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Shaping Public Spaces from Below: The Vernacular Semiotics of Leeds Kirkgate Market

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Abstract

The paper presents a social semiotic approach to vernacular sign-making in place, by examining the visual landscape of Leeds Kirkgate Market, as an example of a semiotically-unregulated place. Traders have ample freedom of self-expression and agency in shaping their stalls through all visual-material resources (beyond mere signage, as analysed in linguistic landscape research). There derives a composite non-cohesive aesthetic of the market's visual landscape, driven by the situated needs and tastes of the socio-culturally diverse population inhabiting the place. The resulting semiotic diversity is remarkable when compared to its neighbouring areas, as well as to recently renovated UK city markets. Against an increased institutional regulation of urban landscapes, semiotically-unregulated places enable vernacular practices from below that defy current aesthetic tenets in professional design and help revealing and questioning the power dynamics underlying a social construction of taste. Research into vernacular semiotics shows the enhanced cultural richness resulting from people's agency in shaping the public spaces in which they live.

Keywords: Aesthetics, taste, multimodality, technologisation, vernacular, semiotic landscape, city markets

Introduction

The visual landscapes of public spaces signify through architectural design, signage, objects and furniture, as well as their colour combinations, layout and materiality. Although the social actors and variables concurring to decisions on public and corporate signage are many (as evidenced in Lou 2016), studies in urban sociology have highlighted a tendency towards "visual coherence" (Zukin 1998, 834; see also Zukin and Kosta 2004) of contemporary consumption spaces, as part of a general tendency towards an "aestheticisation of the urban landscape" (Zukin 1998, 835), increasingly shaped by aesthetic choices made by design professionals, both

as institutional urban design, public signage and urban décor, and as corporate-led image-branding design of chain shops. This not only impacts on the afforded forms of sociability (Zukin 1998, 835), but also, I argue, limits the kinds of social agents who shape public spaces visually and influences a social construction of taste more generally, through hegemonic patterned uses of visual-material resources.

Looking at the visual landscape of places that are still semiotically-unregulated can offer insights into vernacular sign-making practices in place; this can reveal how inhabitants use semiotic resources to shape a place according to their varied interests and tastes, and the extent to which the principles driving their sign-making differs from institutional and corporate-led design. Analysis of vernacular semiosis in place against the mainstream aesthetic tenets in urban visual landscapes can also provide insights into the power dynamics that contribute to a social construction of taste.

While the analysis of vernacular expression in place has generally focused on the "textscape" (Coulmas 2008, 14), that is, on signage and written-based artefacts (e.g., Hutton 2011; Trinch and Snajdr 2017; Malinowski 2009), the present paper proposes a social semiotic approach to the investigation of vernacular sign-making in place that considers meaning made through all semiotic resources shaping the urban landscape. By examining the visual landscape of Kirkgate Market in Leeds (UK), as an example of a semiotically-unregulated place, it focuses on traders' use of resources in their stalls, with the aim to show

(1) the potential (and challenges) of expanding from the analysis of textscapes, to consider all semiotic resources composing the visual landscape of a place,
(2) the socio-cultural value of vernacular sign-making practices and the disruption of mainstream aesthetic tenets emerging from these practices, and
(3) the need to revisit frameworks on the dynamics of a social construction of taste.

Vernacular Sign-Making in Place: A Gap in Linguistic and Semiotic Landscape Research

Concerned with mapping the "multiliterate ecology of cities" (Spolsky, 2009: 32), research in linguistic landscape has increasingly broadened its scope from an original focus on multilingualism to include intersectionality and how writing deployed in public spaces is "indexical of but also shaped by wider processes of social change and urban development" (Papen, 2012: 58), as in the case of gentrification. It is also incorporating attention to multimodal resources; for example, Papen's work includes also "typescript, colour and other visual aspects of signs as well as their materiality" (2012, 61), yet with a focus on signage, disregarding resources such as objects, furniture, their layout and colour composition, and the overall visual-material deployment of built environments. Signage is an undeniably significant component of cityscapes; yet it constructs meaning together with other co-deployed resources. In some cases, signage may not be as visually salient as other resources (such as goods on display, for example), and may pass completely unnoticed except to a linguistic landscape researcher's eye, as Lou (2017) observes when walking a market in Hong Kong with a research participant who would not even know the name of the stall where she habitually shops.

Jaworski and Thurlow's (2010) semiotic landscape research devotes instead equal attention to verbal and nonverbal resources, in order "to capture the multimodal and multisensory means of signification in the environment and our 'ways of seeing' it" (Jaworski, 2018: 2). Work along these lines has shown that privilege is discursively produced through the semiotics of luxury and elitism in place (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009; Thurlow and Jaworski 2012; 2017); the urban design of a place aesthetics can discursively shape values of distinction and exclusion, revealing and reinforcing social inequalities (Aiello 2011); and renovation of facades contribute to a city's image branding within a global marketplace (Gendelman and Aiello 2010). These works show that aesthetics in place is multimodally constructed through resources beyond the sole textscape, and both reveals and (re)produces social dynamics of power, intertwining local

specificities and global economic and sociocultural trends. Semiotic landscape research confutes Ben-Raphael's assumption that "the only aspect of the urban landscape to be under the direct and instant influence of social actors is L[inguistic] L[andscape]" (Ben-Raphael 2008, 42; also reported in Hutton 2011, 176). While analysis of the linguistic landscape reveals the language ideologies entexted in a place (in terms of naturalised associations of linguistic forms and social values, Silverstein 1979), the overall semiotic landscape can be revelatory of the entexted social dynamics of power, and hence of the semiotic ideologies shaping a given place.

Extant work on semiotic landscape pinpoints the role of corporate, institutional and prestige design practices in shaping a contemporary aesthetics of place within today's "global semioscape" (Thurlow and Aiello 2007). What demands examination is the role of "lay" sign-makers within the social dynamics shaping a cityscape. This means asking

(1) how the occupiers of a public space contribute to shape it through all the resources they have available,

(2) the extent to which vernacular sign-making practices deviate from institutional, corporate and professional design ones, and

(3) how they reveal, reinforce and/or challenge a social construction of taste.

The study presented in this paper addresses these questions by examining vernacular sign-making practices in Kirkgate Market, in the city of Leeds, UK, with the aim to open a social semiotic perspective onto vernacular sign-making in place that can account for meaning produced through all visual-material resources, conceived as forms of self-expression, and as revelatory of the social texture of a place.

A Social Semiotic Perspective on Aesthetics in Place

Following research in multimodality (for an introduction to the field, Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran 2016), the present study assumes that anything is potentially a semiotic resource,

as far as someone gives meaning to it or makes meaning out of it, and that meaning-making is multimodal, i.e., it draws on the combination of multiple semiotic resources co-deployed in the situation at hand. As the theoretical perspective originally developing multimodal analysis, Social Semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988; van Leeuwen 2005; Kress 2010) assumes that the semiotic entexts the social, both revealing and constructing it, and that sign-making is the intertwined result of sign-makers' available resources, their specific interest in the situation at hand and their positioning in respect to broader social values, ideologies and practices. Adopting a social semiotic perspective on sign-making, the present study assumes that resources such as objects, layout, colour, as well as all elements of signage, can be used as forms of self-expression and contribute to shape a place's aesthetics, defined as "the politics of style" (Kress 2010, 28), with style as "the politics of choice" on semiotic resources. As a set of socially-constructed evaluations on patterned semiotic choices, aesthetics can be analysed as part of the social and interpersonal aspect of meaning-making, in that a representation aesthetics reveals the projected identities of its author and intended addressee (Adami 2015). The aesthetic meaning potential of a sign can be analysed by identifying its "provenance" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, 10), i.e., a metaphoric process of meaning-making through association with established uses of a resource; e.g., the corporate use of pink for products targeting women generates associations with 'female' whenever the colour is used in other contexts, with specific social values depending on the meaning-maker's positioning towards societal evaluations on 'female'. Through its provenance, the deployment of a given resource indexes certain social values. Indexing in this sense is an extension towards social values of the Piercean concept, i.e., the property of a sign to point to something else, and a semiotic extension of Silverstein's (2003) "second-order indexicality" for language (as in a certain accent or variety indexing its speaker's socio-cultural status and framing of the communicative situation). Identification of provenance and indexing is not unproblematic and cannot be merely equated with a sign-maker's identity,

because of the multiple possible interpretations of signs in context (as evidenced for signage, e.g., in Malinowski 2009), and given the many variables concurring to aesthetic judgment. In this regard, Bourdieu (1986) assumes that taste "classifies the classifier", and hence aesthetic judgment reveals the cultural capital of those who make that judgment. While Bourdieu's sociological investigation of taste correlated cultural capital to socio-demographic variables (such as class, occupation, education), hence to a person's social position, the stance adopted in the present study factors in a sign-maker's agency, and considers taste as reflecting a sign-maker's social positioning in relation to a given "semiotic regime" (Adami 2018c), that is, of dominant patterned uses of semiotic resources. Semiotic regimes concur to shape hegemonic aesthetic values (e.g., whether a certain use of a resource, e.g., Comic Sans for font, communicates amateurishness/professionalism, whether it is for children/adults, appropriate/inappropriate for a certain context, tasteful/tasteless, etc.). Uses of resources that follow or diverge from hegemonic ones reveal their sign-maker's positioning towards those dominant values. The next section provides background information on Kirkgate Market and the data selected, before presenting the analysis.

Leeds Kirkgate Market: Context and Data

One of the oldest and largest indoor markets in Europe (http://www.leeds.gov.uk/leedsmarkets/Pages/Kirkgate-market.aspx accessed 8/10/2017), Kirkgate Market is located in the heart of Leeds city centre, Yorkshire, Northern England. One of the four largest cities in the UK, Leeds has been subject to post-industrial renovation in the recent decades and regeneration of the whole central area. The canal area south of the market has involved the conversion of old warehouses into high-budget apartment buildings, the construction of new glass-and-steel office buildings, and the redesign of "South Bank style" open-air spaces with chain cafés and restaurants. The north and west areas have been made

pedestrian and populated with shopping centres and high street chains, while east of the market and its adjacent bus station, redevelopment plans are shaping a cultural quarter, encompassing the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Northern Ballet, and the Leeds College of Music. Opposite north of the market is the newly-developed Victoria Quarter, a high-budget shopping district hosting luxury brand shops in its arcades.

Managed by Leeds City Council, Kirkgate Market is located in a Victorian building enlarged with concrete-and-steel halls in the 70s and 80s, hosting nearly 400 stalls and shops. With traditional opening times (9am-5pm Mon-Sat), the market hosts generally low-budget activities, selling all kinds of goods and services, from fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and fish, and groceries of different origins, to mobile accessories and second-hand furniture, from clothing and shoes to flowers and kitchenware; services range from hairdressers, nails and massages to key-cutters and shoe repair, from small tailoring services to take-away and cafes.

Along stalls run for decades by generations of British citizens, are those opened by recently-arrived migrants (a rather rare opportunity for migrants' entrepreneurship in the city centre). The ethnic composition of the market population has changed considerably in recent years, with an increasingly ethnically-diverse demographics of traders and customers (Gonzalez and Waley 2013). While precise demographics data on customers are not available, a survey conducted in June 2017 in all stalls of the market by the project Leeds Voices: Communicating Superdiversity in the Market (funded by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust; http://voices.leeds.ac.uk/) has evidenced 25 different nationalities of traders, with over 30 (self-declared) spoken languages.

Traditionally attracting a low-budget customer audience, the market has long been subject to plans for renovation. Gonzalez and Waley's (2013) analysis of documents and meeting minutes evidences the City Council's foregrounding of discourses of crisis and decay of the market to advocate for its upscaling. Against its traditionally elderly, low-budget and

increasingly migrant population, the ongoing renovation plan seeks to attract a younger and higher-budget customer audience by rebranding the market image, with consequent rises in stall rents, and thus increased revenues for the City Council, but also a changed composition of the market stalls, with traditional activities leaving the way to higher-budget ones, which can sustain the higher rents (for an analysis of the renovation effects on the social semiotics of the place, Adami 2018b).

Rather than on the institution's renovation, the focus of the analysis in the next section is on the traders' sign-making in their stalls and how their practices shape the aesthetics of the market, with data collected while the renovation had just started and regulatory constraints had not yet been imposed. The analysis considers visual modes deployed in the stalls, encompassing font, colour, image, layout, objects and writing. The primary data for the analysis rely on photos collected through observations in the market, carried out twice a week, for one to two hours sessions at different times/days for over a year (Oct.2015-Jan.2017), during my collaboration in the Leeds Voices project. The analysis on the primary data will be further supported with data coming from interviews with traders, as background checks on their sign-making, both as emerging in the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews collected by the Leeds Voices research team, and in their exchanges with me.

Aimed to evidence the value of (investigating) vernacular sign-making in place, this study has an exploratory character, with no pretension of presenting a systematic mapping of all traders' sign-making practices. As widely acknowledged in the literature (for a review and discussion, Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran 2016), at present at least, multimodal analysis can only be conducted qualitatively on selected examples. While linguistic landscape research normally provides quantitative data (by counting the languages and linguistic features present in signage) before analysing sampled instances qualitatively, multimodal analysis cannot do that. Resources such as layout, colour deployment and objects present in the 400 market stalls

cannot be coded and counted, not only because they change constantly in each stall, but also because modal features (e.g., 'density', 'positioning' or 'alignment' for layout) have a relational rather than absolute character. More importantly, as will become apparent in the analysis, aesthetic meaning potential is produced in the specific relation among multiple resources co-deployed in a given stall, and in their juxtaposition with adjacent ones, which can be determined only through fine-grained analysis of specific multimodal ensembles. While further lines of investigation and data integration will be indicated in the conclusions, the analysis in the next section will focus on specific examples that indicate aesthetic features emerging from vernacular sign-making in the market, resulting from traders' varied needs, positioning and principled uses of resources (encompassing more than signage) and producing an overall aesthetics remarkably in contrast with that of the heavily-regulated visual landscape of the city centre, which opens to reflections on the sociocultural value of semiotically-unregulated places.

The Unregulated Semiotics of Leeds Kirkgate Market

Differently from findings in linguistic landscape studies on the variables constraining decisions in shop signage design (Malinowski 2009; Lou 2010; 2016), Kirkgate Market is a semiotically-unregulated space. Traders in the market have ample freedom on the visual appearance of the space that they rent. As emerged in traders' interviews (see specific cases in the analysis below), at the time of the investigation, their design did not need to follow specific guidelines or regulations nor undergo any type of approval from the market management.

As a result, while walking the many aisles of the market, the most salient trait of its visual landscape is the impressively wide variety of resources used in the stalls, in terms of fonts, writing, colour, images and objects, as well as their materiality (see

Figure ***1*** for a sample of stall signage; see

Figure ***2***-

Figure *5* for the deployment of visual resources different halls; see further the interactive map produced by Leeds Voices at http://tour.mapsalive.com/61243/page1.htm, providing photos of each stall along with sociolinguistic information about traders).

Figure 1. A sample of the stalls signage in the market.

Figure 2. The central aisle of the 1981 hall of the market.

Figure 3. The right-side aisle of the 1981 hall of the market.

Figure 4. An aisle in the Victorian hall of the market.

Figure 5. An aisle in the 1875 hall of the market.

The diversity in resources does not hold only for banners and signage, but also for the architecture, colour, size and materiality of the different stalls, as well as for the types of goods and services provided (see, e.g., the fish and chips opposite the hair products shop in

Figure ***5***), and for the layout of objects on display. More dense and cluttered layouts (as in the stall top-left in Figure 6) appear beside stalls with dense and aligned layout (bottom-left in Figure 6), and those with more minimalistic, spaced layout (right in Figure 6). Dense displays often have material reasons, i.e., stalls do not have a backstage for storage, so everything needs to be on display. With space as an increasingly highly valued commodity, in current aesthetics conventions the type of layout carries indexical value in terms of social orientation of the business activity, indexing lower or higher budget types of goods on sale (spaced layout was found as characterising the aesthetics of elitist places in e.g., Thurlow and Jaworski 2010b).

Figure 6. Examples of cluttered (top left), dense and aligned (bottom left), and spaced/minimalist layout (right).

Even more, traders have ample freedom in constantly (re-)shaping the place, as when they re-configure layout by displaying their goods on the walls of temporarily vacant neighbouring stalls, without asking for permission to the management (as emerged in interviews with

them), as shown in

Figure ***7*** and

Figure *8*.

Figure 7. Layout re-shaped through the expansion of the display of clothing onto the walls of a temporarily vacant stall (previously occupied by the Lemon Tree café, as can be read in the signage).

Figure 8. Layout re-shaped through the expansion of the display of carpets onto the walls of two temporarily vacant neighbouring stalls.

Because of traders' ample agency in sign-making through disembodied modes in their stalls, Kirkgate Market is an extraordinarily dense example of vernacular semiotics in public space, whose dynamics are explored in the next sub-sections, by zooming in the analysis on the multimodal deployment of individual stalls, before zooming out again through a comparison with the visual landscape of the market's neighbouring areas in the city centre.

Sign-Making from Below

Figure ***9*** shows the Liquid Lounge, a stall selling electronic cigarettes. As emerged from my exchanges with the owner, a British man in his 50s, he has designed the stall by himself using resources encompassing colour, font, layout, objects, furniture and lighting. Writing in the stall has similar characteristics to those identified for "Distinction-making signage" of shops opened during the gentrification of Brooklyn in Trinch and Snajdr (2017). These include "Liquid Lounge" in the signage, with brief text that is not transparent as to the type of business activity; the metaphoric use of "menu" for the e-cigarette flavours, with a foregrounded poetic function over the referential one; the use of the Greek alphabet and the infinite symbol "∞" below

"menu" on the board, indexing erudition and high culture, all typical of elitist shop/stall names, as opposed to multi-word signage eminently referential as to the goods/services provided found in pre-gentrification "Old-school vernacular" shop signage (Trinch and Snajdr 2017). The distinction value indexed by writing is cohesive with the black and white colour palette of the stall, typical of luxury items advertising (Brioschi 2006), indexing elegance, refinement and understatement. Writing and colour attune also with the minimalist, spaced layout of the interiors, with provenance in elitist semiotics (as found in Thurlow and Jaworski 2010b). The resources used in these modes concur cohesively to index modernity, sophistication, luxury and elitist taste. Yet the font chosen for "Liquid Lounge" indexes fun, childish/teenagerish, with a possible 70s psychedelic sub-culture provenance (which, as a speculation, coincides to when the sign-maker was in his youth, and finds further correlation with the long pony-tail of his current hair style). The font type looks amateurish when related to the genre, i.e., a business activity selling an electronic piece of technology to adults. The quite large size of the font not only makes it particularly salient (hence increasing its functional load vs. the other semiotic resources in the stall), but also diverges from the characteristically small sized lettering of "Distinction-making signage", found in Trinch and Snajdr (2017).

Figure 9. The Liquid Lounge stall.

Asked about the choice of font, the owner said he wanted to differentiate it from the major e-cigarette chain brands (after a few years of franchising a major brand, he has now started his independent one); when asked "why this particular font?", he replied "well, now it's easy with this [pointing at his laptop on his desk]; there are so many and I can choose it on my own; so I picked the one I liked most". When commenting on the choice of black as the main colour for the signage and furniture and on the spaced layout, he said "it's elegant and makes the products stand out" (in line with the values of these resources in luxury advertising) "and it's cheaper

[laughter]". In the trader's account, semiotic choice is driven by a combination of his interest in positioning his activity (as different from major brands), taste and availability of resources.

The stall semiotics produces a clash between the font type and size vs. the other resources (i.e., writing, layout, objects/furniture and colour), which disrupts an expected cohesive identity of the business brand image. Unlike the overall visual coherence of consumption spaces observed by Zukin in chain-retail areas (1998), and in the East Village independent businesses (Zukin and Kosta 2004), and the cohesive distribution of variables between older/vernacular and new/distinction signage found by Trinch and Snajdr (2017) in Brooklyn, sign-making practices in the market often result in "composites of connotations" (van Leeuwen 2005, 275) of their multimodal ensembles. One may interpret this as a lack of "literacy" in design practices; yet, when considering "literacy" in terms of power relations (i.e., in terms of who has the power to establish standards of acceptability), composites of connotations are better framed as the expression of practices that rise "from below" (Ribeiro 2006; Ribeiro 2012) and diverge from those produced by centres of prestige (i.e., design professionals), which play a major role in shaping public visual landscapes, and hence a construction of taste towards hegemonic semiotic ideologies. Although reference to Blommaert's (2008) notion of "grassroots literacies" could be made here, as Thurlow and Jaworski (2010a) do in their semiotic analysis of a market in the Gambia, it seems sensible to disentangle vernacular semiotic practices from any notion of literacy altogether; not only is the term heavily linked to logocentric perspectives onto sign-making (Kress 2003), but labelling the Liquid Lounge multimodal deployment as grassroots literacy would involve its evaluation as communicatively effective/appropriate for a (hardly identifiable) grassroots context, which cannot be assumed. In turn, Ribeiro's (2006; 2012) notion "from below" (further adopted for metrolingal practices by Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) does not involve any claim of either appropriateness/efficacy or subversive intentions in respect to higher or dominant standards. Ribeiro's "globalization from below" refers to non-hegemonic

economic practices that de facto (rather than by intention) defy the economic establishment. His research shows that while street vendors of, e.g., counterfeited CDs, do not have any antiglobalist or subversive intent and may well be driven by the same neoliberal business-oriented principles, their practices de facto deviate from hegemonic ones, due to their position of exclusion from the realm of legalised corporate business. Opening his independent brand, the trader of the Liquid Lounge has no longer benefited from the brand-image professional design service offered (and imposed) by the franchising corporation, and has become the designer of his own brand image. His sign-making practices can be seen as the result of his available resources and cultural capital (or taste), de facto (rather than in his intentions) defying mainstream aesthetic tenets of corporate image-brand design. Against "literacy", the notion of sign-making from below (as non-hegemonic practices) disentangles uses of resources from ideologies of (in)appropriateness, and rather reveals the relation of their aesthetic associations to power dynamics, as well as to individual agency, as the example analysed in the next section shows.

Diverse Sign-Makers, Diverse Tastes

The degree of adherence/divergence to mainstream/hegemonic practices varies among traders. As an example, see the stall in

Figure **10**, whose aesthetics mixes cosmopolitan modernism and "UK vintage tea and coffee shop taste", by combining

- an oriental minimalist style of drawings (the teapot, the coffee cup and the honey jar),
- up-cycling-style fonts (recalling the stencilled font on wooden shipping cases),
- upmarket lifestyle taste in wording ("natural" and "organic"),
- modernity (the website URL in the signage),
- authenticity in the handwriting with chalks on the blackboard and brightly-coloured paper labels,
- tradition with a large window with a dense layout of the many items on sales on wooden shelves, hessian bags and unbranded glass jars.

Figure 10. Teapot stall in the market.

A multimodal analysis of the aesthetics of the stall's visual resources cannot derive the socio-cultural demographics of the trader/sign-maker as a Polish man in his 30s, from working class origins, who had arrived in the UK a year before the picture was taken and who has designed the whole shop interiors and hand-painted the façade of the stall, lettering and images of the signage included. The taste behind the aesthetics shaped through choices in resources cannot be deterministically linked to the sign-maker's belonging to a specific "class-fragment" (Bourdieu 1986). Analogously to what research in languaging and styling practices (Rymes

2014; Rampton 2011) is showing for the use of language, it is rather a combination of social factors and individual agency, in terms of a sign-maker's personal trajectory and interest in associating with or distancing from certain social values. In this sense, rather than structural class-fragment belonging, aesthetic choices imply a more fluid and subjective power affiliation, in terms of more or less absorbed semiotic ideologies and taste, thus calling forth a revisiting of Bourdieu's (1986) work. The social values and tastes indexed by the choice of visual resources are more performative and designed than indicative of actual socio-cultural demographic variables and class-fragment belonging of their sign-makers.

Vernacular Sign-Making as Principled

Analogous to what evidenced for vernacular uses of language, vernacular sign-making through all semiotic resources in the market is principled; yet its principles may differ from those of professional design, because sign-makers' interests differ.

Figure ***11*** shows one example of this through the resources of layout and objects.

Figure 11. Transgressive layout and chairs as neglect vs. welcoming signs.

When interviewed, the trader of the stall opposite

Figure ***11***, an Indian-British man in his 50s, said he placed the two chairs on the spot because there is nowhere to sit in the market unless one is willing to pay to sit in a café. He added that many people, including some of his customers (often elderly of various nationalities) come to the market not only to shop but also to socialise and spend part of their day. Following mainstream aesthetic tenets, the type of chairs and their juxtaposition with the boxes (as transgressive signs in Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003) would index values of neglect or shabbiness, when compared with the shabby-chic-styled unmatched second-hand armchairs found in independent cafés, which have become signs of distinction, and the usually new-looking, well-matched functional seats and benches found in globalised corporate places (which nonetheless seldom provide seats not designated to consumption). Far from signs of neglect or shabbiness, the two chairs are instead meant as signs of welcoming and caring, and are obviously interpreted as such by the people who sit there.

Figure 12. Geoculturally-marked visual non-cohesion in a butcher's storefront.

As another example, is the apparent non-cohesion of the display of a butcher's storefront (

Figure ***12***), marked towards Britishness and Yorkshire indigeneity, through the use of the UK national flag and the white rose symbol of Yorkshire (the county of Leeds), and yet displays a lucky cat (also known as Chinese cat) in its window. As resulting from the interview with the butcher (and analysed in detail in Adami 2018a), this geo-culturally-marked visual non-cohesion is motivated by his multiple interests, i.e., to project the identity of his shop as local and traditional, and to address/attract Chinese customers, who are a growing niche of buyers of meat in the market.

In sum, traders' sign-making in the market is principled, and is the product of a complex mix of variables, encompassing their taste/positioning, intended projected identity of the activity, perceived needs/tastes of intended addressees, and available resources. This results in

an extremely composite, non-cohesive landscape, when compared to the highly-regulated professionally-designed landscape of the market's neighbouring areas, as discussed in the next section.

Kirkgate Market as Endangered Semiotic Diversity

When zooming out from the multimodal deployment of individual stalls to the visual landscape of the different aisles of the market (see again

Figure ***2***-

Figure *5* introduced earlier), the non-cohesion or composite effect resulting from the variety of uses of sign-making resources is striking, because of the density and juxtaposition of signs produced by a socio-culturally-diverse conglomerate of traders, with different tastes and specific needs in shaping the identity of their stalls, combining the traders' availability of material resources, cultural capital, perceived tastes and needs of their addressed customer audience, and structural features of the space they have available. This can be said to be expected in a market, analogous to the "vernacular 'clutter'" (Hutton 2011, 182) observed in the textscape of Hong Kong streets, for example. Yet the extent of semiotic diversity of Kirkgate Market is rather unique, both within the city centre of Leeds, and in comparison to other neighbouring city markets.

Most of Leeds city centre is a conservation area (see the City Council map at https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Central%20Area%20-%20LEEDS%20CITY%20CENTRE%20CA%20No_45.pdf Retrieved 7 Sep 2018).

Interventions on the visual landscape in conservation areas need to undergo an application process, submitted for approval by the City Council. Regulations apply not only to signage or architecture, because

> "[t]he historic layout of property boundaries and roads, the spaces between buildings, mix of uses, characteristic materials, boundary treatments, shop fronts, views, trees and green spaces, street furniture, colours and textures all contribute to the special character of areas" (https://www.leeds.gov.uk/your-council/planning/conservation-areas Retrieved 12 June 2018).

The City Council has approved a series of design guides that regulate the landscape. Besides an Advertising Design Guide (Leeds Local Development Framework 2006), the Leeds City Centre Streetstyle Design Guide (Leeds City Centre Management 2001) provides guidelines on street lighting, street furniture (including seats, stands and kiosks, and litter bins) and a series of elements under the heading "City Landscape and Public Art" including greenery, flowers, banners and art installations. Besides institutional regulations in force for outdoor spaces, the visual landscape of the shopping district where the market is located is influenced by the type of businesses in the area (mainly corporate chain businesses and high-budget retail shops). A brief look at the visual landscape of the shopping areas surrounding the market

evidences at a glance the striking difference of its aesthetics. As exemplified in

Figure ***13***, showing Briggate, the main pedestrian high-street in Leeds, running parallel to the market, most streets in the city centre display a visual landscape whose aesthetics is shaped by corporate-led professional design.

Figure 13. The corporate visual landscape of Briggate, the pedestrian high-street parallel to the market.

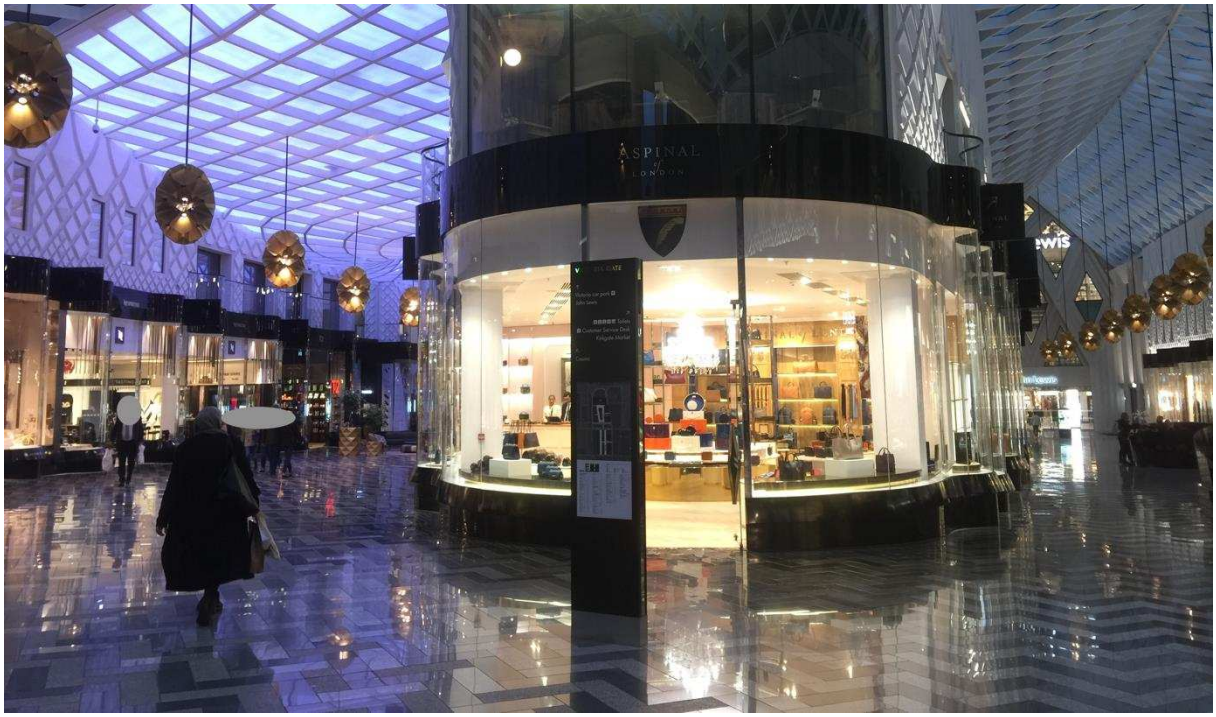

Figure 14. The Victoria Gate shopping centre opposite the market.

Figure 15. The Trinity shopping centre, 300 ft west of Kirkgate Market.

As shown in

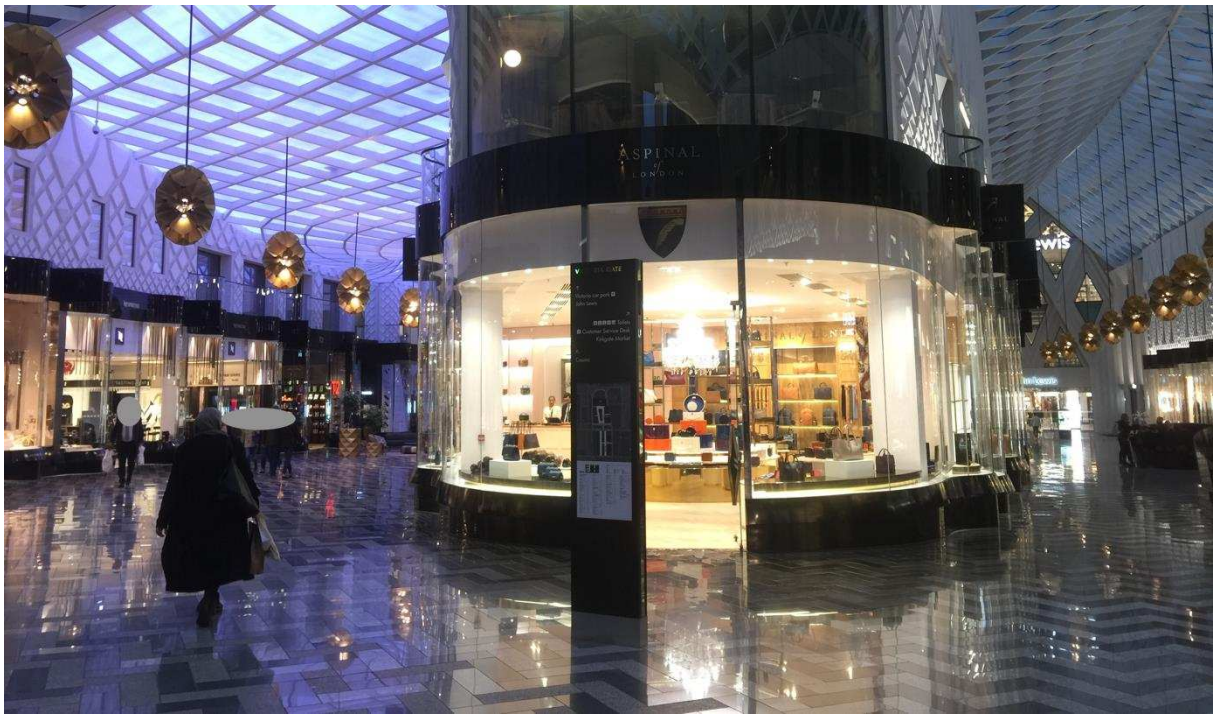

Figure ***14***, the main hall of the Victoria Gate shopping centre, recently opened opposite the market, is also very homogeneous in the visual display of its shops, including their signage (same black colour, shape, materiality and font types and sizes), window sizes, layout, visual texture of architecture, flooring and chandeliers, with all resources cohesively concurring to a sense of grandeur and luxury. The Trinity shopping mall (

Figure ***15***), west of the market and Briggate, is equally homogeneous, displaying only corporate signage, and a very sanitised layout, with no objects or goods outside the spaces of the shops. Not only does the market contrast sharply with the highly regulated and professionally-designed visual landscape of its surrounding areas, but also with the one of Grainger Market, in the city centre of Newcastle (less than 100 miles north of Leeds), a traditionally low-budget market that has been recently renovated towards semiotic homogenisation, as shown in Figure 16; analogous regulatory processes have occurred in Sheffield (35 miles south-west of Leeds) with

the closing of the central Castle Market in 2013, replaced by the opening of Moor market in a regenerated quarter of the city (for the ongoing gentrification of UK markets, see Hubbard 2017).

Figure 16. The recently renovated Grainger Market in Newcastle (photo: Tom Jackson, *Leeds Voices*).

The more the visual landscapes of urban centres (including markets) are impacted by semiotic regulation and corporate professional design, the more the values associated to semiotic resources shape social taste, as the expression of naturalised ideologies of what is appropriate. Regulatory patterned uses of stylistic choices in relation to globalisation dynamics have been explored for language, as verbal hygiene and corporate-led prescriptive styling (Cameron 2000) and as part of an increasing technologization of discourse (Fairclough 1992). In their analysis of elite space as defined in Ikea kitchens, Ledin and Machin extend Fairclough's notion to the semiotics of space and define it as "the increasing codification of all semiotic resources in order to take more control over communication […] coupled with processes of regulation, commodification and marketization" (2017, 326). Vernacular sign-making from below in

unregulated spaces such as Kirkgate Market produces dense semiotic diversity resulting in multimodal composites that de facto defy the aesthetic tenets of the semiotic technologization increasingly characterising the visual landscapes of public places.

As a result, the diverse composite of styles of the market's aesthetics may concur to appreciations of the place by some as "authentic", while leading others to evaluations of shabbiness and neglect, reinforcing discourse of crisis and decay, as evidenced in Gonzalez and Waley (2013), which the city council has used to advocate for the ongoing renovation of the place towards upscaling (and increasing stall rents, which may lead to force the lower-budget shops to close, see Adami 2018b). Both evaluations of either authenticity (as revelatory of othering/exoticizing processes) or neglect/shabbiness reveal the semiotic ideologies in force for the use of all visual resources in place, within an overall "aestheticisation of everyday life" (Featherstone 1991). The overall non-cohesive composite aesthetics of the market may make the place seem either "exotic" or disorienting to visitors accustomed to hegemonic semiotic regimes, chaotic maybe, with signs of shabbiness (as for the chairs) and amateurishness (as for the Liquid Lounge font). Following Bourdieu's (1986) conception of taste as classifying the classifier though, these aesthetic evaluations index an internalization of the conventions of "mainstream" and "exclusive/distinction" professional branding design, as those that are appropriate for visual urban landscapes. In turn, as the analysis above has shown, vernacular sign-making is principled; in some cases it may reflect principles (of welcoming hospitality and invitation to socialization, for example) that diverge from those of corporate business activities, driven by profit maximisation (which are nonetheless appropriating instances of vernacular practices, as shown in Aiello and Dickinson 2014). The diverse sign-making practices from below of semiotically-unregulated places expose visitors and accustom those who become habitual customers to an aesthetics that defies the ongoing semiotic technologization of visual

landscapes; in that, as well as in the socio-cultural principles driving its sign-making (grounded on its inhabitants' diverse needs), they are valuable sources of cultural richness.

Conclusions

As a central semiotically-unregulated place, Kirkgate Market is a rather unique and endangered example of dense and demographically-diverse agency in sign-making in public space. Traders use resources such as colour, typography, image, layout and objects to express the identity/ies of their stalls, respond to the perceived needs of their varied customer audiences and shape the aesthetics of the market's visual landscape. These resources have never been as significant and available to everyone as in today's societies, due to an increased democratization of technologies of reproduction (Hutton 2011, 181) and mass production of goods/objects. Yet their use is increasingly regulated in public spaces, particularly in the city centres of Western countries. Urban visual landscapes shaped by aesthetic choices made by corporate-led professionals in image-branding influence people's tastes, reduces the cultural diversity of public environments and limits citizens' agency and means of self-expression in shaping them. The analysis of Leeds Kirkgate Market, as an example of an endangered space of semiotic diversity from below, has highlighted how traders' sign-making practices reveal different aesthetic principles, driven by the situated needs and tastes of the socio-culturally diverse population inhabiting the place. Findings suggest the need of focusing on vernacular sign-making practices for an integrative perspective to extant research in semiotic landscape onto aesthetics, the social construction of taste, and the complex dynamics that influence social life in and beyond place, in and beyond our visual landscape. This requires enhancing and expanding a social semiotic exploration of public spaces that goes beyond the tools/methods of linguistic landscape and widens its focus, from signage to all semiotic resources. To do so, it seems useful to combine multimodal analysis on the visual landscape with interviews, to be

able to identify sign-makers' intended meaning vis-à-vis a naturalised taste (to which the analyst is hardly exempt); yet, research methods require innovation/integration in at least two further directions, namely (a) development of tools for scoping multimodal analysis onto larger datasets, to aim for a comprehensive mapping of sign-making practices in complex spaces, and (b) integration of social semiotic analysis with an investigation of diverse people's evaluations of semiotically-unregulated vs technologized visual landscapes. This could lead to insights useful for a reformulation of the social bases for the production of taste, as Bourdieu's (1986) class fragments seem too deterministically structural to explain the complex interplay between globalised prestige influences, extent of semiotic regulation of space, and sign-makers' agency, situated needs and personal trajectories, which drive not only sign-making but also the social construction of taste in contemporary societies.

As this exploratory study has shown, semiotically-unregulated spaces like Leeds Kirkgate Market enable the people who live these spaces to shape them visually according to their diversified needs, interests and tastes. Against an increasing semiotic technologisation, sign-making from below results in composite uses of resources that question the semiotic regimes underlying conceptions of "literacy", thus revealing the semiotic ideologies informing the notion. Sign-making practices from below in semiotically-unregulated places are a source of cultural richness for three main reasons. Firstly, they can reveal underlying social principles that deviate from the profit maximisation driving corporate-led professional design. Secondly, they result in aesthetic effects that disrupt an increasingly technologised semiotic landscape and help revealing the influence of hegemonic practices of corporate-led professional design onto the construction of naturalised ideologies and the social construction of taste. Finally, they call for different conceptions of public space and agency in it, as either an institutional site neatly designed and planned for regulated use, or as a site of (negotiation of) self-expression to be shaped by its inhabitants responding to the varied needs of those who live it.

In the (now) three years that I have walked the aisles of Kirkgate Market, asking myself what is semiotically special in the place, I have collected hundreds of photos of creative, often puzzling, uses of semiotic resources in the stalls. While I keep going to the market and interacting with traders, I ask myself how this place will develop as a result of the renovation of the place, which is pushing for its semiotic regulation, and what the consequences will be for the highly diverse demographics of people that inhabit it. Enhanced semiotically-homogenised renovation of the place would force the more traditional and low-budget stalls to close, as an effect of the rising rents and the marketing campaign for a rebranding of the market. This would mean a loss not only of a space of semiotic diversity, as a healthy rupture to mainstream technologized semiotics of the urban visual landscape of Leeds, but also of the last remaining market (with its distinctive type of interaction and socialization) for affordable shopping in the city centre and for affordable independent entrepreneurship, thus marking further the signs of social inequalities and exclusion practices in UK urban areas.

A social semiotic investigation of vernacular sign-making in place can relate the semiotic regimes governing our public spaces to issues of people's agency and freedom of expression in shaping the places they inhabit and their visual landscape, and reveal how semiotic regimes construct taste, a sense of beauty or shabbiness, of what is valuable or worthless (if a pricy item well-lit against a black background or a couple of "poor" but welcoming chairs for anyone to rest and socialize), in a world characterized by global corporate consumer capitalism, in its mix of mainstream chains and distinction/prestige independent business. It is hoped that the present findings can be used as evidence for the urgent need to develop methodologies able to document, protect and promote endangered vernacular semiotic practices in public places, with the ultimate aim of empowering people's agency and freedom of expression in shaping public spaces through all available semiotic resources.

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