More Landscape, Less Language: Digital Gaming, Moral Panic, and the Linguistic Landscapes of Southern Peru

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I offer an account of the "linguistic landscapes" associated with the commodification and purchase of internet services in southern Peru. Through an account of public signage deployed by internet lounges in this area as well as the ideologies that make sense of it, the analysis reveals one of the ways in which moral panic over digital gaming gets semiotically mediated. To do this, the article develops a theoretical machinery that makes sense of the ways in which public signs—relative to their infrastructural contexts—come to project channels for their uptake. When these relationships are considered relative to the ideologies that target them, what gets revealed are the moral contours of Southern Peruvian public life. The analysis ultimately shows how the concept "linguistic landscape" can be useful for the semiotic study of infrastructure as well as the forms of the public life that it helps to mediate.

On a July afternoon in 2013, a group of seven teenage boys[1] snuck past two classrooms that cluster around their school's only exit, a school where I was volunteering as an English teacher. They opened up the creaky, aluminum door and stumbled onto one of the main arteries of Parlata,[2] a southern Peruvian city of some 8,000 people located on the shores of Lake

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1. This group of boys was between 14 and 17 years of age.

2. This name is a pseudonym. All other place names refer to actual locations.

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Titicaca. Once in the street, they chose *not* to do one thing. They did not go downward toward Parlata's secondary plaza. This is the site of the town's smaller colonial-era church and a line of vendors who sell fresh fried trout (and other delicacies) from food carts. Instead, these seven boys darted through an alleyway and raced for another road that leads downward toward the outskirts of the town. Once they reached the edge of town, they cut across the main highway, darted past two little stores, and ran into another one. After a week at the school, I came to learn that this was a regular event, and that it had a singular objective: the boys were passing through the store, clambering up a concrete stairway, and securing a computer at an unnamed[3] and publicly unmarked internet gaming lounge. They were sitting down to play a massively multiple online game (i.e., an MMOG) called Counter-Strike, a first-person shooter game in which players play on teams of terrorists or counterterrorists.

The intelligibility of this scene depends on a participant who was not running along with these boys, or being passed by them on the street, or watching them, and so on. This was a someone who wasn't there in some brute phenomenological sense. These boys were not simply leaving school, after all. They were escaping it. They were leaving early. They cut through an alleyway instead of going through the plaza. For as long as I could still see them, they kept quiet. As agents who escape, avoid a main plaza, cut through narrow spaces, and keep quiet along the way, these boys assume a certain kind of embodied moral sensibility. To put it perhaps too simply, they act as though the public character of the city itself—understood here as a superaddressee, in the Bakhtinian (1986) sense—disapproves of what they are doing.

The saliency of this superaddressee is in part evident through what sociolinguistic scholars have referred to as the "linguistic landscape" (Backhaus 2007): that is, it is evident through the distribution and character of "publicly visible bits of written language" (Blommaert and Maly 2014, 1) such as billboards, shop signs, and graffiti, among yet other possibilities. This is apparent in the above anecdote. Up until reaching the gaming lounge, these seven boys had encountered (or, at least: passed by) a series of public arrays of written language. The name of their school was stamped above the entrance through which they escaped. They passed by a store where there was a set of signs depicting the branded images and names of the companies whose products were sold inside (e.g., Inka Cola, Movistar). At the corner where they turned to go

3. This location has a name registered with the municipality. However, this name is not displayed on the building itself.

through the alleyway, there was a restaurant that listed in black script the two dishes that were regularly available inside. In comparison, the gaming lounge that was their destination received no outside signage at all. It was unmarked and publicly invisible.

The linguistic landscapes of cities like Parlata are the object of ethnographic description in this article. They offer a lens onto the moral understandings that have framed digital gaming as a matter of public moral concern in southern Peru. The first clue is in the public signage of internet gaming lounges: sometimes absent, sometimes indirect, often obscured, and in certain cases, relatively direct and open. The second clue is in the distribution of these signs: to the extent that a location gets understood as a more fully public space (e.g., close to markets, plazas, governmental buildings), these signs are more likely to be completely absent, indirect, and obscured. The third clue is in the ideologies that make sense of these landscapes: the public invisibility of these businesses gets interpreted as a sure sign of their morally dubious status. In this article, I argue that the character, distribution, and ideologies about gaming signage are not some incidental ethnographic fact, but rather one of the primary semiotic ways in which moral panic[4] over digital gaming in southern Peru comes to be articulated and reproduced.

In making this analysis, I draw on the work of Blommaert (2013) and Scollon and Scollon (2003) to illustrate some of the possibilities for ethnographic analysis of the concept "linguistic landscape." Although this is a concept that has been used in an increasingly diverse number of ways, it has perhaps most recognizably been used as a tool for understanding processes of globalization in highly multilingual, urban environments. What are the array of languages that compose some linguistic landscape? What does this array suggest about the speech communities that compose some urban environment? What does this distribution of languages—as well as its history—suggest about the relationship between these speech communities (i.e., understood as evidence for processes of globalization, relationships of dominance between languages, etc.)? By way of contrast, the present analysis follows an insight gestured toward in Wang et al. (2013): it considers the utility of linguistic landscape analysis in contexts that are relatively peri-urban or located in regional urban centers,

4. It is now common in anthropological literature to make use of the concept of "moral panic" without reference to its relatively long salience in sociological and media-focused literatures. It is still useful, however, to engage with this tradition (see Cohen 1973; McLuhan 1994), perhaps especially from an anthropological point of view. One productive way of engaging it is to consider it as offering an alternative take on the role of mass media in the public sphere—alternative relative to the more Habermasian-inflected concerns taken up in anthropological scholarship.

contexts in which—at least in the one considered here—the phenomenon of marked multilingualism is less empirically striking than it is in the densely urban, "superdiverse" contexts that have been the primary object of linguistic landscape analysis (see Blommaert 2013; Maly 2016). With this shift in focus, the object of concern becomes not the relationship between the languages evident in some linguistic landscape; instead, the object becomes the way in which public signs divergently articulate with their infrastructural and ideological environments. Or, to put it perhaps too simply: the analysis concerns itself less with "language" (narrowly construed) and more with "landscape" (broadly construed).

The Ethnographic Study of Linguistic Landscapes

This study contributes to the approach to linguistic landscape pioneered by Blommaert (2013) and Blommaert and Maly (2014), an approach they refer to as "ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis" (or ELLA). This is a paradigm that was formulated in part as a response to a first wave of more quantitatively oriented work on linguistic landscape (Backhaus 2007), work that created useful inventories of the languages extant in urban environments. The goal of the ELLA approach has been to make the study of public signs speak more directly and convincingly to the characteristics and historical trajectories of their broader sociocultural contexts. On the one hand, this has required a more fully semiotic understanding of public signage. These are signs, after all, that are subject to processes of design and commodification, and they are commodities that are oftentimes deeply multimodal as well as directed toward more or less specific audiences. On the other hand, the ELLA approach has required a more sophisticated understanding of the sociocultural contexts of such signs. Their contexts of occurrence can often be characterized, for example, as public spaces in which a number of actors and institutions vie for control over the very character of this space. As Blommaert and Maly (2014) nicely note, this means that public signage both reflects and helps to constitute the contours of some field of relatively institutionalized power and authority.

My intervention in this piece takes the semiotic character of public signage as its starting point: in particular, it takes up the issue of how signs of this sort come to be "emplaced," to use the concept formulated in Scollon and Scollon (2003). By "emplacement," Scollon and Scollon refer to the way in which public signs come to signify—that is, indexically—through where and how they are placed in the material world (e.g., the way in which a stop sign indexes the location where a car is expected to come to a stop). One undertheorized di-

mension of emplacement, however, has to do with the characteristics of the channel through which some public sign comes to be interpretable for some addressee. In the case of stop signs, to be sure, this issue is easy to overlook: they are usually located in a spot with respect to which an interpreter of a particular sort—that is, one who is seated in a car—can easily see and read them. (Note the broader issue of power and authority here: what it means for a sign to be "clear" and "legible" in this case is more often than not explicitly stipulated by the state.) It is not always the case, however, that the channels available for the uptake of some sign are constructed with the same demotic impulse—that is, the impulse to maximize the clearness, legibility, and number of possible addressees for some sign. These are, after all, some of the most commodified dimensions of public signs (e.g., one pays more for a larger, more fully illuminated billboard). More interestingly, perhaps, is the sense in which the infrastructural context of some sign—its emplacement relative to roads, sidewalks, segments of a building, doors, other buildings, and so on—shapes and constrains the available set of channels for some public sign. In the case to be considered more fully here, the infrastructurally inflected channels of some signs are, to use Shannon and Weaver's (1949) metaphor, "noisy" or not fully transparent.[5]

Of course, such an intervention into the semiotic character of signs—an intervention that produces a vocabulary of public sign types (the maximally legible, the constrained, the obscured, etc.)—does not mean that such types are necessarily consequential for some sociocultural context. To make this kind of claim, one must attend to what Silverstein (1985) refers to as the "total linguistic fact": the key is to formulate, for some group of people, the relationship between some sign or set of signs, the contexts in which they occur, and the ideologies that link signs to their sociocultural worlds. In the case at hand, the issue is to set into relationship some claim about public-signs-relative-to-their-channels and the ideologies that target these sign/channel relationships (to continue with the example above, one might investigate the ideologies about inclusivity and access that motivate sign-channel relations that are maximally clear, legible, and available for uptake). In some ethnographic contexts, an investigation into ideologies about public sign/channel relations reveals the way in which public signage helps to (mass-)mediate the imagination of large-scale political subjects and moral agents (i.e., the "public" character of public signs, in Cody's sense [2011a]). In these cases, the ethnographic study of linguistic

5. Kockelman's (2010) analysis colors my discussion of channels in this section.

landscapes opens onto a broader question of importance for the social sciences: that is, the role of processes of mass mediation in the emergence of collective identities (especially national ones) in democratic polities. If the classic locus of concern in this literature has been the newspaper, one possibility of the ELLA approach is that it identifies a different, more fully material, and embodied way through which mass mediation—that is, through an account of public signs and their infrastructural channels—comes to be consequential for imagining and inhabiting collective forms of identification.

A Note on Ethnographic Context: The Internet and Digital Gaming in Southern Peru

The analysis presented here has its origins in a series of three two-month trips to the Department of Puno in extreme southern Peru, trips that started in 2013. Within the Department of Puno, the research has centered on the departmental capital of Puno (a city of some 140,000 people) as well as—to a lesser extent—the surrounding (relatively) urban areas of Juliaca, Parlata, and Ilave. The rural/urban distinction in Peru has a fractal quality to it (Gal and Irvine 2000): from the perspective of the national capital of Lima, Puno and Juliaca (a rapidly growing city of some 270,00 people) are understood as provincial, rural towns; from the perspective of Puno and Juliaca, towns like Parlata and Ilave are understood as relatively more provincial and rural. Although this is an area where indigenous languages like Aymara and Quechua are quite vibrant, the research conducted for this article has—given my interest in digital gaming and linguistic landscapes—focused on the local varieties of Spanish as well as an English-based gaming register used among gamers. In an ethnic sense, the boys, parents, and internet lounge owners I have worked with mostly identify as having originated in a rural, racially marked (i.e., as indigenous) lifestyle at the same time that they seek to overcome this socioeconomic position through education or non-agricultural employment.[6]

This is a region that has become a center for digital gaming as well as for efforts to regulate game play. In a survey of the downtown area of the city of Puno (an area of approximately 1,200 square meters), my research assistant identified a total of seventy-one internet lounges, four of which are gaming lounges (more on this distinction below). Whereas from 2006 to 2007 these lounges served a large number of tourists,[7] they now overwhelmingly serve lo-

6. See Leinaweaver's (2008) account of "getting ahead" or *salir adelante* in the context of Peru.
7. I was conducting an earlier project in this area during this time period.

cal Puneños: for example, students completing homework assignments, social media devotees (Facebook, in particular), adults seeking information on navigating Puno's bureaucracy, and—of course—a large population of mostly male-identified gamers. Puno and Juliaca have hosted a number of gaming tournaments, developing a roster of talent that, in a couple of cases, has achieved international renown.[8] As much as digital gaming has been embraced in this area, its popularity has also incited an intensively negative response on the part of local authorities, schools, and parents. Police, for example, regularly raid internet lounges looking for boys who are skipping school, raids that—as we will see—are the regular object of attention in the local media. On especially important school days, also, teachers search for game-playing boys before class.

The context of both internet use and gaming in southern Peru is, then, relatively distinctive. Although comparative scholarship on the internet and new media has primarily been couched in an idiom of relative deficiency (i.e., centering as it has on the "digital divide" across national contexts; see Guillén and Suárez 2005), it is more enlightening in this context to focus on how access to new media is differently configured across sociocultural contexts. In the context of the Department of Puno, for example, the primary way in which individuals gain access to the internet—and, ultimately, digital gaming—is through what I refer to as "internet lounges" (often referred to as *cabinas* in the Spanish of the region; Holmes 2001). These are places of business that, in addition to making available computers for one's personal usage, may—to some extent—specialize in some particular kind of internet usage (e.g., digital gaming) as well as offer some relatively distinctive conjunction of ancillary services (e.g., printing and photocopy services, the selling of snacks and soda, and the use of phones). Given the ubiquity of these lounges in Puno, it is a relatively salient social fact that the internet is a commodity that gets consumed in contexts that are more or less public and oftentimes quite sociable.

When boys and young men go to play digital games in the Puno area, they go to a kind of internet lounge that I will refer to as a "gaming lounge."[9] These are internet lounges that have specialized in gaming. An internet lounge that is a gaming lounge earns its reputation through the quality of its internet connection, its computers (i.e., their processing speed and graphics cards), and the

8. Two of the members of Peru's most respected DOTA team hail from southern Peru, a fact that is a source of pride for the Puno gaming community. This is a team that—under multiple names and a somewhat variable set of players—has experienced some success in international and Latin American gaming competitions.

9. I should be careful to note that digital gaming certainly occurs in nongaming internet lounges, alongside other kinds of internet usage.

quality of the gaming community that it supports (e.g., the level of talent and accomplishment in the community). Gaming lounges are spaces, also, that are designed to accommodate the kind of game play that boys and young men regularly undertake in the Puno area. The overwhelmingly most popular game in the current moment—a game called DOTA 2 (i.e., the second version of the game called Defense of the Ancients)—is a game that requires a space that can support collaboration between players, players referred to locally as *doteros*. It is a game that is ideally (but not necessarily) played between teams of five players, teams that boys usually assemble from networks of classmates and kin. The structure of a gaming lounge, then, is designed in such a way that individuals can easily view the monitors of surrounding computers, an arrangement that facilitates the coordination of team-based play.

Linguistic Landscape, the Channels of Public Signs, and Addressivity

One day in May 2013, my wife and I were wandering through the center of Puno trying to find a spot to check our e-mail and read the news from home. We stopped by our regular spot, but all of the computers were occupied. We strolled a couple blocks farther, and Nadia spotted a place that we hadn't noticed before. It was, unexpectedly, a marvel. There were sixty computer stations instead of the more normal twelve or thirteen. There were other differences. In our normal spot, the computers were lodged in wooden booths that ensured some measure of viewing privacy. In the new place, however, the computers were arrayed in such a way that users could easily see a neighboring screen. In our normal spot, adults were the primary users of computers, and they did so largely to prepare themselves for visits to the nearby notary and other government offices (e.g., by gathering information online, printing documents, and photocopying them). In the new spot, there were clusters of boys and young men circled around groups of computers, playing games in teams. The computers themselves mostly displayed the highly recognizable green playing field of the MMOG called Defense of the Ancients, a game that dominates the Puno gaming scene. This was a gaming internet lounge.

At the time, I was too struck by the fact that we had stumbled into a gaming lounge to notice a detail that now seems significant: that is, the fact that the lounge itself was difficult to notice from the sidewalk. This turned out to be true for most of the other gaming lounges in the downtown of Puno and elsewhere. Recall, for example, the lounge cited in my opening anecdote, the one located in the smaller town of Parlata. This was a location that receives no outer signage whatsoever. What signs exist for it are, in fact, advertisements for the store

on the first floor, a store owned and operated by the same family that manages the internet lounge upstairs. In this case, then, the lounge was not just difficult to notice from the main highway; it was impossible to notice. Similar examples abound. In the city of Ilave, there is a small store down from the main plaza that, from the outside, looks like it might only sell soft drinks, beer, snacks, and other necessities. On the inside, however, there is a door that leads to a windowless cluster of ten computers. In Puno, similarly, one of the major gaming lounges is on the second floor of a peach-colored building that, from the outside, appears to contain only a national registration office. In each of these cases, one has to be standing inside the lounge itself to be able to see that it is, indeed, a gaming lounge. They are, if you will, publicly illegible.

In other cases, however, gaming lounges were merely obscured from public visibility. The most interesting case is the one I stumbled into. As luck would have it, the unnamed gaming lounge is located next to another business that offers internet services. Despite offering similar services, their public presences are vastly different. The façade of the nongaming business lists its services clearly on multiple, easily viewable signs. In doing so, they take up an advertising register that is highly recognizable in the area. They present lists of things (e.g., photocopies, internet, rentable phone booths) that passersby are meant to interpret as an accounting of services offered inside. For the gaming lounge, however, there are no signs located on the outside façade of the building, and one of the two main, wooden doors remains permanently closed. However, if one happens upon a good viewing angle, there is, in fact, a relatively bright, blue sign that has been set back from the door itself. It is, if you will, more of a hint or whisper than an advertisement. In other ways, however, it is the same. It makes use of the same listlike advertising register as the adjacent internet business. It advertises internet services as well as the gaming software installed on the computers (Defense of the Ancients [always abbreviated as DOTA], Warcraft III, etc.).

The semiotic character of these public signs can be analyzed using the theoretical machinery introduced earlier. When I write that a gaming lounge is more or less obscure from public visibility, this is a claim that presupposes that roads, sidewalks, and buildings are semiotic technologies of a specific sort. As pedestrians in Puno walk down a road during the business day, they see, among other things, a series of signs or advertisements that can only be interpreted relative to (or as "emplaced" within) their infrastructural context. These advertisements are indexical signs (among other sign types), and they are directed to possible addressees. In an indexical sense, they are attached to the building

that—relative to a whole complex of other infrastructural features (i.e., doors, walls, differences in paint, etc.)—they (thereby) mark off as being a business of a specific sort. In terms of "addressivity," they are attached to buildings in such a way that allows for a specific kind of channel with respect to which they are interpretable: in the regular case, these signs are in a pedestrian's line of sight, readable, and they list commodities that are available for inspection and possible purchase. In the case of gaming lounges, however, the signs for these businesses maintain a different sign-channel-addressee relationship: they either have no channel available for possible addressees/passersby or the channel is designed in such a way that passersby have limited interpretive access.

These facts about the sign-channel-addressee relationships of gaming signs suggest—but only suggest—something about the "public character" of digital gaming. Why are they—at best—only marginally legible to the public space of passersby? An additional fact about the sign-channel-addressee relations of gaming signs is suggestive in this regard. It is not always the case that gaming lounges disarticulate with public space in the way described above. In the city of Puno, for example, there are gaming lounges near the public university that are legible to passersby. Gaming lounges in this area are publicly marked and often note that DOTA is available. Santos, an ambitious owner of one of these lounges, offers a hint about why this is the case. Whereas the lounges that are publicly unmarked are located in the center of the city itself (e.g., close to schools, plazas, government buildings), he noted that his own lounge—as well as the other, more fully marked lounges—are located in an area that is geographically marginal and dominated by businesses understood to serve students at the local university.[10] Most importantly, these are businesses that occupy a specific "slot" in the moral geography of the city: the area had once been home to nightclubs and bars, and now gaming lounges have replaced many of them.[11] This observation invites a question that I take up in what follows: How does digital gaming get assimilated to a broader category of publicly threatening, moral indecencies?

Newspapers, Morality, Media Ideologies

After an hour or so of shopping in Puno's central market, I stopped off at a kiosk that sells newspapers and pamphlets along the side of one of the city's main plazas. Among the papers strung up on the kiosk was an image that, de-

10. This observation implies that the meaning of the "public/private" distinction, as Gal (2002) notes, has a fractally recursive dimension that does meaningful conceptual work only in specific contexts.

11. De la Cadena (2000, 37) makes a similar observation about the moral geography of Cuzco.

spite its small size, stood out to me. It was a photo in which a group of four boys were crouching on the side of a road, their hands mostly behind their heads. The boys were wearing the bright red and white colors of their school's uniform, and two policemen watched over them, their pickup truck partly visible on the right side of the photo. It was an affecting image. These were boys, after all, and they wore the icon of childhood dutifulness (i.e., uniforms of local public schools), yet they were quite apparently being rounded up by the police. Once I nudged close enough to read the story,[12] the image started to make a certain grim sense. The photo depicted part of the results of a campaign in the city of Juliaca in which police had raided a series of internet lounges during the school day. As a result of their efforts, a "great quantity" of boys had been discovered in internet lounges when, given the time of day (and their uniforms), they should have been in school. These were, then, boys who had failed to live up to their duty, and they were paying the consequences. It was not only the image itself that was affecting. There was an eerie iconicity between this event of capture and my own act of reading: here I was, among others, on the side of the road, inspecting these boys—and there they were, on the side of the road, being held up to the inspection of the police.

This kind of story has had a relatively intense career in a segment of the mass media in the Puno area. In a stylistic sense, this kind of story has appeared in newspapers and venues that, drawing on Gargurevich's typology of Peruvian mass media (2000), sit at the border between "formal" and "sensationalist" forms of mass mediation, a point that will become evident in the analysis that follows. These are venues (e.g., *El Correo*, *Los Andes*, and the website of Pachamama Radio) that focus on local news, politics, and culture—unlike a Lima-based newspaper like *El Comercio* that mostly covers national and global topics. In doing so, these media serve a very specific segment of the public. They address the anxieties and interests of a working class population that embraces certain parts of their indigenous heritage while also seeking to overcome its stigma (see de la Cadena's [2005] similar characterization). Common topics are problems with the health of humans and animals in high-elevation indigenous areas, the spectacle of the bus crashes that plague transit between rural and urban areas, and the allure of the images that emerge from the dense ritual calendar of the nation-state. These are media, then, that can help to reveal the way in which digital gaming counts as a public moral concern, espe-

12. The kiosk is an interesting case where newspapers are inspected publicly and silently. This contrasts with Anderson's (1983) private and silent readers and Cody's (2011b) public and audible ones.

cially for families and individuals who—like the ones who are my concern in this article—maintain connections to a rural, racially marked agricultural lifestyle at the same time that they seek out the markets and opportunities of cities like Puno.

Stories and images of gaming boys and police were a frequent occurrence in these papers during a six-month stretch in 2013. From April to September, the major media outlets of the city of Puno published a series of (at least) eight articles that reported on the police roundups of boys. In April through June, the two major Puno newspapers (*El Correo* and *Los Andes*) published five articles that fully realized this form of reportage.[13] Denotationally, these stories invariably cite the number of boys discovered, specify the time of day (importantly, as the "school day"), describe the event as an event of police intervention, and note what happened to the boys (i.e., as being returned to their parents, often at their school). In three of these five articles, the authors note that the boys had been playing internet games, but they do not go on to characterize these games more fully (as, for example, first-person shooter games or MMOGs). The accompanying images—that is, photographs of the denotationally described event—capture what appears to be a moment of arrest, even if it is nothing of the sort. The images all show a police pickup truck with uniform-clad boys who are in various stages of being loaded into the bed of the pickup, with one or more police supervising the process.

These articles wield the voice of a "journalistic objectivity" or realist reportage that is suffused more or less explicitly with a certain kind of moral sensibility. These incidences are newsworthy, after all, because these boys are not fulfilling their obligation to attend school. It is more than this, however. These boys are, if you will, doing the opposite of schoolwork. They are playing. This moral vision seeps through in other more overt ways. In the April 3rd *Los Andes* article, this moral perspective is stated explicitly: the boys found in internet lounges were described as having been "seduced by the vice or bad habit of internet games." These boys are not psychologically disordered (i.e., as gaming addicts or as neglectful).[14] They are morally disordered. They are beholden to bad things and lured away from responsibility. In an April 3rd *El Correo* article, it becomes clear that this moral disorder is not just a char-

13. I cannot claim that this number represents the full number of times that such stories appeared in these papers. I have examples of stories that, although they appeared in print, have not yet been archived in the papers' searchable databases.

14. There are, however, institutional arenas in which these boys are more likely to be figured as "addicts" than as "sinners"—in the school itself, for example. See Golub and Lingley (2008) for an analysis of "internet addiction" as a moral crisis in contemporary China.

acteristic of the boys themselves. The unnamed author reports that school administrators planned to tell the parents of these boys that they should instruct their children to take school more seriously. In this case, the moral problem of digital gaming is made to extend to those who bear responsibility for a child (i.e., parents). In other words, the "vice" of digital gaming is imagined to be the result of a familial context in which parents are not instructing or raising their sons in the way that they should.[15]

Excessive or problematic gaming[16] is not just the result of disordered families; it also disorders families. A July 12, 2012, article on the website of Pachamama Radio makes this clear. The article of interest was entitled "In Juliaca, youth threatens mother with a knife for money in order to go to internet lounge." In the first line of this story, we find out that this youth is, indeed, a male—or, as he's described more particularly, a son. Later in the article, it is made clear that the son had intended to go play internet games. Alongside the story itself, the unnamed author has posted a photo of the item that makes the story a spectacle: it is a photo of a sparkling clean knife, gripped fiercely, and pictured above a cutting board set atop a kitchen table. This is a text artefact that is analogous to the ones considered above. It makes use of the Spanish orthographic system as well as an imagistic modality. And, the photo captures the central (im)moral intrigue of the event: the fierce wielding of a knife in domestic space. In this case, interestingly, the gripping of a knife is not a scene captured from the original, documented event (i.e., it is not a photograph of the scene of the crime). Instead, it is an imagistic break from the voice of realist reportage, analogous to the moral sensibility analyzed above. It imaginatively portrays and sets into a domestic scene an agent and instrument that, given the rest of the article, were presumably a part of the original event (i.e., the arm and knife, leaving out the victim).

This article reveals how problematic gaming perturbs the moral life of families. The knife-wielding youth is twice referred to as a "bad son." The person he attacks is referred to as a "mother." His game-playing habit is a "vice" and

15. One detects here the traditional racial paternalism that has been institutionalized in school systems throughout the Andes. As Larson notes about early twentieth century Bolivia, the concern among educators was that "once the Indian child left the enlightened sphere of learning," they would slip "back into the stupefying routines, debauchery and vices of village life" (2005, 39). It follows, then, that "the child and the family were set in place as the object, mechanism, and rationale for state intervention" (2005, 39). In the case of digital gaming, it is clear that the (indigenous) family is (still) understood to be the proper unit for moral reeducation.

16. "Problematic gaming" is a concept that has been brought to anthropological discourse by the work of Snodgrass and his colleagues (see Snodgrass et al. 2014). I use it as a way to describe gaming that is recognized by parents in the Puno area as being excessive. It is a concept that allows one to avoid medicalized terms like "internet addiction."

is something that has "blinded" him. The instrument he uses is referred to as a "kitchen knife." The moral logic of this scene is clear: in his violent response to his mother's refusal, the "bad son" violates the expectation that kinship relations should be based in sentiment, in age-based forms of authority, and in relationships of reciprocity. In other words, his act raises the possibility of a moral world set on its head: his act is grounded in aggression (not sentiment), in the subversion of parental authority (and not its respect), and in violent coercion (rather than reciprocity). He even perverts the meaning of a symbol of domesticity (i.e., the kitchen knife), although one might imagine that this is the least of his offenses. This is a story that, in its full moral arc, subverts the familiar "media ideology" (Gershon 2010) on video games in the United States. It is not that violent video games beget violence; in this instance, the desire to play has become so overwhelming that it begets violence, violence that disorders the (already partly disordering) moral ecology of sons, mothers, and family.

These observations suggest the saliency of a moral logic with respect to which digital gaming gets understood as—at best—morally dubious, a logic that also helps to make sense of the marginal legibility of gaming signs in the linguistic landscapes of southern Peru. Both sets of facts—the moral and the semiotic—speak to what I have referred to as the public character of digital gaming. The newspapers of southern Peru frame digital gaming as disordering with respect to sons, families, and, ultimately, the educational system (i.e., the nation). In doing so, gaming is understood as analogous to other publicly threatening forms of moral indecency: these stories about gaming are mostly located in a section of the newspaper that documents other indecencies like criminality, violence, and the consequences of alcohol abuse. The public-sign/channel relationship(s) of gaming signs is inflected with this same public moral panic. Recall that, to the extent that some urban area gets understood as public, gaming signs are marginally legible to passersby. This illegibility is not an accident or a mere curiosity. The gaming lounges, their patrons, and the commodity they sell (i.e., digital gaming) are excluded from the most fully public world of cities like Puno. To put it more precisely, they do not belong to the world of businesses, persons, and commodities that are made to circulate publicly in a way that is both legible and morally legitimate. The question now becomes: How do passersby make moral sense of the public (non)presence of gaming lounges?

More Intimate Mediations: Language Ideologies and Linguistic Landscape

The overwhelming semiotic indirection of lounges is not an exclusively infrastructural fact; it also receives explicit, (language) ideological attention from

at least two different perspectives. In the case of lounge owners and gamers, semiotic indirection is explicitly understood—that is, ideologically—to be a consequence of the way that a gaming lounge ideally addresses its customers. Santos, for example, makes use of a broad array of advertising, virtual and otherwise. His lounge has a Facebook page on which he posts upcoming events. He sponsors DOTA teams that travel to area gaming tournaments. He uploads video advertisements to a YouTube channel. Although these are important media for advertisement, Santos, along with other owners, observes that a gaming lounge's reputation and relative prestige are ultimately what creates a stable circle of customers. For example, Jhony, a co-owner of a publicly unmarked lounge in downtown Puno, argues that two things are crucial to his lounge's success: its reputation for excellent game play (i.e., its prestige) and its reputation for technological advancement (e.g., fast internet speeds, graphics cards, high-quality headphones). These two forms of reaching a purchasing public are complementary: the "virtual linguistic landscape" (see Ivkovic and Lotherington 2009) of gaming lounges on Facebook and YouTube—a landscape understood to be beyond the ability of local authorities to surveil—aims to advance the reputation of a gaming lounge for high-quality game play as well as to create a social network for which its reputation is presupposable.

In the context of this article, the more interesting form of ideological attention is the following: outside of the gaming world, the public disarticulation of gaming lounges receives considerable, explicit negative moral commentary. For parents of game-playing boys, this disarticulation in and of itself warrants a measure of moral suspicion. In an interview, Clara, for example, a Puno mother of one game-playing boy, lamented that gaming lounges are often challenging for parents to physically locate: "One can't find the internet lounges, and the other thing is that some of the shopkeepers hide them." She went on to say that parenting in such a context felt like being a herder trying to find a lost animal. In other words, it felt morally degrading to both her and her son. Similarly, Rosa, an Ilave mother of two boys, described the surprise of entering a store or business and then noticing—with some disgust—a second, partly obscured room full of loud, vulgar game players. In this instance, she associates a fact about the lounge's public disarticulation or semiotic indirection with an ideologically evaluated category of speech (i.e., *grosserias* or "vulgarities") widely thought to be a common form of speaking in gaming lounges. With the example of Rosa, one gets the clearest sense of the way in which the semiotic indirection of gaming lounges gets associated with a negative, moral evaluation of vulgarity.

For parents and other social actors, the public disarticulation of gaming lounges also gets associated with extra-legality. Mery, a good friend and former internet lounge worker in Puno, insisted that these kinds of lounges—unlike the one where she used to work, a tourist-focused internet lounge—operated outside of the law. She claimed that the owners of gaming lounges did not have the necessary permits to operate as a business, nor did they follow the laws that regulate internet lounges (about, especially, access to pornographic content).[17] In this instance, Mery associates the public disarticulation of these lounges with a form of extra-legality that also counts as a matter of public moral concern: that is, the way in which such lounges are purported to serve as centers for the circulation of pornography. Although Mery's knowledge of these regulations is exceptional, her perspective is echoed in media commentary and in casual conversation that frames gaming lounges as legally and morally suspect and, therefore, justifiably available for police intervention. If the analysis in the previous paragraph suggests a parental or even domestic moral concern about the semiotic indirection of these lounges, Mery's example suggests a set of moral concerns related to a public world of law, legal discipline, and moral indecency. Both examples show how gaming lounges come to be understood as projecting a set of morally corrupting qualities (i.e., qualia; see Chumley and Harkness 2013) onto game-playing boys, qualities that get ascribed to these boys as a part of their moral character.[18]

The dialogical relationship between these two broad ideological positions—that is, the perspectives of lounge owners as well as parents and local authorities—demonstrates the saliency of this conjunction of public moral concern, the characteristics of gaming signage, and the ideological commentary that targets this signage. I hinted at this at the beginning of this section. When the owners of gaming lounges make use of a "virtual linguistic landscape" as well as the online and offline circulation of reputation, they assemble a conjunction of moral concern, (virtual) signage, and ideological evaluation that competes with the one that has been the primary object of concern in this article. It is not only important that, as noted above, lounge owners assume that the virtual landscape that they construct and inhabit is beyond the ability of local authorities and parents to surveil. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to explore this in detail, it is clear, also, that the lounge owners and *doteros*

17. In my observations and interviews with gaming lounge owners, I do not believe that this is the case.

18. Michael Silverstein helpfully notes that discourses in the United States similarly imagine video games as being imbued with a violence that children are thought to reproduce.

attempt to construct a counterhegemonic moral world—indeed, a counterpublic in Fraser's sense (1990)—in which digital gaming gets associated with virtues such as skillfulness, teamwork, courage, and cosmopolitanism.[19] These actors are a little like the Parlata boys described in my opening anecdote: just like the boys who—through the way they physically navigate the city—sense the disapproval of the public character of Parlata, owners and *doteros* construct a semiotic and moral world that evades and upends the world of parents and local authorities.

In sum, my analysis here has helped to reveal the "total linguistic fact" (Silverstein 1985) that surrounds the linguistic landscapes of southern Peru. Along these lines, it is not too much to say that the absence of signage for gaming lounges and their disarticulation with public space count as a meaningful and structuring absence (Kulick 2003), given their moral and ideological environments. Or, to put it more forcefully, the analysis reveals that the public world constituted through what we might call "urban infrastructural semiosis" does not include—or, even, it excludes—the MMOG-playing gamer or *dotero*.[20] This final section provided the key piece of evidence, when considered in light of the two previous empirical sections. In the case of gaming lounges, the characteristics of the public sign-channel-addressee relation come to be subjected to an explicitly moralizing ideology (e.g., on vulgarity, extra-legality, and moral indecency), one that is, importantly, continuous with the moral logic on indecency examined in the previous section. From this perspective, then, the "moral panic" that has surrounded digital gaming in southern Peru can be understood as having precisely these semiotic and ideological characteristics: it is inscribed in public signs and infrastructural context, signs that are made sense of, ideologically, as a threat to the moral contours of southern Peruvian public life.

Conclusion

In the preceding three sections, I have couched my analysis as an exploration of a specific ethnographic issue: the ideologically mediated relationship between moral panic and the characteristics of public gaming signage in extreme southern Peru. However, my goal in this piece is, also, a theoretical one. Al-

19. See Taylor's (2012) account on this score.

20. This is a form of infrastructural exclusion that is neither "horizontal" nor "vertical," to make use of O'Neill and Fogarty-Valenzuela's (2013) implicit typology. It is a kind of segregation that depends neither on keeping persons in or out (i.e., the horizontal axis, useful for thinking about walls or other tactics of displacement) nor on keeping them above or below (i.e., the vertical axis, useful for theorizing "upward" urban growth like skyscrapers). It depends, rather, on an axis of semiotic contrast.

though the concept "linguistic landscape" has mostly been used to make sense of highly multilingual, globalizing urban contexts, I hope to show that this issue does not exhaust the full conceptual reach of this term for sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists. Accordingly, my intention in what follows is to have this ethnographic case speak to two theoretical possibilities that the concept "linguistic landscape" affords.

One of these possibilities is to consider more fully the relationship that some linguistic landscape bears to its broader infrastructural context, an issue that has to a certain extent been explored in the linguistic landscape work of Blommaert and Maly (2014) and Aronin and Laoire (2013), among others. In my own rendering of the concept "infrastructure," I have considered it relative to a theme that has been of classic and increasingly contemporary semiotic concern: the role of channels—or, to echo Jakobson's framing (1960), the role of the phatic function—in semiosis. When, for example, one inspects the channels available for the uptake of some public sign, one is led to consider the relationship between that sign and the infrastructural or material context of its deployment. Although I do not mean to imply that there is just one dimension of semiotic contrast at stake here, the study of public sign-channel-addressee relations does readily invite the following question: How clear, legible, and available for uptake is some public sign, given its relationship to an infrastructural context composed of things like doors, walls, roads, sidewalks, and so on? To what extent are doors, walls, roads, sidewalks, and so on designed as semiotic technologies that allow for a certain socially recognizable set of channel-linguistic landscape relationships? Given the utility of the concept of infrastructure in contemporary cultural anthropology (e.g., see Larkin 2013), the concept of linguistic landscape potentially counts as a semiotic take on this issue, a move that is parallel to (and inspired by) current semiotic work on channels and what Nozawa has termed "phaticity" (see Kockelman 2010; Nozawa 2015; Smith 2016).

The concept of linguistic landscape is also useful for thinking through the role of mass mediation in the ideological imagination of collective (and especially national) identities. Although it is perhaps too tempting to consider public signs to be just that (i.e., public), it is important—following here the work of Silverstein (2000) on this general problem—not to reify such signs as inherently bringing about some kind of public sphere. In this piece, for example, I have considered how public signs—importantly, in coordination with both language ideologies and a local understanding of morality—help to make salient the public meaningfulness of digital gaming (e.g., its status as a moral

indecency destructive to sons, families, and schools).[21] One useful consequence of this analysis is that it provides a vision of the public sphere that is, however mediated by forms of mass mediation, distinctly non-Habermasian. If, in the classic work of Anderson (1983) and Taylor (2003), we see the reflexes of a public sphere that is liberal (characterized, for example, as a common topical space for political discussion not directly controlled by a state), then, in the linguistic landscapes of southern Peru, we find a public sphere that is decidedly illiberal (see Cody [2015] for another example). In this ethnographic case, it takes shape as something that constrains action (i.e., the act of digital gaming), pushes certain classes of person to the public margins, and is best characterized as a kind of moral orientation. It is, then, neither a space for rational deliberation nor a topical space that is common. One of the promises of the ethnographic study of linguistic landscapes, then, is the broadened lens it provides on the mass mediation of collective forms of identification, perhaps especially in moments of public moral panic.

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21. I should note that architects as well as architectural critics have long observed the way in which moral regimes come to be implicated in the design of the built environment.

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