



Linguistic Landscape and the Representation of European Union Power in Robert Menasse's Novel *Die Hauptstadt*

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Abstract

Linguistic landscape research has increasingly moved beyond the inventory of public signage toward the interpretation of how visible language, naming practices, and semiotic arrangements construct social and political meanings. However, literary texts remain underexplored as semiotic environments in which public space can be narrated, selected, and ideologically organized. This article examines how European Union (EU) power and legitimacy are represented through a narrated linguistic landscape in Robert Menasse's novel *Die Hauptstadt*. Using a qualitative interpretive textual design, the study treats the novel as the primary data source and integrates linguistic landscape theory, multimodal social semiotics, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Data were collected through systematic close reading and keyword-assisted searching of the PDF text to identify excerpts containing Brussels/EU toponyms, institutional labels, bureaucratic discourse, written-display references, multilingual routines, and legitimacy-related terms. The excerpts were documented in an excerpt log, translated when necessary, coded in two cycles, and interpreted through Fairclough's textual, discursive, and social dimensions. The findings show that the novel represents EU authority as a semiotic achievement produced through spatial anchoring, institutional naming, bureaucratic classification, multilingual routines, and image-management discourse. At the same time, this authority is destabilized by counter-semiotic disruption, street-level contestation, and moral-memory motifs. The study concludes that *Die Hauptstadt* constructs Brussels as a narrated semiotic landscape where EU power becomes visible, persuasive, and fragile because legitimacy depends on signs, discourse, and public interpretation. The article contributes to linguistic landscape scholarship by demonstrating how fiction can function as an analytical site for examining narrated public space and political authority.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape; Narrated linguistic landscape; European union power; Legitimacy; Critical discourse analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Linguistic landscape (LL) studies examine how language and signs appear, circulate, and acquire social meaning in public space. Since the foundational work of Landry and Bourhis (1997a), LL has been widely understood as the study of visible written language on public signs, street names, billboards, commercial signage, official notices, and other semiotic objects displayed in shared spaces. Later studies have expanded this orientation by showing that public signs do not merely mirror multilingual realities; they organize social space, mark institutional authority, index collective identities, and make social hierarchies visible (Backhaus, 2007; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006a; Blommaert, 2013; Gorter, 2006). In this sense, LL is not simply a descriptive approach to the presence of languages in public writing, but also a critical approach to the symbolic construction of space, social ordering, and semiotic visibility (Kallen, 2023a; Pütz & Mundt, 2018; Smith, 2022a).

Recent scholarship has further shifted LL research from counting languages toward interpreting how signs operate in relation to ideology, mobility, identity, and power (Bagna & Bellinzona, 2023b; Malinowski et al., 2021; Seargeant et al., 2023; Wee, 2021). This development is particularly relevant for political and institutional spaces such as Brussels, where street names, multilingual routines, bureaucratic labels, institutional buildings, and public discourse intersect to produce the visibility of the European Union (EU).

This article extends LL analysis into a literary context by proposing the concept of a narrated linguistic landscape, an approach that treats literary narration as a space where signs, places, institutions, and symbolic objects are textually organized to produce social and political meaning (Kallen, 2023b; Smith, 2022b; Tally, 2020). A narrated linguistic landscape refers to the representation of public signs, place names, institutional labels, multilingual encounters, written displays, and symbolic objects as they are selected, framed, and interpreted within a literary narrative. This concept differs from conventional field-based LL research, which usually relies on photographed signage, direct urban observation, or empirical mapping of visible texts in public space. In a narrated linguistic landscape, the object of analysis is not the actual cityscape itself, but the semiotic environment constructed by the literary text. The signs are mediated through narration, characterization, focalization, description, irony, repetition, and plot structure. Therefore, literary fiction can function as a curated semiotic space where public signs are not merely mentioned as background details, but are narratively organized to produce ideological meanings, spatial imaginaries, and political interpretations of place (Ryan et al., 2016; Smith, 2022b). This distinction is important because a novel may foreground toponyms, institutional names, bureaucratic acronyms, multilingual routines, monuments, documents, slogans, and disruptions not simply to describe a place, but to construct a political interpretation of that place.

The need to expand LL into literary analysis is supported by the theoretical convergence between linguistic landscape studies, multimodal social semiotics, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). From a multimodal social semiotic perspective, meaning is produced not only through words but also through the arrangement of signs, spatial salience, symbolic objects, and the relation between language and social context (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Representation is therefore an active process that constructs reality rather than passively reflects it (Hall, 1997). From a CDA perspective, discourse contributes to the production and reproduction of power relations, institutional identity, and legitimacy (Fairclough, 2010). These perspectives make it possible to examine literary texts as semiotic environments in which language, space, and discourse work together to represent political authority. In the context of the present study, LL provides the categories of signs, multimodal social semiotics explains how those signs become meaningful within narrative space, and CDA connects the signs to broader issues of power, legitimacy, bureaucracy, and public interpretation.

Robert Menasse's *Die Hauptstadt* is a highly relevant literary object for this approach because the novel repeatedly turns Brussels and the EU Commission into problems of visibility, legitimacy, and public meaning. The opening image, "*In Brüssel laufen die Fäden zusammen, und ein Schwein durch die Straßen*" ('In Brussels, all the threads come together, and a pig runs through the streets'), immediately frames the "capital" of Europe as both an administrative center and an uncanny, disrupted urban space (Menasse, 2017, p. 1). Brussels is not presented merely as a neutral setting for the plot. Rather, the city is constructed through recurring names, landmarks, street signs, institutional labels, bureaucratic routines, multilingual exchanges, public image strategies, and symbolic disruptions. These elements form an ecology of signs through which EU authority becomes visible, explainable, persuasive, fragile, and contestable. The novel, therefore,

provides a productive site for examining how political authority is not only narrated through characters and events, but also through the linguistic and semiotic organization of space.

Several sign types are especially important in *Die Hauptstadt*. Toponyms and institutional landmarks such as *Schuman-Platz*, *Berlaymont*, *Justus Lipsius*, and *Rue Joseph II* spatially anchor EU power and turn Brussels into a recognizable map of supranational governance. Institutional labels such as *Kommission*, *Direktorat*, *Corporate Identity*, and *Image* classify actors and functions within a bureaucratic order while also suggesting the need for institutional self-presentation. Multilingual encounters, such as the sequence "*Goedenavond* ('Good evening'), *Bonsoir* ('Good evening'), *Monsieur* ('Sir'), *Au revoir!* ('Goodbye!'), *Tot ziens* ('Goodbye')," represent Brussels as a practical European contact zone where language alternation becomes part of everyday interaction (Menasse, 2017, p. 182). Bureaucratic and legitimacy-related expressions, including "*mangelnde demokratische Legitimation*" ('lack of democratic legitimacy'), "*wuchernde Bürokratie*" ('bloated bureaucracy'), and "*Regulierungswahn*" ('regulatory obsession'), show that EU authority in the novel must constantly be explained, defended, and translated into public credibility (Menasse, 2017, p. 39). These signs are not isolated textual details; they operate as semiotic mechanisms through which the novel represents the tension between institutional power and public perception.

Existing scholarship provides a strong foundation for this study, but two important gaps remain. First, LL research has largely focused on empirical public signage, schoolscapes, commercial signs, institutional notices, urban multilingualism, and photographed semiotic artefacts, while literary fiction remains less frequently examined as a semiotic environment where public space is narrated, selected, and ideologically organized (Ayyub & Rohmah, 2024; Kallen, 2023b; Mou & Wu, 2023; Römhild, 2023). As a result, the potential of novels to construct linguistic landscapes through narrative form has not been sufficiently explored. Second, although European multilingualism, EU identity, and European integration have been widely discussed in discourse studies and cultural studies, limited attention has been given to how EU legitimacy is constructed as a sign-based representational process in literary texts. In particular, the role of naming, institutional labeling, multilingual routines, bureaucratic discourse, image-management language, disruption motifs, and moral-memory references in representing EU power remains underdeveloped. These gaps indicate the need for an approach that treats literary space as a meaningful semiotic landscape and examines how signs within that landscape contribute to the construction and contestation of supranational authority.

The novelty of this study lies in its use of the narrated linguistic landscape as an analytical concept for reading EU power in Robert Menasse's *Die Hauptstadt*. Unlike conventional LL research that documents physical signs in an actual city, this study analyzes how a novel constructs public space through narrated signs and language practices. It therefore contributes to LL scholarship by showing that fiction can function as a semiotic site where public space, institutional authority, multilingualism, and legitimacy are narratively produced. It also contributes to literary discourse analysis by demonstrating that political power in fiction can be examined not only through theme, plot, or characterization, but also through toponyms, institutional labels, multilingual scripts, bureaucratic genres, and symbolic disruptions. Finally, the study contributes to EU legitimacy research by showing how supranational authority is represented as a semiotic accomplishment that depends on visibility, discourse, naming, public interpretation, and moral memory.

Drawing on LL theory (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006a; Landry & Bourhis, 1997a), multimodal social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006a; Smith, 2022b), and CDA

(Fairclough, 2010a), this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What types of linguistic and semiotic signs, including toponyms, institutional labels, multilingual routines, written-display references, and symbolic place references, are foregrounded in *Die Hauptstadt*? (2) How do these signs construct, legitimize, or problematize EU authority and institutional credibility in the narrative? (3) How does the novel's narrated semiotic landscape illuminate tensions between supranational governance and lived perceptions of bureaucracy, belonging, crisis, and moral memory? By answering these questions, this article aims to explain how *Die Hauptstadt* constructs Brussels as a narrated linguistic landscape in which EU power becomes visible, persuasive, and vulnerable through the circulation of signs, discourse, and public meaning.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative interpretive textual analysis, which is appropriate for examining how textual signs, narrative space, institutional labels, and symbolic motifs construct meaning within literary discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2023; Smith, 2022a; Wodak, 2021a). It is a literary-text-based study, not a field-based linguistic landscape study involving public-sign photography, respondents, or urban observation. The research design integrates linguistic landscape theory to identify narrated signs and language visibility, multimodal social semiotics to interpret how signs, places, labels, and symbolic objects produce meaning, and Critical Discourse Analysis to connect textual representation with power, legitimacy, and institutional ideology (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006b; Fairclough, 2010b; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006b; Landry & Bourhis, 1997b; Smith, 2022b).

Data Sources

The primary data source is the PDF version of Robert Menasse's *Die Hauptstadt* (Menasse, 2017). The novel was selected purposively because it explicitly foregrounds Brussels, EU institutions, multilingual urban encounters, bureaucratic routines, and legitimacy discourse. These features make the text suitable for analyzing how EU authority is represented through a narrated semiotic environment. The study does not involve human participants; therefore, the data consist entirely of textual excerpts from the novel. The unit of analysis is a narrative excerpt that contains a linguistic or semiotic sign relevant to EU power, legitimacy, institutional identity, multilingualism, spatial anchoring, bureaucratic classification, disruption, or moral memory.

The inclusion criteria were formulated to maintain methodological boundaries. Excerpts were included when they contained: (1) Brussels/EU toponyms and spatial markers, such as streets, squares, transport nodes, or institutional buildings; (2) institutional labels, titles, acronyms, directorates, or administrative terminology; (3) narrated or quoted written displays, including street signs, documents, slogans, official labels, or textual objects; (4) multilingual routines or code-switching in public, institutional, or mobility-related settings; and (5) discourse explicitly connected to EU legitimacy, bureaucracy, governance, image-making, crisis, or memory. Excerpts were excluded when they did not contribute to the interpretation of public space, institutional power, or sign-based representation.

Instruments

Several research instruments were used to make the interpretive process systematic. The close-reading guide directed attention to place, speaker, institution, sign type, context, narrative tone, and ideological implication. The keyword-search list contained spatial terms, institutional names, bureaucratic vocabulary, multilingual expressions, and

legitimacy-related terms, including Schuman, Berlaymont, Justus, Rue Joseph II, Kommission, Direktorat, Image, Corporate Identity, Legitimation, Bürokratie, Regulierungswahn, Europa, Auschwitz, Schwein, Goedenavond, Bonsoir, Pardon, and other recurring items. The coding sheet recorded the initial code, higher-order category, excerpt function, and relevant research question. The excerpt identification log recorded page number, original German excerpt, English gloss, narrative context, and analytical memo. A translation record was used to maintain consistency in rendering German excerpts into English. The CDA guide organized interpretation according to Fairclough's textual, discursive, and social dimensions.

Data collection proceeded in five stages. First, the PDF text was read fully to understand the narrative context, plot structure, and distribution of EU-related episodes. Second, keyword-assisted searching was conducted to locate recurring references to EU institutions, place names, multilingual expressions, and legitimacy-related discourse. Third, relevant passages were re-read in context to avoid isolating keywords from their narrative function. Fourth, excerpts that met the inclusion criteria were documented in the excerpt log with page references and brief contextual notes. Fifth, a smaller set of representative excerpts was selected for detailed discussion based on recurrence, salience, contrast, and relevance to the research questions.

Table 1. Research Instruments and Functions

Instruments	Main Contents	Function in the study
Close-reading guide	Place, actor, sign type, narrative tone, ideological implication	Ensured that each excerpt was interpreted in a narrative context.
Keyword-search list	EU place names, institutional terms, multilingual expressions, and legitimacy terms	Supported systematic identification of recurring LL-related passages.
Excerpt log	Page number, German excerpt, English gloss, context, analytical memo	Created an audit trail for data selection and interpretation.
Coding sheet	Initial codes, categories, research-question links	Organized the two-cycle coding process.
Translation record	Original German terms and consistent English glosses	Supported translation accuracy and transparency.
CDA guide	Textual, discursive, and social-practice dimensions	Linked semiotic evidence to power and legitimacy analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two coding cycles. In the first cycle, excerpts were coded descriptively according to sign type: toponyms and landmarks, institutional labels and bureaucratic naming, multilingual routines, written-display references, disruption motifs, and moral-memory discourse. In the second cycle, these descriptive codes were grouped into interpretive categories: spatialized authority, legitimacy work, bureaucratic distance, practical multilingualism, counter-semiotic disruption, and bureaucratized moral memory. Approximate frequency counts from the searchable PDF were used only as supporting indicators to show recurrence and prominence. These counts did not replace close reading and were not treated as statistical proof.

Interpretation followed an integrated LL-CDA procedure. At the textual level, the study examined how words, names, labels, multilingual tokens, and symbolic motifs made EU power visible or questionable. At the discursive-practice level, the analysis considered

how these signs functioned within institutional routines, public encounters, and narrative scenes of image management or contestation. At the social-practice level, the interpretation connected these patterns to broader issues of supranational governance, public legitimacy, bureaucratic distance, multilingual belonging, crisis, and European memory.

Trustworthiness was maintained through theoretical triangulation across LL, multimodal social semiotics, and CDA; an audit trail consisting of excerpt IDs, page references, coding notes, and category definitions; and peer-oriented checking of selected categories for coherence. Translation accuracy was supported by retaining the German excerpt beside the English gloss and by checking meaning against the scene context. Because the analysis is based on a published literary text, ethical risk is minimal. The claims of the study are limited to representational patterns in the selected novel and are not presented as empirical proof of actual EU political behavior or the real Brussels linguistic landscape.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The overall result is that *Die Hauptstadt* constructs EU power as a narrated semiotic landscape rather than as a purely institutional or policy-based phenomenon. The novel foregrounds six interrelated representational patterns: spatialized authority, legitimacy work, bureaucratic distance, practical multilingualism, counter-semiotic disruption, and moral-memory discourse. These findings answer the first research question by identifying the main types of signs in the text; they answer the second research question by showing how those signs make EU authority visible, legitimate, unstable, or contested; and they answer the third research question by showing how the narrated landscape connects supranational governance with everyday perceptions of bureaucracy, belonging, crisis, and memory.

The findings should be read as literary-representational patterns. They do not claim to prove how the EU actually operates, nor do they describe the empirical linguistic landscape of Brussels. Instead, they show how Menasse's novel represents EU authority through repeated semiotic arrangements. The most salient signs include EU toponyms and landmarks, institutional labels and acronyms, bureaucratic discourse, multilingual routines, disruptive counter-signs, and references to European moral memory. Table 2 summarizes the main findings.

Table 2. Summary of EU Power Representation in *Die Hauptstadt*

No.	Finding	Representative evidence	Representational meaning
1	EU power is spatialized.	" <i>Schuman-Platz</i> " ('Schuman Square'), " <i>Berlaymont</i> ", " <i>Justus-Lipsius-Gebäude</i> " ('Justus Lipsius building'), " <i>Rue Joseph II</i> "	EU authority becomes visible through named institutional spaces.
2	EU legitimacy is discursively managed.	" <i>mangelnde demokratische Legitimation</i> " ('lack of democratic legitimacy') Corporate Identity; Image	The EU is represented as needing continuous public justification and symbolic repair.
3	Bureaucracy creates distance.	Direktorat C; EAC-C-2; "Arche" ('ark')	Classification gives institutional order but also produces detachment from everyday meaning.

No.	Finding	Representative evidence	Representational meaning
4	Multilingualism operates as routine practice.	" <i>Goedenavond</i> ('Good evening'), <i>Bonsoir</i> ('Good evening'), <i>Monsieur</i> ('Sir'), <i>Au revoir!</i> ('Goodbye!'), <i>Tot ziens</i> ('Goodbye'), <i>Pardon!</i> (Sorry!) "	Brussels appears as a practical European contact zone rather than a purely celebratory multilingual ideal.
5	Disruption functions as counter-semiotics.	" <i>Da läuft ein Schwein!</i> " ('There is a pig running!'), tractors in Rue Joseph II; blocked streets	Counter-signs interrupt the <i>technocratic</i> order and reveal the fragility of official space.
6	Moral memory is bureaucratized.	<i>Auschwitz</i> references; <i>institutional</i> planning around memory	Ethical legitimacy is weakened when <i>historical</i> memory becomes administrative procedure.

A small lexical scan of the searchable digital text supports the qualitative pattern. The terms *Kommission* (approximately 142 occurrences), *Schwein* (approximately 105), and *Auschwitz* (approximately 77) recur prominently, while *Image* (approximately 26), *Identität* (approximately 11), *Schuman* (approximately 11), *Berlaymont* (approximately 8), and *Justus* (approximately 5) also appear as meaningful indicators. These figures are approximate because digital text extraction can be affected by layout and hyphenation. Their value lies in showing that the novel repeatedly juxtaposes institutional authority, disruption, and memory. Figure 2 visualizes these supporting indicators.

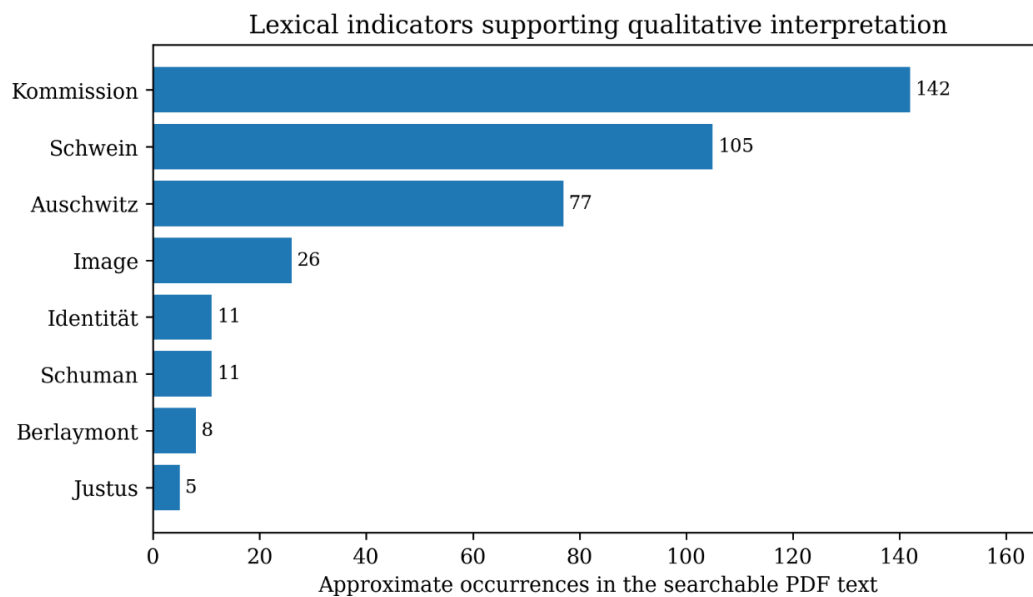


Figure 2. Lexical Indicators Supporting the Qualitative Interpretation

First, the novel spatializes EU power through toponyms and institutional landmarks. Place names such as *Schuman-Platz*, *Berlaymont*, *Justus-Lipsius-Gebäude*, and *Rue Joseph II* do more than locate action. They form a semiotic map of authority that makes Brussels legible as the administrative center of Europe. The police-interrogation scene, in which photographs are read through Schuman, Berlaymont, Justus Lipsius, and a street sign, shows how EU power is translated into a chain of recognizable spatial markers (Menasse, 2017, p. 17)

Second, the novel represents EU authority as a legitimate work. Public criticism of the Commission is condensed in labels such as "*mangelnde demokratische Legitimation*" ('lack of democratic legitimacy'), "*wuchernde Bürokratie*" ('bloated bureaucracy'), and "*Regulierungswahn*" ('regulatory obsession') (Menasse, 2017, p. 39). These terms show that EU power in the narrative is not only exercised through institutions; it must be explained, branded, justified, and made credible. References to Corporate Identity, Image, and anniversary planning further show that legitimacy is represented as a communicative and semiotic task.

Third, bureaucratic classification is one of the novel's strongest representational mechanisms. Labels such as *Direktorat C* and *EAC-C-2* create institutional order, but they also produce distance. They make governance appear rational and structured while simultaneously suggesting that the public meaning of Europe can be trapped inside administrative categories. The metaphor of the department as an "Arche" ('ark') intensifies this distance by suggesting bureaucratic self-preservation rather than democratic purpose (Menasse, 2017, p. 29).

Fourth, multilingualism is narrated as an everyday practice. The sequence "*Goedenavond* ('Good evening'), *Bonsoir* ('Good evening'), *Monsieur* ('Sir'), *Au revoir!* ('Goodbye!'), *Tot ziens* ('Goodbye')," presents Brussels multilingualism as a practical routine of politeness and local navigation (Menasse, 2017, p. 189). This pattern suggests that European belonging is enacted through small interactional scripts, not only through official policy. At the same time, multilingual routines often appear in spaces of mobility and control, showing that language choice is embedded in the management of access, movement, and institutional proximity.

Fifth, the novel destabilizes official order through counter-semiotic disruption. The recurring pig motif, beginning with "*Da läuft ein Schwein!*" ('There is a pig running!'), functions as a moving sign that resists bureaucratic classification (Menasse, 2017, p. 2). Similarly, tractors moving through *Rue Joseph II* and police barriers around *Schuman* transform official institutional space into a contested terrain (Menasse, 2017, p. 174). These counter-signs show that EU authority is visible but not secure; it can be interrupted by bodies, animals, protests, infrastructure, and urban unpredictability.

Sixth, moral-memory discourse complicates EU legitimacy. *Auschwitz* references recur as an ethical sign of European history, but the novel also shows the danger of turning memory into institutional routine. In this pattern, moral legitimacy depends not merely on invoking history but on preserving the ethical force of memory. When memory becomes bureaucratized, it risks losing its capacity to ground political meaning.

Discussion

The findings show that *Die Hauptstadt* represents European Union (EU) power not as a purely institutional possession, but as a semiotic accomplishment that must be continuously produced, displayed, interpreted, and repaired. This interpretation is important because the novel does not merely describe Brussels as a political setting; it constructs Brussels as a narrated linguistic landscape in which names, institutional labels, multilingual routines, bureaucratic genres, disruption motifs, and moral-memory references become signs of political authority. In this sense, the study extends conventional linguistic landscape research by showing that public space can also be reconstructed through literary narration. While field-based linguistic landscape studies usually analyze photographed signs in empirical urban spaces, this study demonstrates that a literary text can narratively organize signs and make them function as evidence of power, legitimacy, distance, belonging, and contestation (Bagna & Bellinzona, 2023a; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006a; Landry & Bourhis, 1997a; Seargeant et al., 2023).

The first implication concerns linguistic landscape studies. The analysis shows that the novel transforms toponyms and institutional landmarks into a semiotic map of authority. Names such as *Schuman-Platz*, *Berlaymont*, *Justus Lipsius*, and *Rue Joseph II* do more than identify locations; they make EU power spatially legible. These place names operate as signs that condense supranational governance into recognizable urban coordinates. This finding supports the view that linguistic landscapes are not neutral collections of signs but symbolic constructions of public space in which authority, identity, and social hierarchy are made visible (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006a; Landry & Bourhis, 1997a). However, the contribution of this study lies in showing that such visibility can also be narrated. In *Die Hauptstadt*, spatial signs are selected and framed by the narrative so that Brussels becomes not only a city where EU power is located, but also a semiotic environment where that power must be read, interpreted, and questioned.

The second implication concerns literary discourse analysis. The study shows that political power in fiction can be examined not only through plot, character, or theme, but also through the linguistic and semiotic organization of narrative space. Institutional labels such as *Kommission*, *Direktorat*, *Corporate Identity*, and *Image function* as more than background details of bureaucratic realism. They create a linguistic texture of administration and produce an affective sense of distance between the institution and everyday public meaning. Through these signs, the reader encounters bureaucracy as a semiotic experience: ordered, classified, rationalized, but also opaque and detached. This suggests that literary texts can operate as semiotic laboratories in which institutional discourse is intensified, stylized, and critically exposed. The concept of a narrated linguistic landscape, therefore, offers a useful bridge between linguistic landscape studies and literary discourse analysis (Hall, 1997; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006a; Smith, 2022b).

The third implication concerns multimodal social semiotics. Although *Die Hauptstadt* is a verbal literary text, the novel repeatedly produces effects of visibility through narrated spatial arrangements, listed place names, symbolic objects, public signs, institutional labels, and multilingual exchanges. Meaning is therefore not produced by words alone, but by how linguistic items are spatialized, repeated, positioned, and made salient within the narrative. This supports a multimodal understanding of semiosis in which language, space, objects, movement, and social context interact to produce meaning (Godwin-Jones, 2025; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006a). The novel's narrated landscape is thus "multimodal" in a literary sense: readers are invited to imagine public space as an arrangement of signs, bodies, institutions, disruptions, and memory markers. This strengthens the argument that literary narratives can function as semiotic environments even without photographic data.

The fourth implication concerns Critical Discourse Analysis. From a CDA perspective, the novel represents EU legitimacy as discursive work, since institutional authority depends not only on formal governance structures but also on the production of public meanings, crisis narratives, and communicative justification (Krzyżanowski, 2010; Wodak, 2021b). Public authority is not presented as automatically accepted; it must be continuously explained through image-management discourse, anniversary planning, institutional branding, bureaucratic genres, and attempts to translate administrative activity into public credibility. Expressions such as "lack of democratic legitimacy," "bloated bureaucracy," "regulatory obsession," "Corporate Identity", and "image" show that legitimacy in the novel is mediated by discourse. The Commission's problem is not only whether it governs effectively, but whether it can make its governance meaningful to the public, who often perceive it through negative labels. This finding supports Fairclough's view that discourse is part of social practice and contributes to the

reproduction or contestation of power relations (Fairclough, 2010a). It also corresponds with recent CDA work showing that EU discourse is often constructed through representations of crisis, bureaucracy, identity, and power (Salih, 2025). In *Die Hauptstadt*, EU authority is therefore represented as semiotic governance: it depends on the ability to manage meanings, signs, genres, and public interpretations.

The fifth implication concerns EU legitimacy studies. The novel suggests that the EU's legitimacy problem is not reducible to formal institutional competence. Instead, legitimacy appears as a fragile relationship between institutional signs and lived public perception. Spatial anchors such as *Schuman* and *Berlaymont* create centrality, but scenes of blocked entrances, crowded movement, protest, and disruption reveal that spatial authority is never fully secure. Bureaucratic classification produces order, but it also produces distance. Image-management discourse produces visibility, but it may also expose the institution's anxiety about public credibility. In this sense, the novel represents EU power as simultaneously visible and vulnerable. It is visible because it is materialized through names, offices, labels, multilingual routines, and official genres. It is vulnerable because these same signs can be disrupted, parodied, misunderstood, or morally emptied (Krzyżanowski, 2010; Salih, 2025; Shore, 2000).

The role of multilingualism further complicates this representation of EU power. The novel does not present multilingualism only as an idealized symbol of European unity. Instead, multilingualism appears in ordinary interactional routines, greetings, apologies, farewells, and brief code-switching in public or semi-public encounters. This representation is significant because it grounds Europeanness in everyday practice rather than institutional slogans. Multilingual routines show Brussels as a lived contact zone where belonging is performed through small acts of linguistic adjustment. At the same time, these routines often appear within spaces of mobility, access, and control. Thus, multilingualism in the novel is both enabling and structured by power: it signals plurality and proximity, but it also operates within a bureaucratically organized urban environment (Bohuslavská & Ciprianová, 2024; Godwin-Jones, 2025; Sargeant et al., 2023).

The counter-semiotic motifs in the novel provide another important layer of interpretation. The pig motif, protest scenes, blocked streets, and graffiti-like urban surfaces challenge the idea that EU space is fully rational, stable, and controllable. These disruptions are not decorative eccentricities. They function as signs that resist bureaucratic classification and expose the limits of technocratic order. In linguistic landscape terms, they show that public space is an arena of competing symbolic claims rather than a neutral container of official signs (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006a; Sargeant et al., 2023). In CDA terms, they show that institutional meaning remains vulnerable to interruption, parody, contestation, and alternative readings (Fairclough, 2010a; Salih, 2025). The more the novel anchors EU authority in official spaces such as *Schuman*, *Berlaymont*, and *Rue Joseph II*, the more powerful these disruptions become, because they occur precisely within the coordinates of institutional power. Disruption is therefore not outside the EU landscape; it happens inside the semiotic field where EU authority is supposed to be most visible.

The moral-memory motif deepens the critique of legitimacy. References to *Auschwitz* give the EU legitimacy question an ethical and historical dimension. The novel suggests that Europe's political project cannot rely only on administrative competence, institutional branding, or public communication strategies. It must also sustain a meaningful relation to historical memory. However, when moral memory is processed through bureaucratic genres and routine institutional language, it risks losing ethical force. This is where the novel's critique becomes strongest: European legitimacy is not merely a problem of image, but a problem of moral meaning. Recent studies on European memory politics show that collective memory and historical narratives continue to shape European identity,

democratic culture, and claims about common values (De Cesari & Kaya, 2020; Rigney, 2021; Schmidtke, 2023; Stenlund, 2025). In this context, *Die Hauptstadt* suggests that if memory becomes procedure, and if ethical history becomes administrative material, then the signs that should ground legitimacy may instead reveal its fragility.

Taken together, these findings show that *Die Hauptstadt* contributes to linguistic landscape scholarship by expanding the object of LL analysis from photographed public signage to narrated public space. It contributes to literary discourse analysis by showing how fiction can organize signs into a political interpretation of space. It contributes to multimodal social semiotics by demonstrating that literary narration can create imagined visibility through spatial signs, symbolic objects, and repeated semiotic patterns. It contributes to CDA by showing how legitimacy is built, managed, and contested through recurring sign systems. Finally, it contributes to EU legitimacy research by showing that supranational authority depends not only on legal competence or policy performance, but also on signs, genres, narratives, memory, and public interpretation. The central contribution of the study is therefore the concept of the narrated linguistic landscape as a framework for analyzing how political authority becomes visible, persuasive, fragile, and contested in literary representation.

Future research can develop this approach in several directions. First, comparative studies could examine other EU-themed literary works to determine whether similar patterns of toponyms, institutional labels, multilingual routines, disruption motifs, and legitimacy discourse appear across a broader literary corpus. Second, the narrated landscape in *Die Hauptstadt* could be compared with empirical linguistic landscape data from Brussels, especially signage in and around the EU quarter. Third, corpus-assisted CDA could be used to examine the distribution and co-occurrence of institutional keywords, image-management vocabulary, spatial references, multilingual tokens, and memory-related terms. Fourth, future studies could compare the novel's representation of EU discourse with institutional EU documents, media discourse, or public communication campaigns. Such studies would strengthen the connection between literary representation, empirical semiotic space, and institutional discourse while preserving the methodological distinction between narrated landscapes and actual urban signage.

In conclusion, the discussion shows that *Die Hauptstadt* represents EU power as a narrated semiotic formation: authority is made visible through spatial anchoring, institutional labeling, bureaucratic classification, multilingual routines, and legitimacy discourse, but it is also destabilized by disruption, moral memory, and public interpretation. The novel's Brussels is therefore not merely the administrative center of Europe; it is a narrated public space where political authority must be constantly produced, defended, and contested through signs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how European Union power and legitimacy are represented through the narrated linguistic landscape of Robert Menasse's *Die Hauptstadt*. In response to the first research question, the novel foregrounds several types of signs: Brussels/EU toponyms and landmarks, institutional labels and bureaucratic categories, multilingual routines, written-display references, disruption motifs, and moral-memory discourse. These signs are not incidental details; they form the semiotic texture through which the novel constructs Brussels as a political and symbolic space.

In response to the second research question, these signs construct EU authority by spatializing it, classifying it, and translating it into legitimacy work. The novel makes EU power visible through names such as *Schuman*, *Berlaymont*, *Justus Lipsius*, and *Rue Joseph*

II; it organizes authority through directorates, labels, and administrative vocabulary; and it represents legitimacy as a continuous effort of image management and public justification. However, the same landscape also problematizes authority through counter-semiotic disruption, bureaucratic distance, and morally charged references to European memory.

In response to the third research question, the novel's narrated semiotic landscape reveals tensions between supranational governance and lived perceptions of bureaucracy, belonging, crisis, and moral memory. Brussels appears as both a center of European order and a space of uncertainty, interruption, and contestation. The theoretical contribution of the study lies in extending linguistic landscape research to literary fiction through the concept of a narrated linguistic landscape. Its methodological contribution lies in combining close reading, keyword-assisted searching, two-cycle coding, and Fairclough's CDA framework for the analysis of sign-based representation in a literary text. The main limitation is that the study focuses on one novel and does not make empirical claims about actual Brussels signage or EU political behavior. Its implication is that literary texts can be used as critical semiotic environments for understanding how political authority becomes visible, persuasive, and fragile through language, space, and discourse.

RECOMMENDATION

Future studies are recommended to expand the narrated linguistic landscape approach across a larger corpus of European political fiction. Comparative analysis could show whether the semiotic patterns found in *Die Hauptstadt* are specific to Menasse's narrative or part of a broader literary representation of EU authority. Researchers are also encouraged to triangulate literary findings with empirical LL data from Brussels, EU institutional communication, media discourse, or corpus-assisted CDA. Such triangulation would strengthen the relationship between fictional representation and public semiotic reality while maintaining a clear methodological distinction between literary analysis and field-based LL research.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

The author confirms that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used for language editing, translation checking of selected German–English glosses, and improving coherence among the research questions, findings, discussion, and conclusion. AI tools were not used as authors and did not replace the author's interpretation and analysis of the literary data. The author remains fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, integrity, citation practices, and final content of the manuscript.

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