visual communication
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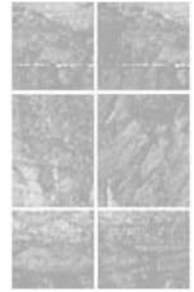

'NO OUTLET': a critical visual analysis of neoliberal narratives in mediated geographies

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ABSTRACT

This article turns to Miami, Florida's (USA) Upper Eastside – an eclectic stretch of about 20 city blocks in one of the nation's 'global cities' – for a critical visual analysis that uses mapping and photography to explore how neoliberalism is communicated. With an approach that considers geography as a visual 'vernacular landscape', this research further supports the role of visual communication as a means to reveal deeper meanings of geography, particularly in terms of identifying ideological qualities of the neoliberal project that are often hidden in plain view. The authors' photographs and maps supply data for this article, which are then read through the process of 'geosemiotics'.

KEYWORDS

geography • geosemiotics • mapping • narrative • neoliberalism • photography

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, a robber entered a house in Miami, Florida's (USA) Belle Meade neighborhood in the city's Upper Eastside (Map 1) and held the homeowner at gunpoint (Bojnansky, 2013; Johnson, 2010). Residents of this wealthy neighborhood, which sits among a cluster of 1940s bungalows and borders a stretch of hotels and piano bars once known to attract contemporaries such as Frank Sinatra, fought with local governments and activists for the next two years about how to protect their homes from outsiders who could harm them. The residents' proposal was simple: fence-in the neighborhood. 'Criminals are going to take the path of least resistance', the man whose home was invaded told the *Miami Herald* (McGrory, 2012): 'If they see a fence, they may just turn around and go elsewhere.'

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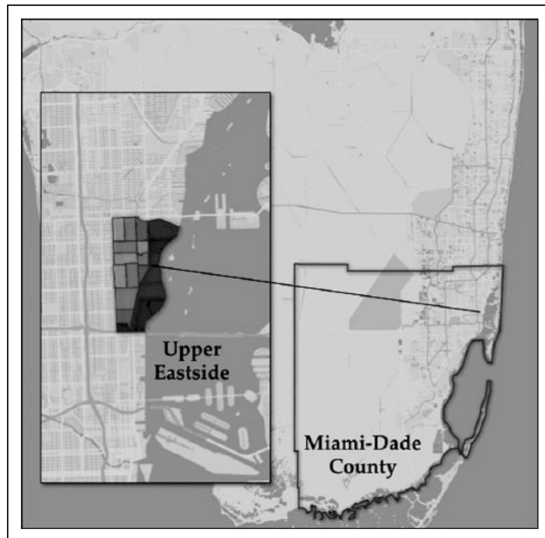


Map 1. Miami's Upper Eastside.

Figure 1. An open gate in the Belle Meade fence reveals the hidden neighborhood behind it.

But, as with most elements of urban environments, Belle Meade's fence (Figure 1), which was completed in September 2012, holds contested meanings, depending on which side of the fence one stood. To those who wanted the fence, it represents security and safety. To others, the fence adds to the neighborhood's exclusive status; Belle Meade is already one of the wealthier residential spaces in the city. Still others may interpret the 6-foot-tall, black iron fence that cuts across what used to be unobstructed public sidewalks and streets as an intrusive way to privatize public space,

Figure 2. Barriers along the Upper Eastside create notions of a mythical place beyond. Here, locals created a cut-through to access the neighborhood.

or as a beautiful addition to the neighborhood's eclectic charm, or as a landmark of home (Figure 2). The meanings are varied, many, and highly personalized (De Certeau, 1984). However, the meanings are also invisible, hidden – as portions of the fence has become covered by overgrowth – and so embedded into the everyday that one must stop and inquire as to its purposes, significance, and powers of interpretation (Harvey, 2009; Soja, 2010).

Living and working in Miami, we frequently speed past these neighborhoods of Miami's Upper Eastside along the east edge of Biscayne Boulevard, a corridor that connects the city's downtown to its northern neighborhoods. Over time, however, as we have begun to explore notions of power, space, and place in our environments and communities (Gutsche, 2011, 2014a; Shumow, 2010, 2012) what appeared to be the neighborhoods' borders and boundaries that block off one neighborhood from another such as fences and posts, walls

Figure 3. NO OUTLET signs, road paint, and overgrowth block dozens of public streets that are cut-off to restrict access to the Upper Eastside.

and bushes, and pockets of stop, turn, and 'NO OUTLET' signs (Figure 3) came to represent tangible outcomes of neoliberal narratives told through politics and in the press to privatize, securitize, and naturalize social control in public space (Shumow and Gutsche, 2016). For this study, neoliberalism is defined not only as a political–economic agenda, but also as an ideological project that embeds into dominant culture rhetoric and practices of the free market that conflate the notion of capitalism with democracy, and that ultimately lead to the privatization of public goods, including public geographies (Harvey, 2003, 2009; Soja, 2010), the results of which appear in the Upper Eastside.

These neighborhoods once appeared, in the most basic ways, similar to those on the other side of Biscayne Boulevard; streets and sidewalks allowed people to enter the space when the roads were connected to each other and when there was more than just one way in and one way out. Yet, over the last 20 years, the Upper Eastside has become increasingly guarded, and cut-off from neighboring communities, evidenced most recently by the building of Belle Meade's fence. Therefore, we use this article to explore geography as a visual 'vernacular landscape' (Krase and Shortell, 2011), one that speaks meaning when explored through 'geosemiotics' (Pan, 2010). In this way, we identify how elements such as concrete walls that line dozens of city blocks and clusters of large bushes sprouting both beautiful flowers and inches-long thorns serve as much of a visual function as a physical one to support the neoliberal project.

In the end, this study supports the role of visual communication as a means to reveal deeper meanings of geography and helps identify the hegemonic qualities of the neoliberal project via an analysis of spatial signs used as forms of social control that are often hidden in plain view (Gutsche, 2014b). Our article begins with a brief cultural history of Miami's Upper Eastside to ground readers in the environments at the center of this study. We then build a conceptual framework related to cultural meanings of geography and

visual communication studies through which we explore neoliberalism as an applied project in geographic settings. The article concludes with a discussion about the value of visual culture in understanding the physical embodiment of power structures within neighborhoods. The authors' photographs and maps of US Census and geospatial data provide the visual texts for this article.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As communication scholars interested in how culture is expressed through critical and human geography (De Certeau, 1984; Harvey, 2009; Lefebvre, 1991; Lynch, 1980; Said, 1979; Soja, 2010), the role of neoliberalism in everyday life (Fairbanks and Lloyd, 2011), and visual communication (Denis and Pontille, 2010; Krase and Shortell, 2011), we ground our conceptualizations in our personal experiences of living in Miami and our interactions (however fleeting) with the space at the center of this project – the city's Upper Eastside. Here, we present the conceptual framework that guides our exploration of local territories with a critical eye, specifically cultural explanations of geography, the application of dominant ideology, and of visual communication.

Mediatized geographies and place meanings

Geography holds meanings beyond those associated with its physicality, operating as 'a means of production as land and part of the social forces of production' and as a 'political instrument' to construct inequalities in political representation and economic possibility (Gottdiener, 1985: 123). To clarify the complex exploration of geography, cultural scholars tend to define environment in two main ways. First, the term 'space' applies to a specific location, an area that carries shared, recognized boundaries, such as a neighborhood or nation-state. A second term, 'place', is used to explain the cultural meanings associated with space (Entrekin, 1991; Gutsche, 2014c; Lefebvre, 1991; Lynch, 1980; Soja, 2010). Scholars talk about 'place', for instance, when identifying the United States' Midwest as being 'the Heartland' (Fry, 2003), describing London's urban environments of racial 'minorities' and 'deviance' as being of 'the Inner City' (Burgess, 1985), and in differentiating between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident' – the world's East and West, respectively (Said, 1979).

These mediatized geographies have been applied to interpret social conditions and cultural values embedded in events of the world and everyday life (Aiello, 2013; Gendelman and Aiello, 2010). Williams' (1976) constructions of the 'country' and 'city', for example, help inform Gans' (2004) 'small-town pastoralism', the notion that rural lands and people hold traditional and conservative values and live in minimalistic environments when compared to urban areas. Meanwhile, 'the Inner City' has been reapplied in dominant discussions about urban ghettos in the US (Parisi, 1998) and espouse notions of 'othering' inherent in many characterizations of geographies, including Said's differentiation of East and West and in Lule's (2001) explanation of 'the

Other World', in which post-Cold War US politicians and press demonized and savagized Haiti's political turmoil and placement within a redeveloping international landscape.

In sum, the role of geography in literature, popular culture, and news media is represented throughout scholarship and in applications of everyday life as being a vital component of explaining the human experience (Gutsche and Rafikova, 2016). However, this article reaches beyond identifying the place-representations of Miami's Upper Eastside to build upon understandings of both the practice and process of place-making, particularly in terms of how place-meanings are *presented* through visual alterations of built and natural environment. To achieve this goal, we turn to the study of place-making and human geography.

Human geographers maintain that built and natural environments evoke meanings to audiences that are based, in part, on a combination of cultural influences, including politics, economics, and human interactions within environments (Cloke et al., 2004; Gould and White, 1993; Shumow, 2012; Wood, 2010). These scholars do not ignore that environments hold intrinsic features, such as weather, seasons, and topographies; rather, they suggest that an environment's characteristics are interpreted through social and cultural production – and that dominant culture forms a host of explanations related to geographical elements from which one can choose as a means to interpret a particular location (Caquard, 2011; Dickinson, 2006; Monmonier, 1996; Stewart and Dickinson, 2008). Critical geographers extend their inquiry about one's experiences with a location – and, to some extent, with dominant, mediatized characterizations of space and place – to unveil the socio-political elements of how dominant interpretations of geography benefit power structures.

Soja (2010), for instance, presents the concept of a 'socio-spatial dialectic' to reveal inequalities of how space maintains social control and order that benefits the powerful. This interpretation of geography involves analyzing space based on how society divides its social resources – such as hospitals and schools, public transportation and public spaces, adequate and affordable housing, and economic investment – across space. The 'socio-spatial dialectic' evaluates the 'haves' and 'have-nots' based upon the construction or maintenance of space. In this perspective, for example, a physical manifestation that blocks roadways and sidewalks, restricts sunlight, or hinders one's line-of-sight to another structure or space diminishes that space's recognition among dominant society and furthers the intentions of the powerful to maintain their control.

As development evolves throughout geographies, these spaces become places of contested meanings and either of great development or of diminished representation. Critical and human geographers, then, seek to highlight issues of power, agency, and interpretation within contested geographies, thereby exploring the multiple facets of spatial interpretation and the effect of power

on place and people (Gutsche, 2014c). By identifying geographic characteristics and placing them in a conceptual context, in Miami's Upper Eastside, we advance scholarship similar to the types of inquiry called for by Fairbanks and Lloyd (2011) that apply 'high levels of abstraction' about the neoliberal project to the 'street level, where the practical contradictions of navigating neoliberal terrain in everyday life' (p. 5) are experienced. Therefore, as we interpret the particular geography of Miami's Upper Eastside as being complex and layered, its settings serving for acts of repression as much as for reclamation, we wish to identify its visual characteristics through a lens of power, specifically as part of an ideological project surrounding neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism as a place-making process

As a political-economic project, neo-liberalism is concerned primarily with the power of the free market to enhance personal freedoms, entrepreneurialism, private property rights, and to encourage free market principles as the best way to promote human well being (Hall, 2011; Hardin, 2012). The geographic place-making power of neoliberalism is frequently at the forefront of the economic and political desires of its proponents. A neoliberal state, concerned with the protection of free markets (and thus, democracy, or so the argument goes), is often relied upon as a reason for maintaining defense forces and to reinforce the state's territories, boundaries, and interests.

Neoliberal movements have increased desires for 'local control' that has led to self-governance by communities who, facing a perceived threat, have the means and wherewithal to organize. Such outcomes have influenced local geographies through the privatization of public spaces (Llyod, 2011), including through the empowerment of homeowner associations (HOAs), what Romig (2010) calls 'nontraditional, privatized community institutions', that govern public streets, parks, and sidewalks, while maintaining order through policing, signage, and ordinances. However, like much of the neoliberal ideological project, the tools used by HOAs are embedded in the public (and sometimes via the public, itself) and thus are able to gain veiled legitimacy through repetition. Therefore, we are more interested in visual elements of our local geographies that serve as signs of neoliberal values than in the socio-political processes themselves that make these signs possible.

METHODOLOGY: EXPLORING SPACE THROUGH VISUAL DISCOURSE

Selecting the Upper Eastside as a microcosm of neoliberal influences in geography was a process deeper than selecting an area that seemed to match the kind of built environment pertinent to our study (Aiello, 2013; Denis and Pontille, 2010; Krase and Shortell, 2011); our process of exploring the neighborhoods along Biscayne Boulevard began with conversation about how we, ourselves, are 'outsiders' within parts of our own city. Neither of us had spent

much time in these neighborhoods, beyond the infrequent stop at a coffee shop or restaurant. While we live in the greater Miami area – one in a modest house nestled in tree-lined streets, the other in a high-rise apartment near the beach – we have only a fleeting understanding of what it must be like to live in the neighborhoods in and surrounding the Upper Eastside.

During these moments spent in the Upper Eastside, however, we both sensed that these spaces visually communicated that they are 'off limits'. We were struck by the amount of social control through signage, guardhouses, blocked streets, walls, and fences that we saw while driving past or during our infrequent stops in the area. Our separation from this space, then, puts us in an interesting position to explore the meanings within our often-limited interactions with this neighborhood that in themselves reveal the veiled nature of ideological work embedded in environment.

To explore the visual culture of this geography (Aiello, 2013; Denis and Pontille, 2010; Jenks, 1995), we adopt Krase and Shortell's (2011) language of 'vernacular landscapes' to explain how geographies hold 'codes' of meaning which audiences use to make meaning of a particular space and place. Yet, we wish to extend the conceptualization of 'vernacular landscapes' from an idea that relates to the more obvious elements of a location, such as colors, street signs, paint, and words to an environment's veiled visuals, ones camouflaged by physical features, such as overgrowth, the repetition and normalization of physical barriers, and the implied, dominant rhetorical associations for the visuals of a particular space and place (Aiello, 2013). Furthermore, while Krase and Shortell (2011) approach urban landscapes as speaking spaces to be decoded within an environment's collective identity, we argue that a location need not have an overt, shared identity that is communicated across a collective, but that the messages and meanings of environment hold covert meanings, as well (Moore et al., 2008; Patch, 2004).

'Geosemiotics', the idea that geographies hold 'public texts' that contain dominant meanings, readily available for understanding (Scollon and Scollon, 2003), therefore provides a basis for exploring environment via an understanding that the meanings of street signs cannot be interpreted outside of the context in which they are placed in the environment (McMurtie, 2012; Pan, 2010; Wagner, 2006). Denis and Pontille (2010), for instance, argue that signs in the urban environment are not randomly placed, but are intentionally located to gain their ultimate power. Therefore, to complicate the Upper Eastside's visual attributes and messages, we apply two visual methods of communication – photography and mapping.

Extending the eye via photographs and mapping

Photography in this project allows us to explore the 'semiotic work' of environments (Denis and Pontille, 2010: 444), specifically the geographic details and patterns in the Upper Eastside that we miss in our peripheral vision and

Figure 4. This panoramic image, facing South on Biscayne Boulevard, represents the authors' 'wide-angle' view of the Upper Eastside during our drives past the area of study. The image presents a dominant view of the space that is complicated by the straight photographs of geographic elements at the center of this study.

in our passing glances. We apply the intentionality of head-on and straight photographs as a way to capture through the photographic eye elements of the geography that we had identified during our neighborhood trips made together and independently. In so doing, we each took field notes and photographs as we drove and walked through the city space. We then printed dozens of photographs and discussed how neoliberal ideologies may have been communicated through the geographic characteristics. In the end, these photographs document what we see and do not see during our daily movements past the Upper Eastside.

Moreover, the photographs we selected emphasize the consistencies of neoliberal messages in the Upper Eastside, particularly the repetitive vocabularies of privatization, securitization, and the naturalization of social control that blend among barriers and perform the 'invisible work' of environmental infrastructure (Star, 1999). A panoramic photograph of the Biscayne Bay corridor in the Upper Eastside (Figure 4), for instance, represents a 'wide angle' visual position closer to what we have seen previously while passing through the neighborhoods, a perspective that we have largely dismissed with the vantage points used in photographs for this project (McMurtie, 2012).

As a second layer of visually exploring the Upper Eastside, we have mapped the locations of photographs from the essay along the Biscayne Boulevard corridor (Map 2). This map includes 'NO OUTLET' streets, barriers and guardhouses within the neighborhood and along Biscayne Boulevard; three areas are also marked to show interactive panoramic images of the boulevard to help place the reader in the environments we discuss below. Furthermore, our initial process of selecting the Upper Eastside as a representation of how neoliberal narratives are expressed in the city space included entering data from the US Census and the Easy Analytic Software Inc (EASI) national crime clearinghouse (Mulherin and Howell, 2012; Tsai et al., 2011) into Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. The resulting visuals (Maps 3, 4 and 5) are composed of block group data, the most granular level of spatial data provided by the US Census that still provide anonymity to respondents, and explore three socio-demographic variables as they relate to

Map 2. Locations of images of barriers and blocked properties along Biscayne Boulevard in Miami's Upper Eastside. Videos A, B & C can be viewed on the authors' website: shatterbe.lt/nooutlet360

the Upper Eastside: per-capita income (Map 3), property values (Map 4), and the EASI crime index (Map 5).

While the aim of this article is to explore visual forms of communication of space, and to understand the complexity of the geographies through a lens of neoliberalism, the maps serve more as visual representation of spatial diversity than of a deep sociological description. We see these maps, then, as serving a vernacular of their own that articulates messages of society in a familiar political forum, such as mapping (Lynch, 1980; Monmonier, 1996). However, just as lone images of a single concrete barrier would be ineffective in expressing the complexities of an environmental vernacular, maps and statistics alone, without the context provided by photographs and a conceptual lens, would be just as hollow.

Therefore, we also view our use of GIS mapping and the mapping of our photographs to position the reader in the space, as a means to interpret the geography's vernacular (Monmonier, 1996; Wood, 2010). In the case of Maps 3 and 4, a clear delineation can be seen from the west side of Biscayne Boulevard (Highway 1) to the east, where darker shading represents either greater per capita

Map 3. This map depicts per capita income in Miami's Upper Eastside. The darker shades represent areas of higher income. Maps 3, 4 and 5 were built by the authors using SimplyMap, GeoCommons and Google Fusion Tables; data collected from 2010 US Census and EASI database; full data and interactive maps can be found on the authors' website: www.shatterbe.lt/nooutlet360

income or higher property values. In Map 3, for instance, the block group on the bottom right represents the walled community of Bay Point (Figure 11 and 12: AQ no artwork) where the per capita income is over $70,000, while, just three blocks away, directly across Biscayne Boulevard, per capita drops to $22,000. Additionally, in Map 4, property values can differ by as much as $300,000. Using the example of Bay Point once again, property values there average about $1 million while across the boulevard they drop by almost $800,000.

Both Maps 3 and 4 are quite clear in relaying narratives of property value and income, the dark borders between and among block groups revealing starkly different levels of wealth peppered throughout the space. However, overarching narratives within Map 5, which depicts EASI crime data, are not so easily interpreted; instead, the map's mosaic of higher and lower crime rates present no clear pattern (indeed, higher or lower per capita income or property value do not necessarily correlate with either higher or lower crime rates) and communicate the complexity of the urban environment in which this research takes place.

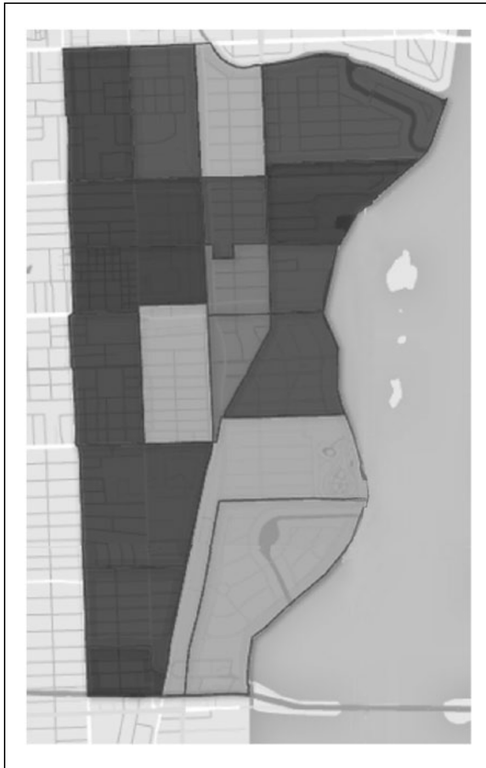
Map 4. This map depicts median property values in Miami's Upper Eastside. The darker shades represent higher densities of wealth concentration.

ANALYSIS

In this section, we argue that visual explorations of geography as applied here can serve as a tool to identify elsewhere the degree to which ideology is covertly applied, maintained, and delivered to the public. Specifically, we discuss three main themes of visual – privatization, securitization, and normalization of neoliberal ideologies.

Borders as visual messages of privatization

Miami's Upper Eastside consists of several neighborhoods – Bay Point, Morningside, Shorecrest, Bayside, and Belle Meade – and is littered with mid 20th-century modern architecture, creating an eclectic stretch of about 20 city blocks along Biscayne Boulevard (also Highway 1), which runs the length of northeastern Miami (Map 1). From its border with the Village of Miami Shores at Northeast 87th Street to Bayfront Park in downtown Miami, the four-lane boulevard is a study in the complexities and contradictions of modern urban geography; indeed, it serves as a dividing line between rich and



Map 5. This map depicts EASI crime rates in Miami's Upper Eastside. The darker shades represent areas of higher rates of crime.

poor (see Figure 5). From one end of the boulevard to the other, average per-capita income between block groups often doubles – and sometimes triples; income averages can vary from $9,000 in one neighborhood to over $100,000 in the next (Maps 3 and 4).

And whereas the east side of Biscayne Boulevard is home to public green spaces, waterfront property, and private homes – many behind gates and guardhouses – the boulevard's west edge houses pockets of low-income, mixed-use neighborhoods, businesses, light industrial, and train tracks. The street scenes are different, as well, from east to west. Public streets on the west side of Biscayne Boulevard are open and, in some cases, wind across the city all the way to the Everglades, while at least two dozen east-bound streets have been blocked by overgrowth, fences, and concrete walls (Map 2). 'NO OUTLET' signs, 'STOP' signs, and neighborhood watch signs tell people to avoid neighborhoods such as Belle Meade (Figure 6). In at least a dozen cases, portions of public streets have been removed. The streets' initial access points are still connected to Biscayne Boulevard, complete with turn arrows still painted on the pavement (Figure 3).

Figure 5. A NO OUTLET sign and foliage serve just as much as visual signs of 'no entry' as physical barriers to public space.

The privatization of these spaces through walls, gates, fences, brush, and guardhouses has been led by the increasing power of homeowner associations (HOAs). A direct outcome of the neoliberal project, these organizations control acceptable behavior within these spaces through added (private) policing, security, and signage (Graham, 2010). In the United States, perhaps now more than ever before (Frug, 1999), HOAs represent 'local forms of sovereignty' that support private decision making about 'personal possessions' (Ong, 2006: 132), including property.

Indeed, privatization of wealth is a common outcome of neoliberal ideologies (Becker and Müller, 2013; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009) and serves a dual function within the neoliberal framework. First, privatization encourages the market to reshape and maximize the profitability of arenas that were once out of the reach of private interests. Second, privatization places the needs of the individual above the community by promoting mythology that the individual is in control over her own destiny, even if corporations and governments set the social and cultural norms and opportunities for her to succeed. The extension of neoliberal principles begins, we argue, at home – particularly in terms of how private citizens and their governments address issues of equality, access, and maintenance over public and private spaces. The 'inalienable right to own property', Soja (2010: 45) writes, has become 'legitimized if not sanctioned' as a 'central principle in defining the capitalist nation-state, its system of laws, [and] its revised definition of citizenship'.

Through that lens, 'NO OUTLET' signs in the Upper Eastside (Figure 7), guardhouses (Figure 7), and concrete walls (Figure 8) have become the norm for maintaining both physical and neoliberal ideological boundaries between public and private spaces. Moreover, these physical and visual

Figure 6. NO OUTLET signs, fences, and foliage direct traffic away from Miami, Florida's (USA) Upper Eastside. Some two dozen public streets along 20-city blocks restrict access to outsiders.

barriers serve to privatize public spaces. Indeed, signs have long been a means by which governments deliver messages (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010). They present a dynamic language – both through the words written on the sign (i.e. 'STOP', 'YIELD', 'NO OUTLET', 'DEAD END') and the signs-as-text. Colors, shapes, designs, and placement of street signs demarcate space to fit particular expectations of social behavior, but also – in the case of the 'NO OUTLET' signs that pepper the Upper Eastside – communicate one's ability to access space based upon the desires and needs of local public (and private) governments.

Interestingly, whether or not the specific language of the 'NO OUTLET' signs represent city ordinances or state laws for these particular locations, rhetorically these markers seem to signal the more true message of 'NO ENTRY' that, in one sense, could easily have been replaced by 'DEAD END' signs. Though in the case of the Upper Eastside, a relatively affluent set of neighborhoods, it seems perhaps more palpable to use less disparaging

language through 'NO OUTLET'. The meanings in these spaces between 'NO OUTLET' and 'DEAD END', however, share the same philosophical message – 'Do Not Enter (Unless You Belong Here)'.

Nonetheless, stretches of concrete walls that line the east side of Biscayne Boulevard in the Upper Eastside serve the same function of privatization as signs and fences. The destruction of open-access public streets to install bushes as barriers function to make public spaces more private in that the passerby is left to see the same flat surface of tan or beige walls that blend into a concrete curtain, leaving the viewer only to speculate (or to ignore) what may be beyond (Figure 8; Map 2). Such means also push the viewer beyond possible spaces of access to centralized locations where guardhouses, crime watch signs, and gates signal increased surveillance and a sense of exclusivity. Furthermore, that these guardhouses and walls are funded by private homeowners and geographic alterations – such as destroying publicly financed streets – are subsidized by local governments complicates the interaction of the private–public outcome of neoliberal ideologies (Becker and Müller, 2013; Frug, 1999; Lefebvre, 1991; McGuirk and Dowling, 2009).

The Upper Eastside's walls and half-streets (Figure 9), street signs and clusters of foliage (Figure 10), and roads that end abruptly (Figures 3 and 5) or are curved in ways that block visual access to the neighborhood also blend into an environment (Figure 7) that calls for its own privacy. Geographic alterations to space mystify these private–public environments into secret places, where guardhouses and gates (Figure 1) create passageways into the unknown or into the exclusive. A cutout in Figure 2, for instance, shows the mystique that is built around the neighborhood itself. In this image, an entryway formed through overgrowth where an open-access street has been removed creates an archway to the residential areas behind it, and the man-made walkway appears as a bridge from one world to another. The messages that underlie this 'visual-material gateway' (Aiello, 2013: 350), one of many along the Upper Eastside's Biscayne Boulevard, defy a dichotomous inclusive/exclusive interpretation, depending on the audience (those living within *and* without). In the end, hidden passageways, physical walls, and signs of security mark a neighborhood that executes its 'right' to separate even its most public spaces for its own use and to present elements of its environment as a means to protect its 'hidden' treasures within a complex landscape (Maps 3 and 4).

Walls, guards and the 'obession' with securitization

This article began by discussing the desire – and accomplishment – of Belle Meade residents to build a 6-foot-high fence across public access points to the neighborhood following a home robbery there (Figure 10). Despite concerns by local activists that the fence would restrict 'outsiders' from accessing Belle Meade's tree-lined sidewalks, public streets, and bay-front views, the

(a)

(b)

(c)

Figure 7. Guardhouses and gates present images of heightened security, restriction, and privatization among public streets and passageways in the Upper Eastside.

$70,000-fence connected pockets of dense foliage armed with the *bougainvillea* bush's 2-inch thorns, to make a single barrier. Today, Belle Meade is only

(a)

(b)

(c)

Figure 8. Walls along blocks of the Upper Eastside communicate that people of this space deserve, desire, and require security and separation.

accessible by passing through one of two manned guardhouses on its outer edge,[1] and several swing gates that were installed to maintain minimal public

Figure 9. These concrete posts, reflectors, and neighborhood watch sign represent how such barriers have become integrated in the visual norms of the neighborhood.

Figure 10. The Belle Meade fence completed the neighborhood's border-building, which included removing a through street and installing foliage, a neighborhood watch sign, and directional arrows.

access. Ironically, then, these gates (many of which are hidden behind overgrowth, see Figure 1) seem to diminish the fence's practical purpose – to keep people out.[2] However, as we argue here, the fence was intended to serve just as much as a visual message of exclusivity as a physical barrier.

Throughout the entire Upper Eastside, barriers meant to provide security to private spaces have blended into the environment and appear less overt than iron fences and concrete walls. Figure 9, for instance, shows four concrete pylons that sprout from the ground, almost camouflaged by the landscape's other vertical features – a concrete planter, light posts, curbsides, and tree trunks. Posts such as this sit outside private homes alongside public streets that have been blocked by nature, their purpose communicated, in part, by crime watch signs, similar to the one posted on a light post in Figures 9 and 10. These crime watch signs – the

one in Figure 10 reads 'WARNING: THIS AREA PROTECTED BY CITIZENS CRIME WATCH' – connect the public–private barriers to notions of pending danger and crime that may threaten the neighborhoods from the outside.

(a)

(b)

Figure 11. **Directional signs throughout the Upper Eastside serve as signals of social control that have become normalized, incorporated into nature, and altered by street and graffiti artists.**

Such visuals serve three purposes. First, these visuals are not just to protect privatization, but to direct the people within spaces, while assigning dominant values to the purposes of particular places (see Figure 11). Kallen (2010) writes that street signs speak a vernacular of social control as much as providing geographic information, and argues that signs operate in multiple ways. Just as much as street signs serve a 'civic' purpose to label territory and regulate behavior, Kallen writes, they provide information related to the 'marketplace'. Signs, Kallen continues, also identify 'portals' for mobility and

Figure 12. Several blocks of walled property that have become incorporated into the environment begin at the southern-most end of the Upper Eastside.

transportation of people and goods, provide a 'wall' for expression, and serve as a 'detritus zone', a place 'where the transient effects of consumption and the discarding of language-labeled commercial goods contribute to the overall effect of language use in the environment' (p. 43). In terms of this project, we see mystical passageways through brush (Figure 2) and the use of brush borders (Figure 12) to break or adapt these privatized public spaces as 'portals' that allow just enough freedom to enter as to not constitute a complete revolt to otherwise seemingly overt forms of exclusion.

In terms of the Upper Eastside, we suggest a second reading of geographic barriers and signs reveals that they articulate not only the possibility of crime occurring in the space, but that both people inside and *outside* of the space should be fearful that crime is lurking and that action to resolve that crime is imminent. For instance, guardhouses – and their guards – represent simple messages of high security, what Soja (2010), borrowing from Davis (1990: 42), refers to as a 'security-obsessed urbanism'. In this vein, Soja (2010: 42) writes: 'Defensive fortressing of urban life and urban space [is] built on a pyscogeography [sic] … of fear and [is] aimed at protecting residents and property against real or imagined threats of invasion.'

So while we would not blame a neighborhood for being concerned following a home invasion, as described in the case of Belle Meade, we subscribe to the conceptual discussion about an 'obsession' with protecting private property and suggest that, in the case of the Upper Eastside, this obsession has extended into the privatization of public space (and a neoliberal principle) set on operating as a form of securitization.

Guardhouses in particular have become synonymous with wealthy urban areas and the neoliberal movement in that securing the rights of the self becomes paramount for protecting the successes of neoliberalism and to counter calls for efforts to serve and protect the masses (Graham, 2010). The securing of wealth – including private property and rights to public spaces – becomes more important as the distance between rich and poor increases, such as depicted in Maps 3 and 4. Such securitization represents how the economic model of neoliberalism redefines 'individual freedom … as the capacity

for self-realization and freedom from bureaucracy, rather than freedom from want, with human behavior reconceptualized along economic lines' (Leitner et al., 2007: 4).

Driving and walking through gated private neighborhoods in this part of Miami is a strange enough experience to have shaped our understandings of geography in the ways we have described. As two white men driving into these neighborhoods in a Toyota RAV4 and with no 'real reason' to be in the neighborhood, the guards gave us merely a nod, opened the gates, and waved us in. With no questions asked as to our presence and purpose, the semiotic meanings of the guardhouse's surveillance and threat of banishment have become quite clear. Yet we were left to wonder about the tangible role of these guardhouses in terms of who is allowed to access the neighborhoods without interrogation or suspicion.

For us, the alterations to neighborhood geography we have discussed thus far serve a third ideological purpose, which we introduce here, but discuss in greater detail below – the normalization of privatization and securitization of geography (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Graham (2010) identifies such normalization as 'neoliberalization', a project based upon the domination of wealthy over poor in geographic terms, walling-off of rich neighborhoods and public space throughout the world and the introduction of private policing of these private–public spaces. Below, we explicate the visuals of geographic 'neoliberalization' in the Upper Eastside through the replication of directional signs and security (Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11) – outcomes of an ideological project that has become part of the neighborhoods' natural settings.

Normalizing the process of neoliberalization

Speeding along Biscayne Boulevard in the Upper Eastside, past its shops, strip malls, strip clubs, and restaurants, and through a seemingly endless number of stoplights, the intersection at NE 70th St appears like any other (Figure 4; Video A). Yet, much of what makes this intersection largely nondescript is in the 'textural boundaries' (Aiello, 2013: 353) that are hidden out in the open – thick brush that blocks-off a public street leading east into a residential area, a 'NO OUTLET' sign signaling the privatization of what sits beyond, and, perhaps more than anything else, the sense that this intersection just isn't that special. Throughout this article, we have explicated the 'communicative' characteristics of the Upper Eastside's environment, identifying both the physical and ideological messages that the eye may not see as it passes through the space). In this final section, however, we articulate how these otherwise 'invisible' elements operate together to represent and normalize the outcomes of Graham's (2010) 'neoliberalization' through the alteration of environment. Panoramic photographs (Figures 4 and 12), for instance, present a view of space that, when juxtaposed with other images throughout this article, reveal the complexities of the seen and the unseen (Flanagan, 2004), within which

the ideological meanings of place-markers are embedded, naturalized, and the meanings of power sustained via its camouflage (Paterson, 2006).

Maintaining the opacity of neoliberal democracies in terms of their intentions and beneficial outcomes relies on injecting its practices and philosophies across all social and cultural venues (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Borrowing from Hall (1977), Hebdige (1979: 11) writes that whatever is embedded in dominant experiences and explanations of life becomes a legitimate 'unconscious' and earns a 'taken-for-grantedness' as being of a 'natural' way of things. What is especially hegemonic in the construction of 'normal common sense' is that the actions and efforts of daily life are explained through 'transparent' rationales. In the case of the Upper Eastside, for instance, the construction of walls and barriers – within its complex space of inequality and difference – are erected under the guise of creating 'privacy', reducing noise, and adding 'security'. Yet, the very 'transparency' of popular rationales for constructing physical barriers render alternative motives '*invisible*' (p. 11, emphasis in original), and, at the same time, the inequalities highlighted by Maps 3 and 4, are further exacerbated by 'visual-material resources that invoke not only their architectural and overall physical difference, but also a disparity in cultural and social capital' (Aiello, 2013: 355).

Through a reading of visual culture, then, a line of shopping carts at a public street that had been blocked to privatize a portion of the Upper Eastside (Figure 12) could be read as a form of agency, the reclamation of altered space; however, such a reading that recognizes the power of the individual to counter dominant spatial manipulation veils the notions of power in the naturalization of such a space that allowed for it to be reclaimed in the first place. In other words, we see the alteration of public geography through bordering and barrification as a means to indoctrinate publics to the overarching – and expanding

Figure 13. Shopping carts line foliage planted along a street that had been removed by the city and symbolize how these blocked streets are integrated and repurposed by those outside of the neighborhood's border.

– efforts of neoliberal ideologues, a process that occurs in local geographies operating within individuals' personal (and personalized) relationships with their environments (De Certeau, 1984).

CONCLUSION

This article performs a geosemiotic analysis of natural and built environments in the Upper Eastside of Miami, Florida. Through photography and mapping, it unmasks the naturalization of neoliberal messaging via geographic alteration to install and promote the naturalization of neoliberal principles of privatization and security. In sum, we argue that the power of neoliberalism (and 'neoliberalization') occurs just as much in the visual communication of those principles as it does in the actualization of physical artifacts. Here, we also argue that lines of barrier walls, streets that have been demolished by local governments to block entry to wealthy neighborhoods, and repeated use of 'NO OUTLET', crime watch, and other street signs benefit from geography's 'communicative' nature to further 'neoliberalization'. More specifically, we turned to visual communication to read space as a text of privatization and securitization that, in this case, has become naturalized in personal territories and public spaces not only through the visuals themselves, but through 'legitimate' processes behind geographic alteration.

And, as we discussed throughout this article, many of the spatial transformations of the Upper Eastside have been led by the private–public homeowners associations that collaborate with public governments to destroy public streets, sidewalks and natural entry points to spaces of wealth. Therefore, just as much as the visual communicates particular spatial meaning, the use of 'official' 'NO OUTLET', 'STOP', and crime watch signs provide an authoritative stamp of approval for barrification. In this way, blocked streets appear to serve the public interest just as privately funded guardhouses (and guards) that control access to public spaces take on an authoritative and 'official' presence that contributes to the legitimization of spatial control.

To us, the most intriguing outcome from this work is the degree to which we have been impressed by the geographic power of a space that is, to us, neither a home territory nor a completely unknown space, but one that we have passed daily with environmental features of control, which we have ourselves come to accept through 'common sense'. This article, then, not only contributes to our own interpretations of altered-naturalized environments, but to the field of visual communication by exploring the dynamics inherent in interaction among straight and panoramic photography (including interactive visuals provided online to situate the reader in the environment at www.shatterbe.lt/nooutlet360) and mapping to explore space. In the end, we suggest that future research on 'neoliberalization' focus on the unseen as much as the seen by relying on practical and conceptual approaches to geography that identify its issues of power, normalization, alteration, and interpretation. Without such layered approaches, dominant culture and social norms are

left to fester within the normal and the natural, perhaps to be re-altered and reclaimed, but also without the kind of critical inquiry that can lead to effective resistance.

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NOTES

1. A third guardhouse within Belle Meade blocks unfettered access to the Belle Island neighborhood (see Map 2; Figure 7c).
2. Bloggers at www.transitmiami.com posted a satirical video that depicts people carrying items such as computer printers, running in and out of the neighborhood through a Belle Meade fence gate and, in one instance, through a gap between the fence and overgrowth. The video can be viewed here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/01/sarnoff-security-fence-belle-meade_n_1928860.html

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