foreseen multi-city cluster in Southern China. The on-going actualization of the GBA is of recent date, buttressed by the GBA Outline Development Plan proposed in 2017 by the 12thNational People's Congress of the PRC. This initiative aims to create an increased degree of connectivity between Hong Kong, Macau and 9 major cities of the Guangdong Province, expected to produce an increased number of socio-economic reconfigurations of the region. It is already manifested in conspicuous engineering projects, like the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong High Speed Rail. Yet, at present, the GBA is primarily being actualised on a symbolic plane: as a discourse and a constellation of signs. Such prefigurations of the megalopolis, this paper argues, provide a good vantage point for grasping how new forms of urbanity territorialize a space, reworking its existing tensions between smoothness and striation (see Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 474-500). Through this lens, then, the present paper explores the semiotic tensions between the machine of trans-city collectivisation and intra-city individuality under a possible material becoming-of-region.

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Keywords: smooth/striated space, territorialisation, Guangdong - Hong Kong - Macau Bay Area, geopolitics, spatial semiotics

2. Rionegro bilingüe: English language policy and the making of the city of Rionegro

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Rionegro, a small municipality in Colombia's Oriente Antioqueño region, has, over the past decade, undergone substantial changes in terms of both texture and tone, that is to say on material and discursive planes as it is being recast from pueblo (town) to ciudad(city). Recognising place-making as a material, discursive, ideological and political-economic process, this paper draws on a nine-month, ethnographic study to explore the role of language in the making of the 'city'of Rionegro. In shining a light on these proceses, I will pay particular attention to the municipal English language teaching programme Rionegro Bilingüe. A language in education policy framed in explicitly territorial terms, I will explore how the discourses of Rionegro Bilingüepermeate different spaces in the municipality and allow for the mobilisation of language ideologies which, in turn, legitimise, enable and support the political project of city making. By conceptualising the programme as a form of infrastructure, I will explore how the Rionegro Bilingüe interacts with other infrastructures, both physical and discursive,to contribute to the reimagining of the municipality as a 'modern', 'international' and 'liberal' city; thus materialising the local government's explicit aim of bringing into existence "la ciudad con la que se sueña" (the city that is dreamt of). Through this analysis, I hope to generate a reflection not only about the imbrication of the material and discursive planes in the process of place-making and the role of language therein, but also about the role of the Rionegro Bilingüe in the decentralisation, territorialization and legitimisation of the Colombian state and its social rule of law; an ongoing process in times when the role of the state is being (re)negotiated under the auspices of el posconflicto (the post-conflict era).

Keywords: place-making, urban studies, language policy, Colombia, bilingualism

3. Urban entrepreneurialism, language and governmentality:
The case of *Business Improvement District Gamlestaden*

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Gamlestaden is a Gothenburg neighbourhood characterised by a mixture of Swedish and immigrant commercial activities, religious associations and mosques, old meat industries and new trendy restaurants. After years of stigmatization and insecurity-discourse in local media and planning policy, Gamlestaden became in 2018 the object of the first SwedishBusiness Improvement District (BID). As a neoliberal tool for urban governance, BIDs and similar models of public-private partnerships, 'in which private stakeholders and real estate owners assume a pivotal role in [...] the management of urban spaces' (Valli & Hammami, in review), are now becoming popular in Sweden to counter urban segregation, decay and insecurity. The aim of the paper is to analyse BID Gamlestaden, and its effects on patterns of visibility, agency and mobility in Bellevue, an area of Gamlestaden, which the BID portrays as an untidy and insecure place. Against this backdrop, we draw upon multimodal critical discourse analysis and work on neoliberal governmentality in order to analyse the design, implementation and reception of a sign program, "Gamlestadslyftet" (2018), aimed at streamlining the visual appearance of commercialestablishments in order to increase sales and profit and boost the real estate market. Our analysis contributes to the ongoing discussion within urban studies on governmentality and neighbourhood branding by focusing on language. It conceptualizes urban entrepreneurial sign programs as a form of 'soft policies of exclusion' by which 'exclusion of undesired populations passes via the implementation of sanitation and "ambiance" policies to accommodate the comfort of the middle- and upper-classes in public spaces." (Valli & Hammami, in review).

Keywords: Gamlestaden, neighbourhood branding, segregation, sign programs, urban governance

4. The 'conditions for speaking' in the city: Stickering and surveillance in Frankfurt am Main

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A key factor in day-to-day efforts to reinforce particular conceptions of urban spaces is the practice of surveillance. Surveillance is an under-researched topic in sociolinguistics (see however e.g. Eley & Rampton forthcoming; Jones 2015, 2017), and this paper contributes to addressing this gap by investigating lived experiences of surveillance and what they reveal about the "conditions for speaking" in the city (Blommaert 2005: 219). Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Frankfurt am Main, the paper focuses on the putting up of stickers in public space. Stickering is a civil offence in Frankfurt, and city authorities and public transport operators employ CCTV cameras and cleaners to monitor public realms and remove stickers. The paper starts out by exploring the imaginings of the city that underlie the construction of stickering as a form of disorder and incivility, and by comparing these visions with those of the stickerers. Through an analysis guided by Interactional Sociolinguistics and Goffman, it then focuses in on the moment of sticker emplacing, detailing differences in the stickerers' conduct and experiences of surveillance, which were mediated by different senses of the offensiveness of the act, as well as ethnicity and past experiences of racial profiling. This differentiated account of lived experiences of surveillance reveals factors and contingencies underlying inequalities in 'voice', while also highlighting the interactional nature of the formation of linguistic landscapes.

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5. Discourses and practices for commoning in urban spaces

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Commons are both shared resources and the actual process of commoning, from water to energy (i.e. Grenoble water management or Catalan Som Energía), from urban (ie.independent centre for artistic, social and cultural production of l'Asiloin Naples) to cultural commons (ie. Spanish Fundación de los Comunes) or even encompassing initiatives (Commons Transition Plan in Ghent). The core sites for commoning in Europe today are precisely cities where commoning practices represent a "counter-movement" of resistance that arises to stop the commodification of spaces and resources (Polany 2004; Rayner, 2017), and are consequently becoming a political issue. Within this European context, this paperexplores the essential role of language in the social transformation accomplished by an outstandingexperience of urban commoning, the Ingobernable, a social centre with significant social and political support in the heart of Madrid, occupied in 2017 when the public administrations put the building at the service of the interests of the market. The focus of the paper is twofold. First, I aim to show how new discourses, languages practices and repertoires are needed to: recover commodified urban spaces via prefiguring deep social change that entails inclusive forms of participation and constituent processes towards self-government; face persuasive complex negotiations with public and private institutions and exchanges across extensive international networks; and consolidate diverse communities and political subjects. Furthermore, as communicative practices are also common resources, these can be the object of commoning themselves, particularly in multilingual communities and international networks. Second, I argue for the importance of doing research and reinforcing language commons (e.g. language exchanges and free language classes; translator brigades; "polyglot dialog", "receptive multilingualism", inclusive communication protocols) within experiences of commoning and social transformation.

Keywords: spatial turn, urban spaces, commoning, language commons, language practices

6. How the water speaks: Water, love, sovereignty, governance

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In Language, Capitalism, Colonialism (Heller and McElhinny 2018) we close an extended critique of language ideologies and scholarship which are complexly imbricated with colonialism and capitalism with a section on "this is how we hope". We note why many activists have called for a focus on accounts that move beyond a focus on damage, to a focus on desire and futurities (Tuck, Recollet). In this paper, I offer an extended example of such work. An increasing number of Indigenous activists and academics have argued that water protection is central to Indigenous resurgence and the elaboration of Indigenous forms of sovereignty, and that a focus on how the water speaks will change forms of governance from those focused on nation (Danard). These water activists work against oil pipelines, fracking, nuclear power plants and nuclear waste burial, bottling of water from local aquifers, and other forms of industrial contamination. They include water walkers, who have conducted ceremonies with water around the Great Lakes, inspired by the work of Grandmother Josephine Mandamin. This paper describes a water gathering with the Credit River in July 2019, a gathering which is a way of consulting with and about the water, through ceremony, in ways that provide support and direction for good work going forward for women from Akinomaagaaye Lodge and allies. This ceremony was to our knowledge the first large public ceremony with the river since the Mississaugas of the Credit were displaced in the mid-19th century. This paper, in particular, will focus on bureaucratic discussions with supporting agencies that putatively control the river, considering how we parsed the fine boundary between asking for support without asking for permission to conduct ceremonies that have been done by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years on these territories.

Keywords: language, indigeneity, settler colonialism, water, governance

7. Global cities, professional selves, and the semiotic packaging of hi-tech knowledge production

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This paper engages with the city as a metapragmatic object of attention within the fields of urban planning and architecture. It does so by looking closely into the emergence of "speculative architecture" as a distinctive professional strand, one that claims to "create narratives about how new technologies and networks influence space, culture, and community [with the aim of] imagining where new forms of agency exist within the cities changed by these new processes" (Liam Young, 2017). Taking onboard Markus and Cameron's (2002) position that both architectural objects and language are 'irreducibly social phenomena, so that any illuminating analysis of them must locate them in the larger social world' (p. 9), the attention is here shifted towards addressing 'speculative architecture' as a discursive space (Heller, 2007) for the production, circulation and valuation of knowledge and social categories through discourses about architecture, urban spaces and forms of communication. More specifically, this architectural strand is conceived of as a social field for genred performance (Briggs and Bauman, 1992; Cameron, 2000) whereby 'doing speculative architecture' cannot be detached from the semiotic packaging of new professional selves (Urciuoli, 2008) that are on demand within transnational networks connecting higher education institutions, thinktanks, hi-tech industries and governmental bodies in global cities. By looking at the staging of such professional selves, this paper examines spatializing practices of de-territorialization and nationalization with an eye on the larger infrastructures of global urbanism and associated regimes of citizenship (Ong, 2006) that these forms of layering enable.

Keywords: speculative architecture, global cities, professional selves, citizenship, semiosis

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