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Semiotic landscapes and mobile narrations of place: Performing the local

by

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Semiotic landscapes and mobile narrations of place: Performing the local[1]

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore some of the practices and mechanisms behind the multiple constructions of place and its meanings, focusing specifically on the diverse ways in which signage is read and incorporated into personal narratives of place. We employ a methodology of narrated walking that allows insights into how our informants actively construct the significance of local place as they navigate and move through space, and that also illustrates how signage discourses are enacted, performed, disputed and elaborated in local performativities of place. The paper concludes by drawing out some implications for research on semiotic landscapes generally, and offers some suggestions on what such an approach to semiotic landscapes might contribute to a politics of local civility by taking into consideration how signage mediates local interpersonal relationships, the situated social dynamics of multivocality, and ultimately, the contesting lives of multiple publics.

Short title: Performing the local

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we argue that central to a theorization of semiotic (linguistic) landscapes and how to research them is an understanding of the situated social dynamics of multivocality in local places, manifest in the contesting lives of multiple publics – multilingual, multicultural and multiracial. Hall (2009) has suggestively argued that rather than a setting to be navigated, local place is that through which, and with which, lives take shape, and that biographies of place and life are intimately interwoven (Hall 2009: 581); local life "takes place, not just in place but with it" (Hall 2009: 579). Despite global mobility, flow and flux, (Hall 2009), place, emplacement and locality remain important in many different ways, and in fact, mobility is a crucial factor defining of place and locality (Hall 2009: 575).

However, local places are fraught and contested constructions, complex and multilayered, and any physical space will host many different micropublics living together in 'proximities of difference' (Mac Giolla Chriost 2007). Places themselves are 'mobile', they change and shift shape over time as new building constructions, transport systems, and patterns of migration alter the physical, cultural and linguistic landscape of a site.

The complexity of place is reflected in the complexities of linguistic or semiotic landscapes; Kallen recognizes that linguistic landscapes are complex 'confluences of systems, observable within a single visual field, but operating with a certain degree of independence" (2010: 42), and Stroud and Mpendukana (2009) distinguish materially and semiotically distinct spaces in the South African township of Khayelitsha, among others 'spaces of implosion', sites where many different composition principles in signage can be found. Much recent work has explored diversities in the semiotic

production and reading of space and place (e.g. Malinowski 2009; Scollon and Scollon 2003; on authoritative spaces), but few studies have looked at this diversity from the perspective of the prosaic, everyday ordinariness of place making (see also Milani *this issue*).

In this paper, we explore what the complex dynamics of place-making mean for our understanding of semiotic landscapes. We look at some of the practices and mechanisms behind the multiple constructions of place and its meanings, noting that the making of place is a fraught practice involving the investment of social and affective capital of individuals tied to, identifying themselves with or moving through a particular locale. We show how signage and the material semiotic landscape play an important role in organizing place, and how place in turn determines the reading of signage, and argue specifically for the idea that a central aspect of place-making is in fact the way affect and movement through space is organized, narrated and interactively accomplished by means of – direct or indirect - engagement with situated material semiotic artifacts. We recognize that this requires a methodological shift towards a performative approach to the study of semiotic landscapes, and a conceptual reorientation towards semiotic landscapes as a transmodal and corporeal construct. Thus we move beyond a straightforward representational account of landscapes and embrace a non-representational (Thrift 2007) perspective on place that emphasizes the importance of bodily practices and the negotiation of affect and emotion in place making, and thus how "visual space is a result of human actions, and in turn, has an impact on human actions" (Pietikäinen et al. 2011: 277). This allows us to capture the emerging and processual nature of semiotic landscapes as the sediments of contended interpretation and interaction (see also Milani *this issue*).

The place in focus for our study is the township of Manenberg, originally a predominantly Kaaps[2] speaking township, located approximately fifteen kilometres east of the Cape Town central business district. Like many South African townships, Manenberg is increasingly multilingual due to movements of local populations and an influx of migrants with distinct languages from beyond the country's borders (especially Nigeria and Somalia). English is now a predominant feature of the landscape, and so is increasingly, isiXhosa, spoken in Tambo village, the new, expanding, 'suburb' of Manenberg.

In what follows, we first give an overview of some powerful and dominant discourses on Manenberg as a place, and in section (3) move into exploring how these dominant discourses are narrated and enacted in Manenberg residents' personal navigation through the township, illustrating how place is lived, practiced and talked about on a day-by-day basis. In conjunction with this, we introduce some theoretical and methodological constructs with which to approach how semiotic landscapes are referenced in these macro-discourses of place, and pay special attention to how semiotic artifacts in the landscape are incorporated into, function as a point of reference for, or are embellished in, place narrations. By way of a concluding discussion (4), we speculate on how the construal and enactment of local semiotic landscapes engage with, and speak back to, macro-discourses, briefly discussing what implications this approach may hold for further research and policy.

2. Manenberg: Spatialisations and place making

Manenberg, as any urban space, can be characterized in terms of different, at times competing, macro-discourses of spatialisation (Osborne and Rose 2004). In standard

authoritative narratives, it is (re)presented as a geographically marginal space, historically created out of the forced removals of black and coloured families during apartheid, characterized in contemporary time as plagued by poor urban planning, lack of municipal services, and as crime ridden. Both informally and in formal, expert discourses, Manenberg has the reputation of being a gang saturated area, one of the worst such areas in Cape Town. Given this profile, it is not surprising that Manenberg is conceived of in terms of a moral architecture of 'zones' that demarcate problem areas.[3] In this regard, authorities initially divided the township into three such zones (Williams 2010), although the NGO 'Proudly Manenberg' subsequently added two more zones, bringing the number to five, a move primarily motivated by the distinct nature oft gang activity in each zone. Boeta, who heads up the Safety Sector in Proudly Manenberg, provides the following breakdown:

> Zone 1... it's from Sherwood Park... right down till, the Downs Road...Zone
>
> 2... it's from the circle [in the Downs Road]...right down to, er, the
>
> *Bads*<baths>... the swimming bath...Zone 3 is from the Downs Rd, here by
>
> the 7's they call it the 7's right down to Turfhall Rd... the new Turfhall Rd
>
> there...Zone 4, goes right down to Klipfontein Rd... from Turfhall to
>
> Klipfontein Rd that is zone 4, it's all in this side...Zone 5, Tambo Village
>
> right up till, till the Junction... from the police station to the Junction.
>
> Zone 4, that is down that side...that is the Dixie Boys, Americans, and,
>
> the...Junky Funkies.
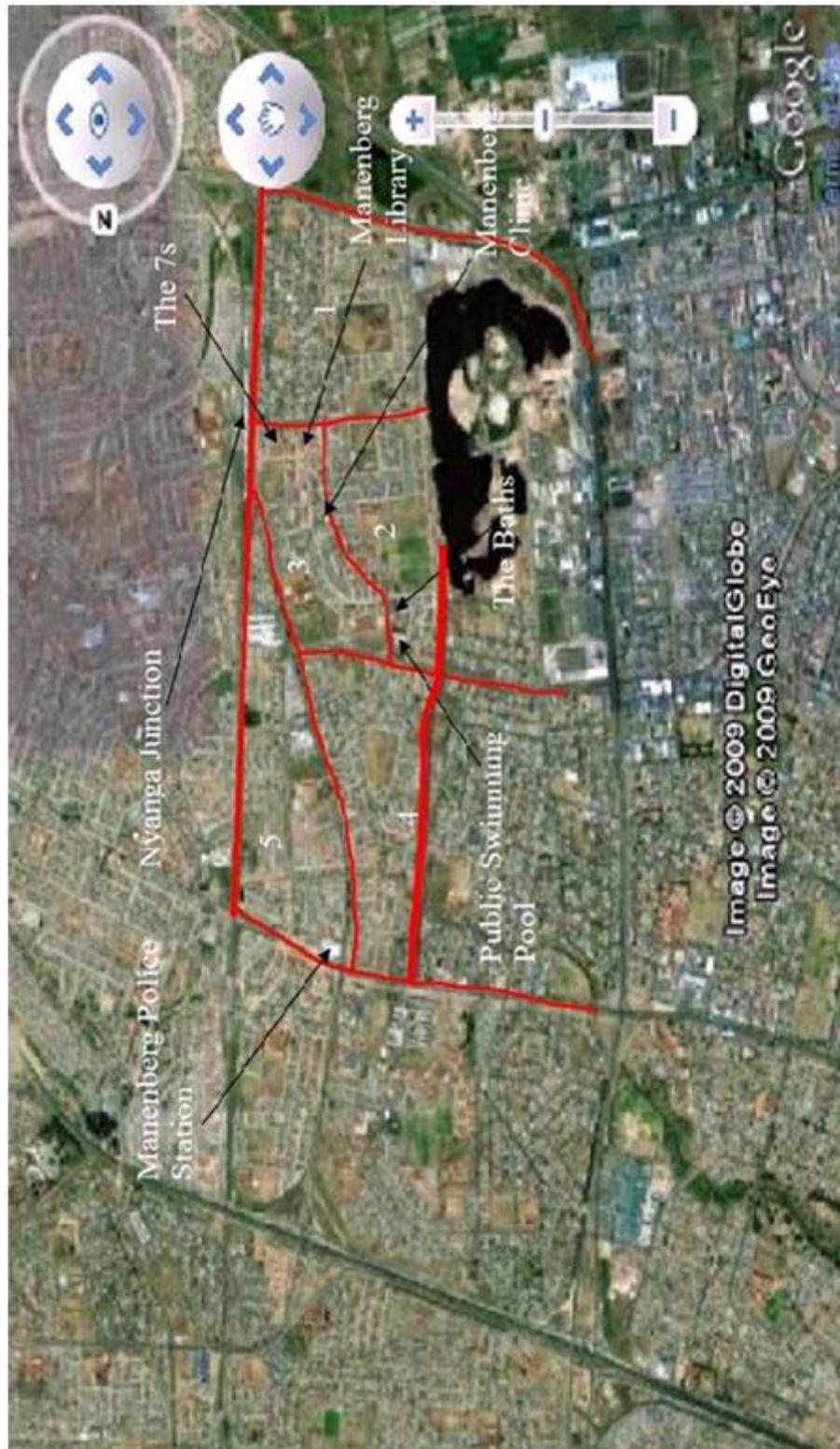
Figure 1. The 5 Zones of Manenberg (Source: Google Earth)

Crouch (2003) talks about 'spacing' to refer to the performativity of place making, and Mondada (2011) stresses "the importance of social action for the making of space", and the need to highlight "the details of the embodied production of these voices in and on space as well as of the controversial nature of plural versions of space" (Mondada 2011: 291). Macro-discourses of spatialization about Manenberg are realized in the embodied and interactionally negotiated everyday narratives, of crime, security, freedom of movement, aspiration and futurity that residents of Manenberg tell. They are above all evident in how residents move around in local place, and negotiate its dangers and its opportunities. Movement and interaction with people and objects in space renders place making fundamentally a practical achievement. Thus, a *praxeological* approach to space-making (e.g. Mondada 2011) that views place as a socially accomplished and embodied *practice*, and that takes cognizance of the importance of mobility in local place making (e.g. Urry 2007) captures well the transient and emerging nature of places such as Manenberg.

Viewing semiotic or (linguistic) landscapes as part of transmodal repertoires of practices and 'technologies' of perceiving, living and narrating everyday 'place' has implications for how to approach their study. Because we need to know not just how signage is read, but how it is embodied, enacted, re-narrated and performed, merely representing what there *is* does not capture what is imagined to be, nor how what there *is* is transformed and transmuted and 'read' in alternative ways in situated interactions. The approach we employ here, namely a material ethnography of language (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009, 2010) focuses on the interaction of signs and bodies, how people interact with others, and how signs interact (dialogically) with each other (Scollon and Scollon 2003; Stroud and Mpendukana 2009), highlighting both a praxeological construal of local place and an understanding of locality in terms of mobility.

A variety of methodologies have been employed to capture the mobile and praxeological constitution of place (cf. for example, Sheller and Urry 2006; Watts and Urry 2008). One such methodology is walking. In one sense, "walking is constitutive of place itself", (Lee 2004: 1), comprising "an active mode of perceiving the urban environment assisted by all the senses (multisensorial) (aural, olfactorial, visual, touch)" (…) Walking generates 'circumambulatory knowing' (we know things in space by walking around them, positioning in relation to our bodies and other objects), and thus acquire a kinaesthetic experience which allows walkers to build up "a strong feeling for space and spatial qualities" (Tuan 1977: 12, cited in Wunderlich [2008: 129]). Walking as an epistemological and methodological tool, and the procedure of *narrated walking* in particular, allows the ethnographer-linguist to monitor the enactment of discourses of place as they evolve over time and across landscapes through the perspectives and affectual stances of narrating walkers (cf. Trumper-Hecht 2010). There are various approaches to walking as a methodology, such as photovoice methodology (Wang and Burris 1997) and the 'go-along walking interview' (Carpiano 2009). The methodology employed in this study is a version of this latter methodology, the so-called 'commented walks' (Winkler 2002), that involves the production of narratives and accompanying reflections when walking in a place. Informants were asked to guide the interviewer around the different zones, and to characterize them in each in turn, from the point of view of what one 'ought to know' about a particular zone. The rationale given was that the interviewer needed to get a good grasp of the Manenberg zones in conjunction with a project on childhood literacy and parental mobility.[4] The interviewer actively prompted the narrator to expand his/her narrative at particular points, for example, by asking specifically about the significance of an abundance of signage/graffiti in a particular zone, or what the explanation was for different types of signage in different zones.

In what follows, we explore how salient social discourses such as those of aspiration, crime, and service delivery (zone 1), and unemployment and xenophobia (zone 2) are performed in the interactional making of local place. Our focus is particularly on how semiotic artifacts figure and are used in these narrative performances in spatial *practice*, as residents *make* place, and, experience space, as *lived space* (Lefebvre 1981).

3.   Walking in Manenberg

Walking is not a 'singular' phenomenon, but one of "infinite multiplicities" (Morris 2004); how one walks depends on what local economic, social and cultural spaces one traverses and how one navigates them. An important aspect of the design of public spaces is the macro-sociopolitical and demographic descriptions of Manenberg we noted in (1). These are manifest in how residents organize their pathways and trajectories in and around Manenberg, as well as echoed in the ways in which local residents (and even outsiders) narrate their different experiences of the different neighbourhoods. They are also apparent in readings of public, semiotic landscapes.

Generally, walking in Manenberg is a fraught affair, especially for those who are not familiar with the township. Gary, one of our walkers, warns that

> If they [the gangsters] know oh ok we see you every day going to the shop
> whatever going to work, they won't bother so much, but even in daytime if they
> notice this guy don't stay here, they'll even ask you who you looking for oh no
> we'll show you where [..] round the corner they'll rob you

Walkers' sensibilities, such as comfort and fear are key resources (Duff 2010: 892) with which they navigate their trajectories around Manenberg, resources that illustrate precisely the importance of non-representational and praxeological understandings of space. Residents are attentive to where it is possible to walk, alone or in company, and aware of where one can find safe spaces, and at what time of the day. They know what streets are accessible to different individuals, and what streets are 'owned' by gangs and thereby out of bounds to the general public. They are perceptive to the ways in which the rythmicity of the township space, the time of day and activity, determine different possibilities for mobility, and are emphatic about the importance of social networks and the visible presence and active engagement of others for the creation and sustainability of a liveable environment.

Zone 1

Zone 1 is located on the borders of Manenberg and stretches from Landsdowne Rd to Turfhall Road. It provides the main point of access into Manenberg, and hosts a collection of taxi and bus stations, as it serves as a junction for many roads and much mobility of people and goods going into and out of Manenberg. The majority of the buildings are service establishments (shops, restaurants and churches) and government offices (housing office and community centres). Most of the visible semiotic artifacts here comprise (private, local) business signage (figs 2 and 3), and municipal signage (fig 4).

Figure 2. Zone 1, Directions to an internet café

Figure 3. Zone 1, Internet café

Figure 4. Zone 1, Official signage (Construction of the New Manenberg Housing Office)

The signage on the commercial establishments are typically made out of local materials (hardboards) or written on vibracrete[5] or brick walls. Typically again, the standard, red and white, tuck shop/café board comprises the bulk of the industrially manufactured signage in Manenberg. This is sponsored by Coca Cola, and carries the name of the café and a stylized visual depiction of the Coca Cola emblem. There are few high-end billboards in this zone, primarily the municipal signage in fig. 4. With the exception of one local commercial signage, all text is written in Standard English with conventional punctuation and orthography, in non-elaborated, block text, with little in the way of embellishment to distinguish one sign from the other. Surprisingly, even the local government signage (fig 4) is in English only, even though it is customary in public, municipal signage, to provide the message in all three official languages of the Western Cape Province, Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. Again, with the exception of the municipal signage, placement of signs is on an individual item basis with few examples of aggregated, or clusters of, signage.

This zone, on the edges of Manenberg, typically links the outer world with the inner environs of the township. As is the case for many such transit zones, borderlands or liminal spaces, zone 1 serves as a façade – almost a display board profiling the community for outsiders – and serves as a portal through which to enter and access the neighborhood and its semiotic spaces. As a portal and place of transit, zone 1 lacks obvious deep social texture. Rather, it is a publicly accessible zone that permits many different types of walking or physical presence – from loitering through strolling to discursive walking or urban roaming (Rendell 2003; cf. Wunderlich 2008).

In this regard, the composition of the signage is closely in step with the characteristics of the zone, and its placement is thus far from arbitrary, but determined by the local urban ecology of zone 1. Ferrell and Weide (2010) have proposed the idea of 'spot theory' to account for why, for example, graffiti artists choose particular urban spaces to exercise their craft. Stroud and Mpendukana (2009) suggest that particular types of spaces predispose to particular types of signage, characterized by different levels of material investment, modes of production, and authoring conventions. This reflects the *affordances* created by different forms of mobility, and by how gaze is deployed in different urban spaces, for how 'reading' is accomplished. Thus, recognizing that the parameters of the local urban ecology are reflected in the design and placement of signage suggests that signs bear an important relation to how people read place, move around in it, traverse it, embed forms of interaction into it, and talk about it, that is, signage comprises an important part of a praxeological and mobile construal of place.

In zone 1, the entrances and exits, or portals, of Manenberg provide interactional moments where people meet briefly and coincidentally as strangers in pursuit of other social roles of longer duration. Interactionally, regimes typically revolve around

negotiating corridors and conditions of movement, finding locations or locating buildings. Buildings and their social functions are predominantly municipal and administrative, where, for example, literacy events and practices (such as CVs IDs and drivers' licenses) comprise circulating markets of symbolic capital. Another characteristic of zone 1 as a portal is its function as a façade – an imaginative representation of the community for outsiders.

Not surprisingly, the signage in this zone reflects and helps structure such transitory and mobile practices. One way in which the materiality of place is reflected in signage is through the notion of *genre.* A genre sets up a particular set of expectations as to type of topic/content, form of register, attitudinal stance, and interactional roles that are appropriate to a given occasion (Blommaert 2008; Bauman and Briggs 1992), and orientates interlocutors to the production of an appropriate local semiotic. Genres manifest (parts of) discourses or discourse frames; just as the genre of a medical examination, with its interactional routines, content questions related to the body and particular register instantiates a particular discourse of the body or (specialist) regime of knowledge about illness, so can different genres of signage be seen as concrete unfoldings of particular discourses.[6] Genre is thus a useful construct with which to capture how semiotic artifacts such as signs interact with, sometimes determine, and otherwise reflect perceptions of place, and the position of bodies and bodily practices such as walking (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009, 2010; Pietikäinen et al. 2011). In zone 1, the bulk of the signage is either *deictic*, serving to point the way to particular locations in the township, or representational or *interpellating*, naming buildings or locations, or 'bringing them into existence', that is a form of branding.

A nice example of deictic signage guiding the walker around the township is the internet café sign at the entrance to Manenberg. The predominance of internet café

signage offers channels for treating the flow of material resources for mobility of these literacy types; it connects two different types of portal, the local and non-local, joining the busy main road circumventing Manenberg and the information highways of electronic traffic.

What the particular genres of signage instantiate in zone 1 is a discourse of aspiration and futurity, mobility and change, a commonplace discourse among residents of Manenberg (cf. Salo 2004).[7]

This reading of place emerging from the local signage is also apparent in how individual *narratives* accompanying walking in zone 1 are structured, as walking is a semiotically informed practice, organized and transmitted through different forms of *social authority* (Morris 2004: 686). The construction of zone 1 as a place of transit and aspiration, and captured as such in predominant forms of signage, is refigured in narrative as weak social networks and fragile social control, instantiating the anonymity and depersonalization of the transit space, and repeated in forms of walking and interpersonal engagement. Manenberg is represented in the walker's narratives as a mobile place of fleeting social encounters, and accompanying dangers. Interestingly, the unfolding of the narrative is structured according to a trajectory of locations and places, again illustrating the type of signage genre (deictic and interpellational) found in this zone. For example, Greg, one of our talking walkers, touches in his narrative of zone 1 on the theme of Manenberg as a transit zone and a portal. He embeds these themes in a narrative about the attendant dangers of walking *particular* (named) streets – indicating how the temporal (and also gendered (Salo 2004: 281)) rhythmicity of the area plays an important role for when walking is safe or dangerous. At specific times of the day, street corners, crossings, bridges, and culverts are said to be particularly dangerous. Greg

remarks on how the 'outsiders' (non-Manenberg residents) who pass through zone 1 using public transport risk becoming victims of crime;

> G: the African people who, come by taxi, get off here, they rob the people on
>
> that, er little bridge over there….
>
> unfortunately some of them (black Africans) works, at shops that close 6 o'clock
>
> 7 o'clock so, there are still taxis available that time, and this is where the taxis
>
> drop them at night,

The theme of 'aspiration' and civic development is taken up in utterances such as the following:

> Here, on this field, I don't know who organises it but I-I know just every every
>
> Saturday and Sunday they organise like six-a-sides, here which-which, is rather
>
> nice...you-you do get, er people in the community who organises teams, try er
>
> you know make it a better place but,

The down side of high aspirations is lack of service delivery, which is something that Greg touches on at length in his narrative of Manenberg,

> G: on the other side er the Gugulethu side you find there's every morning you s-
>
> find a police van standing there
>
> R: Ah

> G: If you on in the train you'll find at Bonteheuwel station there's two police
>
> vans standing there
>
> R: Mm
>
> G: I can't see why Manenberg can't have a police van

We note then for zone 1 how discourse themes of 'transit', 'aspiration', and 'mobility' that also feature as content themes in the available local signage reappear and are incorporated into narrations of place that refer to failed service delivery (lack of policing), weak social networks, and frequent reference to the 'outsider', the 'passer-by' (it is difficult to walk in zone 1 if you are not known locally; those not known are assaulted at points of transit). These discourse themes are narratively mapped onto zone 1 through accounts of happenings in places and locations, reference to which is also a characteristic feature of the signage genre in this buffet zone. These discourses occur in zone 1 only – as we shall see, there is no mention of outsiders, of crime or lack of social cohesion in the narrations in the other zones, and the coordinates of location appear to play a lesser role in narrative orientation.

Zone 2

The western border of Zone 2 is Vygekraal road, with the section beyond that known as Primrose Park. It is on the main thoroughfare (Manenberg Rd) that the three zones are linked. Predominant forms of signage are everyday local shop signage advertising a variety of household services and goods that one would normally expect in a domestic context, such as local grocery (spaza) shops, barber's salons (containers), and cafés. Signage is frequently commissioned painting that mimics the sponsored signage of the

café and more established spaza shops. There is a recognizable container genre that makes reference to religious proverbs or names with religious overtones typically associated with barbers or hairdressers. As with Zone 1, there is little in the way of aggregate signage, and most text is in English, with only the odd example in Afrikaans.[8] Characteristic of this zone is a neatly ordered, geometrically laid out, and neatly spaced signage with identically angled lettering. The bulk of the signage here is factory produced and sponsored, with no personal embellishment.

In contradistinction to zone 1, zone 2 is a lived-in space. The domestic and commercial nature of zone 2 is reflected in the interpersonal relationships people enter into with each other, as well as being visible in forms of bodily comportment (for example, of leisure, where clusters of residents gather on street corners) and forms of walking (e.g. strolling). People raise families here, sleep, eat and get through their day. Children play in the street outside the houses, and residents, who know their neighbours intimately, form networks of sociality and mutual assistance. Zone 2 is a *personalised* space (neither really private, nor public), and in contrast to Zone 1, those who live there monitor closely who is in the zone, or moving through it, keep their ear to the ground and a close eye on what they consider to be acceptable behaviours.

Figure 5. Zone 2, Manenberg Avenue not far from the car, researcher aggressively challenged by resident.

Figure 6. Zone 2, Manenberg Avenue, on foot not far from car.

Figure 7. Zone 2, Manenberg Avenue not far from the car, researcher aggressively challenged by resident.

The material nature of zone 2 is also reflected in type and genres of signage. The signage is mainly found in direct conjunction with food and service outlets. Predominantly, signage genre is one of 'personalization', (Stroud and Mpendukana, 2010) where the identity of the service provider figures prominently (figures 5-7 above: 'Wayda's fuit and veg.', 'My fruit and veg.', Bismillah Barber Shop'), and is the only variable element in an otherwise fixed, and standardized form. Grocery products and hair dressing services make up the most common products advertised, representing discourse themes such as (commercial) care of the body, (alimentary and grooming). From the point of view of interaction, the signage predisposes to routinized service encounters, which, in small places such as this, nevertheless acquire an intimate, biographical dimension when the shop owner becomes familiar with customers' daily consumption patterns and credit needs.

The signage genre in zone 2 articulates with higher order discourses revolving around care, motherhood, providing for, neighbourliness and coping. In her extensive

ethnography of Manenberg, Salo (2004) has carefully described how these discourses permeate networks of sociability and local intimacy.

She argues for instance that "many adult women in their roles as mothers, and unemployed young men in their roles as gangsters or *Ouens*,…became the moral police of personhood and the defenders of their communities as a means to redefine and recuperate a positive sense of identity" (2004: 11). She shows how, as a result of the historic gendering of household formation, housing and welfare access (2004: 153), spaces such as the local housing offices came to be defined as feminine spaces. Adult women thus became the custodians of (bureaucratic) cultural knowledge. In order to gain access to the inner circle of women who hold this knowledge, strict adherence to "the key values of the moral economy through which personhood of women as *moeders* [mothers] is recognised" (2004: 160) is required. Young women who wish to be regarded as *ordentlik* or respectable, and thus eligible for such access, were required "to exercise control over [their] sexuality by [adhering] to a predictable daily routine, [assisting with] household chores…[dressing modestly, and]… restrict[ing] their movements on the street to daytime hours only" (2004: 281) (thus contributing to the temporal gendering of space). These young women also rely on older women to assist them to gain employment (mainly at clothing factories) "through the local system of introduction, *ingebring* (bringing in)" (2004: 178). Salo also asserts that the practice of "communal mothering [enables] women as mothers [to] share the responsibility of identifying and making persons such as the tough men or the good daughters in this community" (2004: 161).

These themes reoccur in everyday narratives about zone 2. Interestingly enough, they are deployed in conjunction with talk about signage to speak to issues of (un)employment and coping, neighbourliness and how each household contributes in

different ways to keeping small shops afloat (by, for example, offering their labour free). Intimacy and security in social networks, and in association with this, the role of strangers and outsiders as when foreigners (najis) do business differently, is also a common narrative trope that incorporates reference to local signage. As our walker takes us around the local streets in zone 2, he makes frequent reference to the local signage to weave a set of narrative themes around unemployment, social networks of assistance and indigenous versus foreign practices of shop-keeping. In the following excerpt, the narrator recounts problems of unemployment in Manenberg;

> G: That's you-you-you put up a Coke sign if you got a tuck shop
>
> R: Oh, so there's a tuck shop, upstairs?
>
> G: upstairs ja…These are all…government courts but, there are people got to make a living if you can't find a job, or what people do is you, if you lose your job you take that little that you get from your previous employer, and you just go and buy some chips and whatever and…up a tuck shop,

Reference to the signage is drawn into the narrative about place almost as a metaphor for the individual entrepreneurship of residents, an index of necessity, as Greg makes explicit how 'out of place' the commercial signage is, as "these are all…government courts' (that is, council housing estates).

> G: most of the times y-you know erm, I know Coke gives it…you don't need a lot…you can actually go to them and, if you got a tuck shop they will provide you with, a-a board, with your name on it….Dee's tuck shop or whatever.

Discourses of care, intimacy, neighbourliness and coping is also manifest in conjunction with how Greg talks about the presence of foreign traders in Manenberg, the so-called Najis,[9] and the opportunities this provides the residents. Again, reference to signage, more specifically, the design details of the signage is the organizing trope for this discourse. These stall-keepers are said to design their signage differently by listing products, and by providing more personalization and embellishment on their shop signage, that is, we find here a 'racial' categorization of different styles of signage,

> G: no they-they use their own writing and painting and colouring and, more often
>
> OK the-the-the way you can distinguish between the two of them is that, they
>
> would put up the name, and they would put, everything that they sell
>
> R: ah
>
> G: they'll tell you cigarettes milk bread whatever, whereas wi-with the-with the
>
> coloureds they'll just put up a Coke sign…you'll know I sell everything,
>
> R: oh yes
>
> G: so you'll come there and ask me whatever I sell..but I-like I say the Nigerians
>
> they'll paint the whole wall make clear this is a tuck shop this is what we sell,
>
> and, and the coloureds they'll just boom there's a Coke sign, come to us, and, see
>
> what you can see here at our-at our tuck shop [R laughs] that-that's basically-and
>
> then you've got (?)

Thus, in zone 2, where the predominant signage genres are personalized commercial, and discourses are about care, domesticity, and coping, signage serves as a resource to organize narrations about different 'publics' and social relationships centred around commercial networks; between, for example, those who have tuck shops and their

neighbours/employees who do not, as well as being used to talk to the different commercial and social practices of the foreign shopkeepers, the unemployment and poverty of the population in general. As in zone 1, participants orientate to particular situated features of the material and embodied environment to produce narrative versions (Mondada 2011: 291) of place. However, in this case, rather than place being structured in terms of named locations, navigation in zone 2 is in terms of puddles and pools of unemployment, clusters of local or non-local businesses – all structured around types of available signage in different places.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we attended to the various ways "in which …relations to urban space are organized by the urban trajectories, maps and itineraries that arise from [participants'] differential relations to a range of economic, social and cultural associations and forms of life" (Bennett 1998: 180-81). We explored different spaces in Manenberg with respect to how movement and narratives of movement, agency, confidence and safety were organized, and how local signage was referenced in these transmodal, praxeological and mobile performances. Incorporating an awareness of signage as an explicit part of the walking narrative methodology enabled an understanding of how linguistic landscapes contribute to the constitution of place as a discursive, contested and multimodal/transmodal construction.

Our study focused on the various ways in which signage is read and its themes reflected in and incorporated into personal narratives of place as residents move through township space. We illustrated some of the ways that the placing and design of the signage works conjunctively with locally situated embodied narratives of macro-social

discourses to give meaning and significance to local place and situated movement. We were able to show how social discourses and associated processes of place making are reproduced, organized by, and projected onto aggregates of semiotic artifacts and people's interactions with them. This essentially involved our subjects engaging with macro-discourses of place in their narrations, and in their trajectories through the township, as well as through the interactional regimes they participated in. Thus, the macro-discourses of spatialization found expression in how and where residents walk in Manenberg, in the way they interacted with others, and in how they were incorporated – almost as tools of navigation - into the narratives of the walkers as they traversed different zones. The multiple discourses and representations of place, read and construed from the perspective of local affect, informed how signage discourses were built into the everyday narratives of place of our walkers. In this, signage occasionally provided a semiotic framing for what was spoken about, and for how interpersonal relationships and local interaction orders were structured, and how they served as a commentary on the forms of motility afforded by different zones. The semiotic landscape thus functioned as a 'material canvas' (Nayak 2010) for these locally enacted and narrated discourses, a backdrop and a point of reference that focuses and makes specific the organizing trope of the particular places.

What, then, of the possible implications of this study for research on semiotic (linguistic) landscapes? Authors have pointed to the relationship between perception, representation and technologies of documentation (cf. Barni and Bagna 2009), and how habits of looking and listening shape the technology of data gathering and its analysis (cf. Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael and Barni 2010). Here, we suggest that there are benefits in moving away from a purely representational stance on landscapes to one that pays more attention to the prosaics and contingencies in the

building of the local environment, and the local epistemologies inherent in affectful ways of navigating local place. The prosaics of place mean that semiotic landscapes need to be read not just in terms of the composition and design features of the artifact (visual semiotics), nor in terms of where they are placed (geosemiotics), but against an understanding of how these parameters contribute to how physical spaces are constituted as embodied and lived, and contested as places of personal and local significance.

Sheller and Urry (2006), referring to the new mobilities paradigm, alert us to how "all the world seems to be on the move", and that we need to replace sedentary social science "that treats as normal stability, meaning and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change and placelessness" (2006: 208) with a more fluid approach to place. Urban environments such as cities and townships are "as much spaces of flows as they are spaces of place" (Yeoh 2006: 150), and much daily movement is movement in a locality that is ultimately defining of the local (Hall 2009). Semiotic landscapes thus become a source of insight into a sociolinguistics of *mobility* rather than linguistic *localization*, and a resource for not only the study of the social circulations of meaning in society (e.g. Stroud and Mpendukana 2009, 2010), but for its *embodied* circulation. We see this as a post-representational (Nayak 2010) challenge to the panoramic and 'distant' research gaze found in much research on semiotic landscapes (Hall 2009: 576).

Research on linguistic landscape has traditionally found ready applications in the fields of language policy (e.g. Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Shohamy et al. 2010). We suggest that a praxeological and mobile stance on signage may guide rethinking across a broader spectrum of critical applied linguistic and sociolinguistic concern than what is customary in linguistic landscape research. We can begin to discern how signage may be part of an approach to urban design and urban semiotics dedicated to creating conditions of local neighbourhood engagement and new emotional geographies of place in the

service of a revitalized 'politics of civility'. Sociologists and geographers concerned with social and urban policy have argued that

> If policies for multicultural living are to have any meaning, they need to connect much more closely with the sensory aspects of affect, event and encounter. This entails more open understandings of people's 'sense of place' and how this registers with ideas of nation, region, home or locality as geographically located and emotionally experienced. (Nayak 2010: 2389)

It is at the level of the local that groups and individuals will encounter each other, engage around mutual concerns of consensus or contention, and move towards solutions to possible intractable conditions of co-existence and 'harmony'. Amin, for example, emphasizes how abstract rights and obligations are realized in "the everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference on microcultures of place" through "distinctive individual and interpersonal experiences" (Amin 2008: 967). However, while acknowledging the importance of the local for "the micropolitics of everyday social contact and encounter" we also need to recognize that spaces comprise and support multiple publics, and that "groups do *not* occupy a common sense of place". Feeling *out of place* is one of the key obstacles to any sense of belonging, agency and participation (Phillips et al. 2007: 228, quoted in Nayak [2010: 2372]), The implication here is that places are potentially sites of explosive difference, disagreement and contention, where distinct positions of interest will confront and collide, and where consensus may be an "accident of engagement" (Nayak 2010) rather than a predetermined outcome of deliberation. The localness of place and its situational dynamics is thus central to a variety of processes at the level of the nation and its

politics. Given the ubiquity of signage, and the way it is referenced in narratives of place, the centrality of semiotic landscapes as objects of contention, resistance, displays of power and historicity, linguistic landscapes have an important part to play in policies for citizenship (Rios 2008).

Notes

[1] We wish to thank the Vlaamse Interunivesitaire Raad (VLIR), the South Africa Netherlands research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) project number 338282: Childhood Development through Early Literacy (CDEL), and the Max Planck Institute for Religious and Ethnic Diversity for financial support for various parts of the project.

[2] 11 official languages are recognized in South Africa. In the Western Cape Province, where Cape Town is the provincial capital, Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa are designated official languages. Kaaps is a regionally characteristic variety of Afrikaans, spoken predominantly among speakers racially classified as 'Coloured' during the apartheid years.

[3] It bears pointing out that there are also alternative emerging discourses of aspiration, hope and development – albeit still marginal – of residents 'greening' their areas and organizing themselves into political interest groups that actively lobby for improved service delivery.

[4] Even though this specific study took place over a few weeks (February to June), the researchers had been working in Manenberg at various intervals since 2009, during which time many residents had volunteered stories about their daily life in Manenberg. The present study was a first attempt to obtain a more systematic understanding of how retellings served as ways of navigating place on a daily basis.

[5] Concrete slabs used to construct fences or buildings – see vibracrete fence in fig. 3.

[6] Cf. also Kallen (2010) who distinguishes between a variety of (non-exhaustive) discourse frames, namely, what he calls, 'the Civic frame, the Marketplace, Portals, the Wall and the Detrius zone, which "can be defined by the functions of discourse entered into by

interlocutors and by the language choices and forms of expression available to these interlocutors (2010: 43).

7   And quite coincidentally manifested in the 'Good Hope' signage.

8   One of the few examples of Afrikaans signage here is the Filadelphia tabernacle.

9   Najis is Arabic for "impure/ritually unclean." Blood, urine, and excrement are najis. This term is often used as a generic term to refer to all foreign Africans (thought to be a play on "Nigerians"), and can be construed to be a highly derogative term when referring to foreign African stallholders/shopkeepers in the townships.

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