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Chapter 6.

Shaping the Social through the Aesthetics of Public Places:

The Renovation of Leeds Kirkgate Market

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(in Frida Forsgren & Elise Seip Tønnessen (Eds.) *Multimodality and Aesthetics*, London: Routledge)

INTRODUCTION

The visual and material landscape of our urban environments has semiotic and social significance. Semiotically, it makes meaning through the co-deployment of the resources of its architecture, signage, objects and furniture, including their shape, materiality, colour and layout. The multimodal composition of our urban landscapes shapes the aesthetics of the environments in which we live. Against a tradition that regards aesthetics as merely concerned with form and related (solely) to sensory perception, the notion has more recently been defined in relation to sociocultural meaning also. If our sensory perception processes forms of any kind in terms of what we perceive as pleasant or unpleasant (to the eye, ear, and touch) for example, aesthetic values are not solely sensorially determined, but also socially constructed. Eco (2004, 2007) has shown that notions of beauty/ugliness change through time, across cultures and social groups. Bourdieu's milestone sociological investigation (1986) has evidenced that taste preferences depend on an individual's cultural capital, which correlates to class fragments. Linking aesthetics to power dynamics, Kress (2010) defines it as "the politics of style" (with style defined as "the politics of choice", in patterned uses of semiotic resources).

Semiotic regimes, that is, the power dynamics governing the conventionalised uses of certain resources, contribute to our social construction of taste. As a banal example, if Comic

Sans rather than Helvetica is increasingly used solely for texts addressing children, and hegemonic typographic practices avoid it or stigmatise its use for professionally-produced artefacts outside that specific domain/intended audience, we will increasingly associate its use with juvenile and amateurish values. In other terms, a certain form “indexes” (following Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003; and Silverstein, 2003) certain socio-cultural values of the representation/artefact/environment in which it is used, of its intended audience/addressees/users, and of its sign-maker’s projected identity features. As interpreters of a given form, whether or not we like it (or consider it appropriate or not, tasteful or tasteless etc.) depends on our cultural capital, hence our aesthetic judgment reflects and reveals our positioning in respect to hegemonic (socially-constructed) aesthetic values within society.

Socially, the semiotics of our urban environments reflects and projects the social dynamics governing them, namely,

- (1) the sociocultural characteristics of whom these places address, invite and are open to (in terms of lifestyles but also of income, e.g., hipsters, underground circles, upper or lower classes etc.);
- (2) the extent, organisation and distribution of agency in shaping these places semiotically, among those who inhabit them, manage them, design them, own them, and/or access them, within broader dynamics of social inclusion/exclusion (as the semiotic/aesthetic facet of, e.g., regeneration and gentrification processes in city centres worldwide);
- (3) the social practices that are enabled/allowed to or hindered/stigmatised from taking place in these places (e.g., weather loitering and “hanging around” or walking by quickly for purpose-oriented activities).

In sum, the semiotics of our environments contributes to a socially-constructed notion of aesthetics; this influences our tastes and reflects the social dynamics governing a place.

Our urban places are heavily semiotically regulated. The visual and material landscapes of our city centres are not only increasingly shaped by the corporate signage and spatial/material composition of chain shops and shopping centres, but also by professionally-designed public signage and urban décor, commissioned by public bodies to shape the image of a city and/or a specific place. In this, the visual landscapes of our urban environments acquire increasingly mediatising and mediating functions (Aiello, 2013). In turn, as inhabitants of these places, we have increasingly limited agency to shape them.

Semiotic regulation is a broader trend involving constraints on the use of resources for representation in several domains. Linguistic research has shown that organisations increasingly regulate their employees' use of language, in what Fairclough (1995) terms "technologization of discourse" and Cameron (2000) terms "styling". Ledin and Machin (2017) have expanded Fairclough's technologization semiotically to investigate shapes, colours, materiality and organisation of space in the design of Ikea kitchens, and the kinds of lifestyles they promote. Organisational research (Gagliardi, 2006; Mears, 2014) is increasingly investigating the aesthetics of organisations, that is, how corporations shape the semiotics and materiality of their spaces and products and regulate the look of their employees (from clothing to hairstyle and ways of walking) to shape a desired image of their brand and the related perception of their customers. While Thurlow and Jaworski (2012, 2017) have investigated semiotic and material uses of resources that characterise elite, prestige and luxury places, regulatory practices in the use of semiotic resources in public places have not been investigated yet.

The present work will attempt to show how social semiotic multimodal analysis can contribute to understanding the social dynamics beyond, and reflected by, the regulatory

practices shaping the aesthetics of the visual landscapes of our public spaces. It will do so by examining the case of Kirkgate Market, in Leeds (UK), focusing on the changes in sign-making practices deriving from the undergoing renovation of the place, which is affected by increasing semiotic regulation in the institution's attempts to brand its image.

The next section provides background information on Kirkgate Market, the following one introduces the semiotically-unregulated character of the place before it underwent renovation, while the section after analyses the changes in its visual landscape following renovation. The concluding discussion identifies the gains and losses (Kress, 2003) produced in the change, in terms of semiotic practices and related social effects.

LEEDS KIRKGATE MARKET

Kirkgate Market is considered one of the oldest and largest indoor markets in Europe (<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/leedsmarkets/Pages/Kirkgate-market.aspx> accessed 26 Jan 2018). It is located in the centre of Leeds, one of the four largest cities in the UK, which has been subject to post-industrial renovation after being heavily affected by Thatcherism in the 80s and 90s, like most urban centres in the north of England. Renovation of Leeds has involved the whole central area, with regeneration of the canal banks south of the market, through 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 corporate chain cafés and restaurants. North-west of the market, the centre has been pedestrianized and populated by shopping centres and high street chains. Just opposite the north end of the market, a large multi-storey John Lewis (a chain selling high-end global fashion brands) opened at the end of 2016 in a newly constructed building promoted as the landmark of the Victoria Quarter, a shopping district of arcades hosting luxury brands.

Managed by the City Council, and surrounded by these high-budget, luxury and chain shopping areas, Kirkgate Market is located in a Victorian building enlarged with new halls in

the 70s and 80s. Traditionally attracting a low-budget customer audience, it has long been subject to plans for renovation. After various attempts, often actively resisted by traders (Gonzalez, 2014), one hall was closed for work in 2015 and reopened in spring 2016 as one of the first steps towards upgrading the place. The ethnic composition of the market population has changed considerably in recent years, with increasingly diverse demographics of traders and customers (Gonzalez & Waley, 2013), including new and old migrants as well as British citizens of all ethnic groups living in Leeds. The nearly 400 stalls sell all kinds of affordable goods and services, including fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, groceries of various provenance, mobile accessories, affordable and second-hand furniture, - white goods, and kitchenware, textiles, clothing, and flowers; services range from hairdressers, nail-bars and massages to key-cutters and shoe repair, and from small tailoring services on to take-away restaurants and cafes. By contrast with the traditionally elderly, low-budget and increasingly migrant population of the market, the ongoing renovation plan seeks to attract a younger and higher-budget customer audience by branding the image of the place, which has long been surrounded by discourses of decay, neglect and crisis (Gonzalez, 2014).

The analysis in the following sections draws on data collected during a 2-year social semiotic ethnographic study of the place (2015-2017), as part of the British Academy/Leverhulme funded interdisciplinary project Leeds Voices: Communicating Superdiversity in the Market (<https://voices.leeds.ac.uk>), which aimed at investigating traders' and customers' communicative practices in such a socio-culturally diverse place. During fieldwork observation, the visual landscape of the place and the sign-making changes that I was noticing have increasingly generated questions on the social dynamics underlying its renovation, further triggered by the many concerns expressed by traders in their interviews conducted by me and others in the research team. The following sections draw on fieldwork observations captured through photos and supported by traders' interviews, and focus on (1)

the unregulated character of the semiotic practices in the pre-renovation stage, (2) the institutional sign-making resulting from the attempts at branding the market, and (3) the effects of institutional regulatory practices on the traders' sign-making.

PRE-RENOVATION STAGE: UNREGULATED VERNACULAR SEMIOTICS

As analysed in detail in Adami (forth.a), the most salient characteristic of the visual landscape of Kirkgate Market is the impressively wide variety of resources used in the stalls (see an example in Figure 6.1, capturing a section of an aisle of the market; see photos of all stalls in the interactive map produced by Leeds Voices at <http://tour.mapsalive.com/61243/page1.htm>).

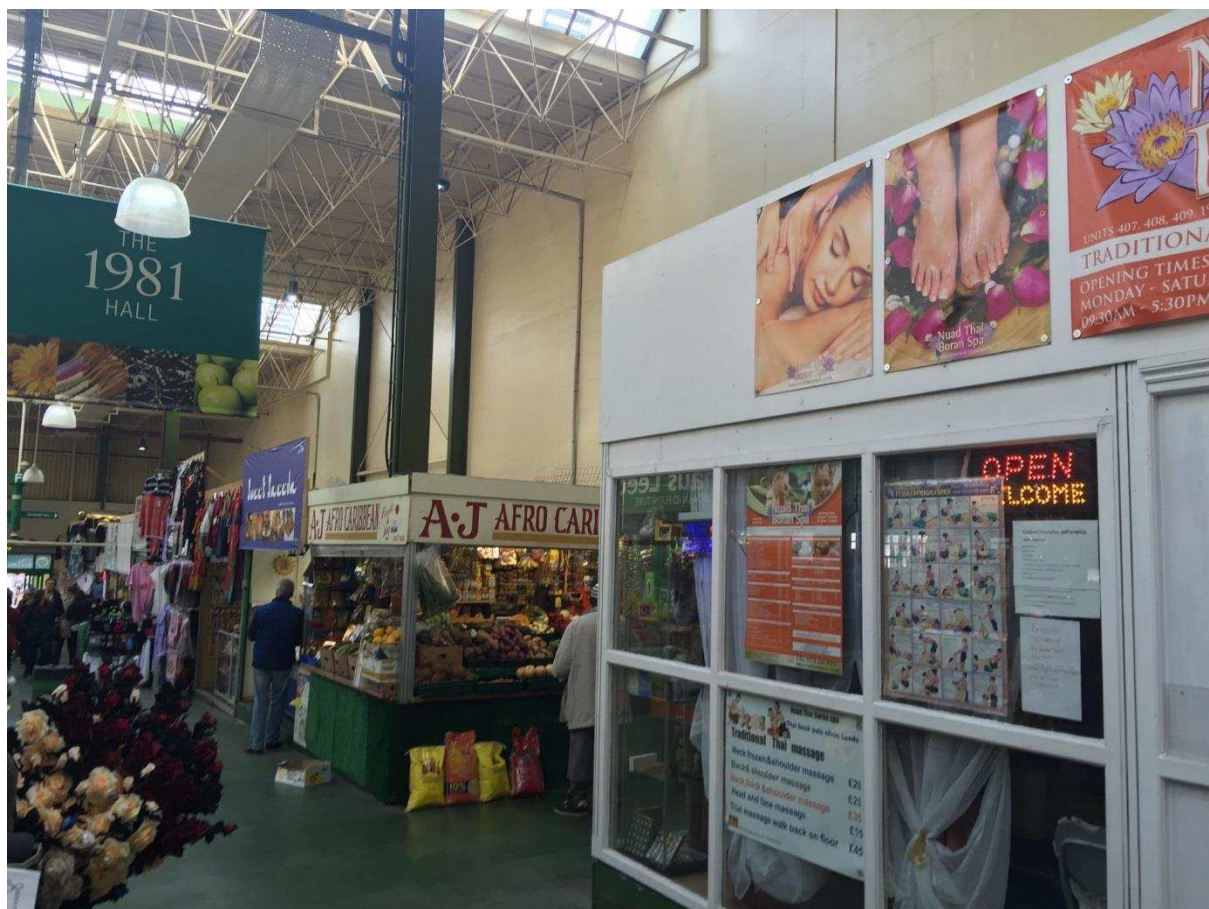


Figure 6.1. Diversity in semiotic resources in an aisle of the market.

The diversity in resources encompasses not only writing, font, image, colour and layout of banners and signage, but also the architecture, colour, size and materiality of the different stalls and the layout of objects on display. The wide variety of resources deployed in the stalls is indicative of the semiotically unregulated character of the place. Traders have ample freedom of agency in sign-making with disembodied modes in their stalls. This works together to make Kirkgate Market an extraordinary example of “vernacular semiotics in public space” (Adami, forth.a). Traders’ ample agency in sign-making results in a remarkably diverse aesthetic landscape, because of the density and juxtaposition of signs produced by different sign-makers, who have different tastes and specific needs in shaping the identity of their stalls. Trader’s sign-making is driven by a combination of variables such as their cultural capital and material resources, the perceived tastes and needs of the customer audience they address, as well as the structural features of the space they have available. This results in a sense of non-cohesion in the visual landscape of this public space, which is typical of traditional (non-gentrified) markets and bazaars worldwide, but contrasts sharply with the overall visual landscape of the city centre’s shopping district within which the market is located. Like most UK cities, the centre of Leeds has heavily regulated public signage, and is mainly populated by chain shops and shopping malls, displaying professionally-designed visual compositions.

The more the visual landscapes of urban centres are impacted by professional corporate design (and centrally-located markets are gentrified), the more the values associated with patterned uses of semiotic resources will shape our tastes, as the expression of naturalised ideologies of taste, within an overall semiotic technologization of discourse, which regulates not only corporate/institutional language use (as investigated by Cameron, 2000; and Fairclough, 1995), but all semiotic resources (for semiotic technologization on resources online, see Adami, forth.b). This is so much so, that some sign-making in the

market may show shabbiness and neglect to our eyes; yet in-depth observation reveals the principles behind the sign-making. Economic and material reasons for the resources available combine with the sign-makers' assessment of the needs of their intended audience, as exemplified in the following two cases. In Figure 6.2, the materiality of the banner, the hand-written list of services, layered with multiple pen/marker colours and handwriting styles, the discoloured sample photos of the tailored products, the scratched surface of the wall of the stall, the un-matched materials and textiles covering the windows (with one not properly fixed), all index poverty of resources, lack of maintenance, and perhaps even sloppiness/neglect. Yet the signage lists the languages spoken in the stall and a culture-specific expertise in tailoring style, while the curtains protect the privacy of the customers inside the shop, and the poverty of resources index - the low-budget hand-made character of the service provided, all indicative of a well thought-through idea of the needs of the specific custom audience that the stall addresses.



Figure 6.2. An apparently shabby design.

Rather than careless or ‘accidental’, vernacular sign-making in the market is principled; yet the social and semiotic principles on which it hinges may differ from those of professional design, because sign-makers’ interests differ, as in the example shown in Figure 6.3. The layout seems to index -“transgression” (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003), with the boxes of objects on sale placed outside the boundaries of the stall. Yet the transgressive sign is the result of a conscious choice, rather than what could appear to be carelessness (stall holders must pay for space they occupy outside the stall). From an interview with the trader of the goods displayed in Figure 6.3 (a man in his 50s, originally from India), it emerged that he places the two chairs opposite his stall to offer a place to sit to the many (often elderly) habitual visitors who come to the market not only to shop but also to socialise and spend part of their day, given the absence of seats not designated for consumption. To an eye influenced by mainstream aesthetic tenets (like mine), the materiality and design of the two chairs and their juxtaposition with the boxes in Figure 6.3 would be interpreted as signs of neglect or shabbiness. Instead, as emerged in the trader’s interview, they are meant as signs of welcoming and caring, and are interpreted as such by the people who often sit there.



Figure 6.3. Transgressive layout and chairs as neglect vs. welcoming signs.

The semiotically unregulated character of the market results in an overall non-cohesion because of the density and complexity of the juxtaposition of signs produced by a socio-culturally diverse conglomerate of traders. This may make the place disorienting to visitors, chaotic maybe, with signs of shabbiness. A disorienting or disconcerting effect is however an index that we, as viewers and inhabitants of urban spaces, have internalized the hegemonic conventions of professional branding design as those that are appropriate for commercial places in our visual urban landscape. In turn, as these examples have shown, vernacular sign-making is principled and may reflect principles (of welcoming hospitality and invitation to socialization, for example) that diverge from the profit-maximisation ones that drive corporate business activities designed by brand-image professionals.

THE RENOVATION: BRANDING, SEMIOTIC REGULATION AND SIGN-MAKING CHANGES

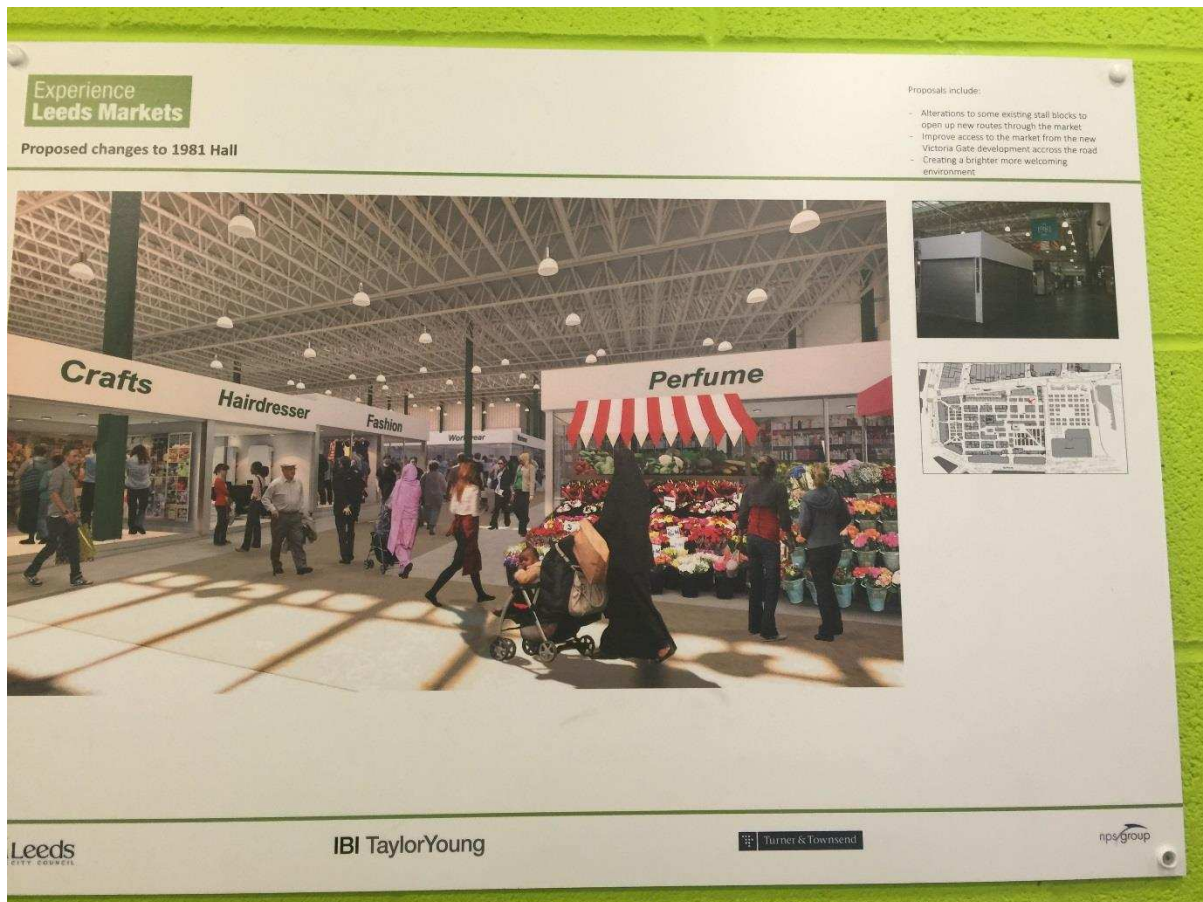


Figure 6.44 shows the plans of renovation of the market, as depicted in a poster attached to one of its central walls. Judging from the type, size and shape of stalls, their signage and their layout in the main image of the poster, the semiotics of the place would be sanitized, homogenised and standardized following aesthetic patterns reminiscent of shopping malls or exhibition fairs, with a dramatic loss in traders' agency in sign-making and consequent reduction of the vernacular semiotic character of the market's visual landscape.

Experience Leeds Markets

Proposed changes to 1981 Hall

Proposals include:

- Alterations to some existing stall blocks to open up new routes through the market
- Improve access to the market from the new Victoria Gate development across the road
- Creating a brighter more welcoming environment

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

IBI TaylorYoung

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nps group

Figure 6.4. Renovation plan.

The top-left text in

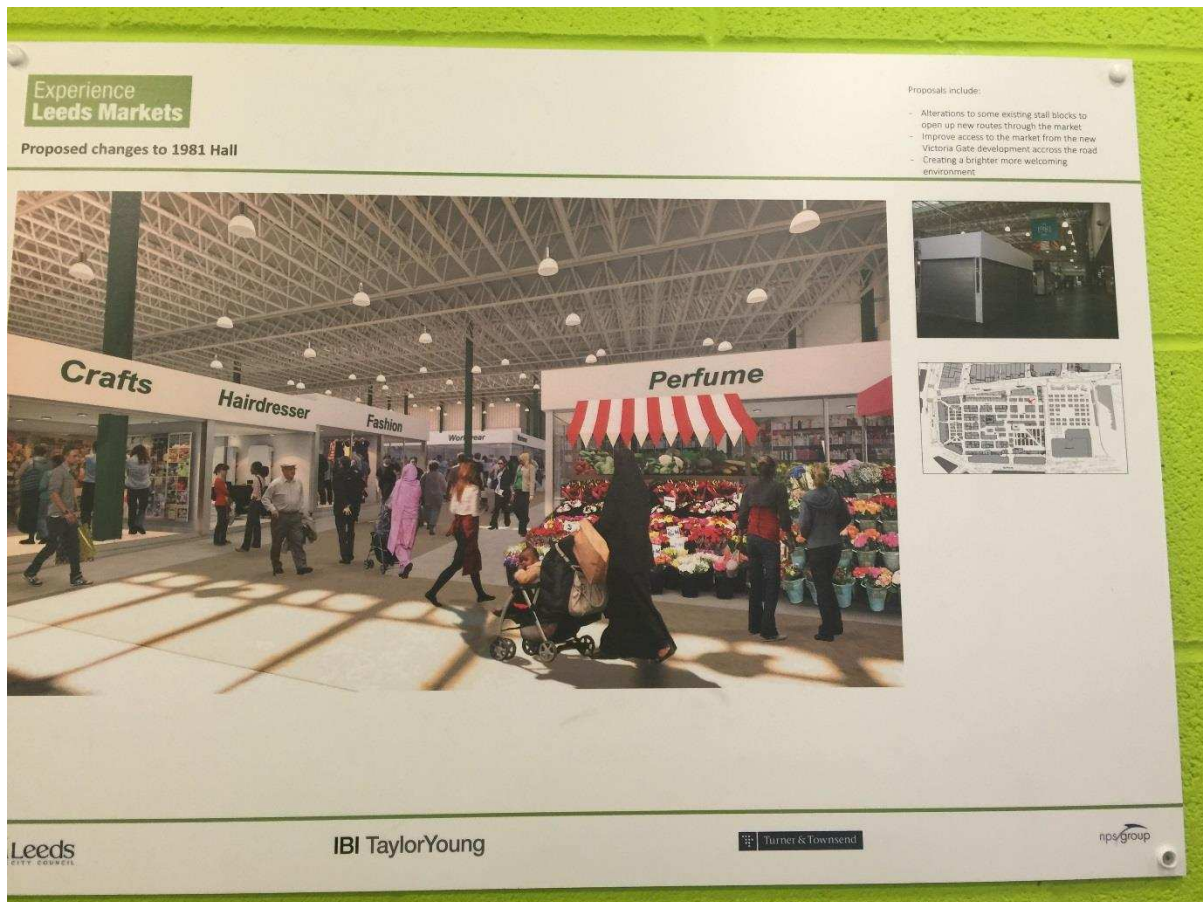


Figure 6.4 invites one to “experience” the market, thus targeting a new kind of audience, i.e., visitors in search of experiences, rather than customers coming for their daily shopping. The written text on the top right explains the rationale behind the planned changes:

Proposals include

- Alterations to some existing stall blocks to open up new routes through the market
- Improve access to the market from the new Victoria Gate development across the road
- Creating a brighter, more welcoming environment

The renovation is aimed to “improve access” from the “Victoria Gate” (the newly developed high-budget shopping district, with the recently opened John Lewis store). Changes are aimed at “opening up” and “brightening” the market. The aisles in the plan are significantly wider compared to the current ones, thus enabling customers to move quickly (as in shopping centres), yet limiting the “rubbing-along” effect (Watson, 2009) of the physical contact that is

typical of the bodily interactions in markets. The overall semiotic homogenization and opening up/brightening intervention are said to create a supposedly “more welcoming environment”. This all gives an indication of the type of audience (in terms of taste preferences) that this welcoming is aimed to attract, i.e., new visitors/outsideers, who are accustomed to the aesthetics and interaction practices of shopping centres (rather than the regulars who are accustomed to the aesthetics of welcoming signs such as the chairs in Figure 6.3).

The renovation plan has not been fully implemented yet. As of January 2018, it has involved (1) institutional signage inside and outside the market, and (2) the renovation and repurposing of a hall of the market. The next two sections examine each of these respectively.

Institutional signage: Branding the market

The first sign of renovation is visible before entering the market, in the signage of its many entrances. Figure 6.5 shows the visual changes in one of the main entrances to the Victorian building, facing the main pedestrian shopping area of the city centre. Along with the repainting of the window frames from green to dark grey, a new logo (shown at the bottom in Figure 6.5) has replaced the images of fruit and vegetables in all entrances and is present on banners advertising the place across the city centre.



Figure 6.5. One of the main entrances before (top-left) and after renovation (top-right), and the market's new logo (bottom).

A multimodal analysis of the logo in Figure 6.5 can single out the intended reshaping of the image of the place. In the logo, **writing** names the place (“Kirkgate”, not present in the original entrance signage), singularises it (from “markets” to “market”), and puts a stamp of history on it (“est. 1857”). **Image** puts a stamp of locality/local pride, through the rose symbol of Yorkshire (the county where Leeds is). **Font** provides lightness and elegance, by reducing the thickness of the font body of the old “Leeds City Markets” metal lettering of the entrance, and introduces cohesion in the 3D effect of the font used for “Kirkgate” and the rectangular shape framing it (further recalling the new signage of stalls, see



Figure 6.6 below). **Layout** has a main recalling function, through the positioning and orientation of “Leeds City” and “Market” that reproduce the upper shape of the entrance and its metal lettering; so, when the logo is displaced from the market entrance (i.e., when it appears elsewhere, e.g., on flyers and banners around the city, as well as on the market website), it visually recalls the place, through association of its layout with that of its main

entrance. **Colour** uses white against a dark background (black when the logo is used in banners and prints); the narrow black and white palette (further reinforced through the repainting of the entrances into dark grey, as shown in Figure 6.5) indexes - minimalism in line with the distinction signage of business activities in gentrified areas (Trinch & Snajdr, 2017).

The multimodal deployment of the market logo serves to identify and promote the market as a unique, traditional, and local place, through values of elegance, cohesion and minimalism, in line with current trends in distinction marketing of heritage places, which again target a specific audience. It is indeed designed to address “outsiders” and visitors, who want to “experience” (cf. the invitation in the plans in

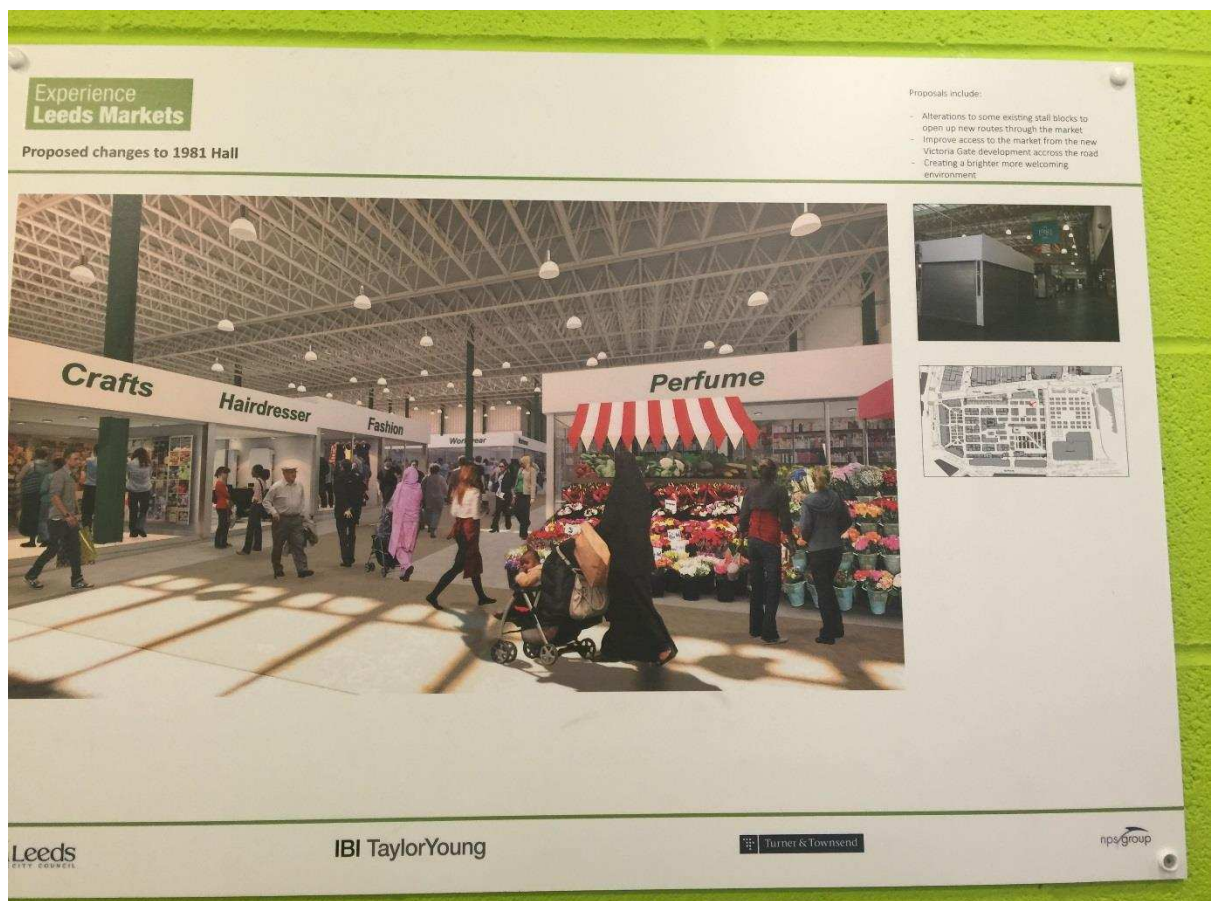


Figure 6.4 above) the authenticity of the market as a historical/traditional place, rather than use/live it as habitual customers for daily low-budget shopping needs. The placement of the logo on the entrances, and the consequent disappearance of the fruit and vegetables

image, results in a loss of the “daily shopping” signified as a triggered/suggested activity to be carried out in the market.

Besides changing the visual appearance of all the entrances, the market logo is part of a branding campaign that involves a cohesive aesthetics now present on the signage outside the market and on the panelling covering the stalls that are temporarily unoccupied (Figure 6.6). The signage pairs the market logo through (1) colour, with the black and white colour palette (as for the repainted entrance gates, the specific nuances of black and grey are not pure, but tinted with warm colour hues that recall values of “vintage”), and (2) shape, recalling the rectangular framing, through either a drawn square or a physical one marked by the colour grey. Writing in the institutional signage includes notable facts that make the place unique (“the largest indoor market in Europe”) and enhance the “history” of the place, as well as a tagline “Many stories told. Many still to tell.”, reproduced on walls outside and inside the market (cf. also Figure 6.7 below). Writing also includes a series of verbs, scattered throughout the market in place of the signage of stalls that are temporarily unoccupied. With “browse” (shown in the top-right image in

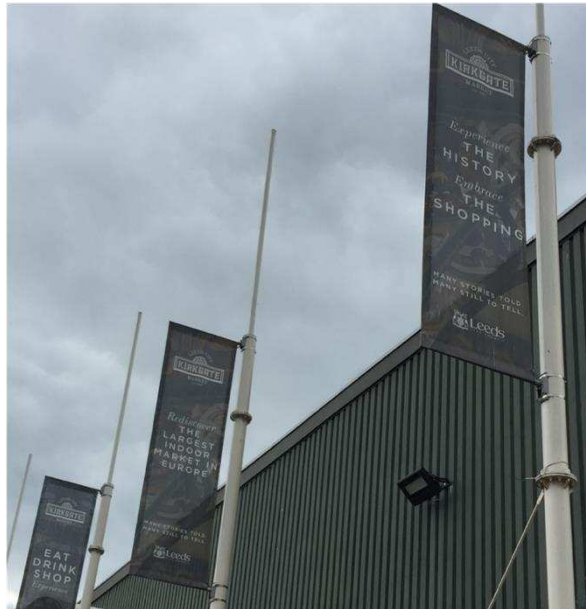


Figure 6.6), other verbs in the series are “buy”, “chat”, “eat”, “drink”, “meet”, “reminisce”, “share”, “shop”, “watch”. In line with the “experience” framing the renovation plan (see discussion above), besides shopping/buying, the activities triggered in the signage have semantic values of communality and conviviality (“share”, “chat”, “meet”), and again visiting/heritage nuances (in the “watch” and in the history and tradition implied in “reminisce”). Besides appearing individually on signage, four of the verbs appear clustered together on walls and banners, shaping a slogan: “eat drink shop experience” (bottom-right and left in



Figure 6.6). Their sequencing in the slogan is indicative of priorities: before then a space for daily shopping, the market is presented, branded and increasingly shaped (see the new hall discussed below) as a place for entertainment and food, in line with the centrality of food spaces in urban regeneration, see also (Aiello, 2013). The visual composition of the verb series, in a sans serif font, minimalist colour palette, the use of few or isolated words, and the full stop in the tagline, conforms to the characteristics of distinction signage found in Trinch and Snajdr (2017) for gentrified Brooklyn activities. In sum, the place is being branded as a landmark of the city, for those (outsiders, who align with distinction values of cohesion, elegance and minimalism) who want to experience the market's authentic, local and traditional flavour.



Figure 6.6. The branded image in the signage of shops outside the market (top left and bottom right), in the panels on unoccupied stalls inside (top right), and in the banners (bottom left) and entrance (bottom right, in the background).

The new hall: Semiotic regulation styling the trader

As mentioned earlier, a hall of the market reopened in spring 2016 after being closed for several months for renovation. In line with urban regeneration trends, the hall is meant as a place for foodies (consistent with the prioritising of drinking and eating activities in the institutional signage in



Figure 6.6 above); it is advertised as such outside the market (Figure 6.7) through a gourmet-style wording and glamorous background aesthetics, with the overall composition recalling the image-branding of the market, including the logo, the minimalist typeface combination, and the slogan “Many stories told. Many still to tell.”.



Figure 6.7. A poster outside the market advertising the renovated hall.

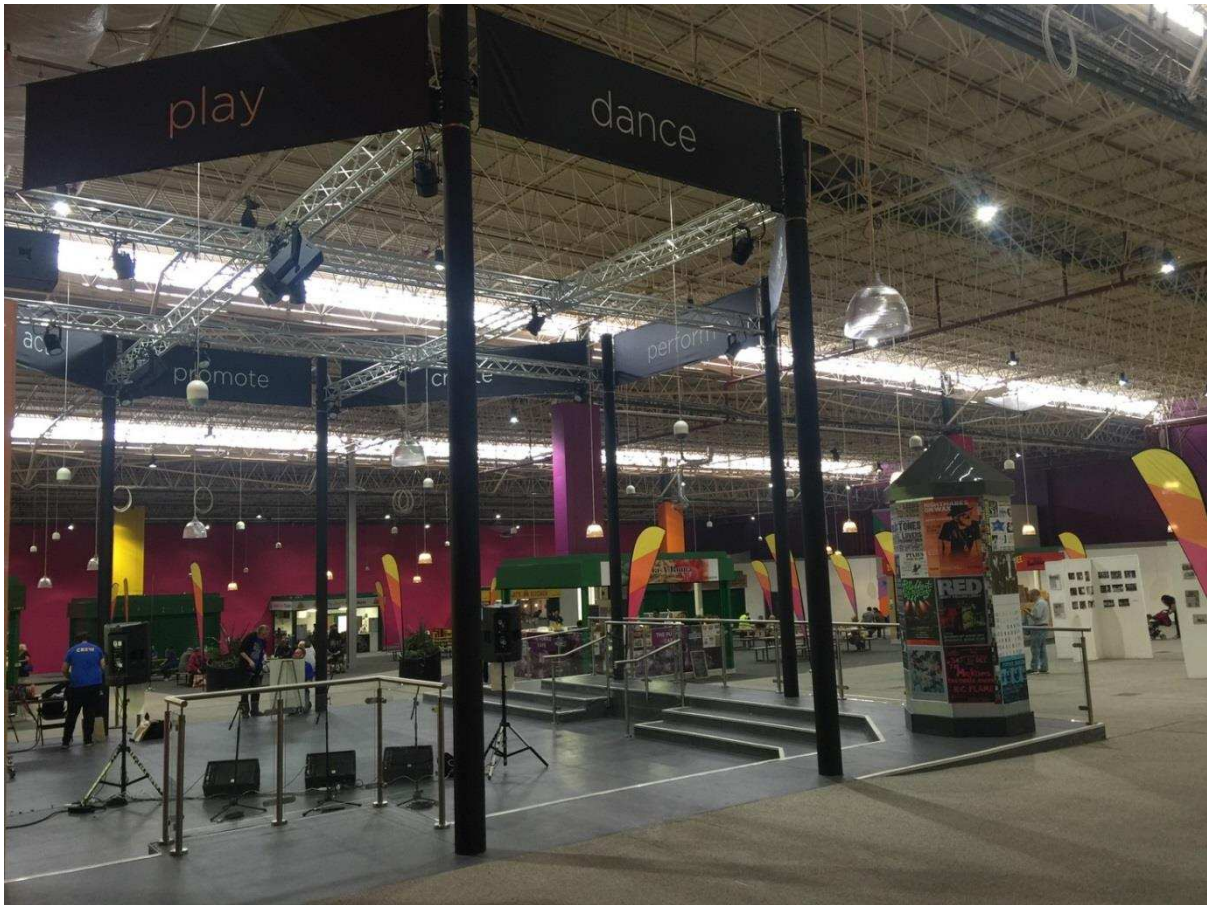


Figure 6.8. The hall reopened after renovation.

Figure 6.8 shows part of the hall after the reopening. It has colourful halls, a multimedia stage for events and entertainment, plus various signage that makes the presence of institutional sign-making rather prominent. Verbs on the signage of the multimedia stage broaden the triggered activities, diverting them further from shopping, inviting to “dance”, “promote”, “create”, “play”, “act” and “perform”. Along with the permanent stalls (most of which offer different cuisines to eat on the spot or take away), the hall hosts temporary events, including Saturday artisanal and independent designers’ markets and vintage clothing and music record fairs, as well as a bi-monthly evening event with temporary stalls of local breweries and produce, appealing to a younger, higher-budget and gourmet audience. Events often include live music and entertainment for children, in line with recent trends in shaping spaces in

shopping centres devoted to leisure activities, ‘street food’ areas and temporary designers’ stalls.

Changes in traders’ sign-making practices can be traceable in those stalls that have been relocated to the renovated hall from another one, and those located at its boundaries. Figure 6.9 shows the Spice Corner, a stall that has been present in the market for over 30 years, which has “been forced to move” to the new hall (in the words of its owner, a woman in her 50s, originally from Mauritius). The photo on the left shows the shop in its old location; the one on the right shows it in the renovated hall, displaying a different signage. When interviewed, the owner said that she had to change the banner because traders in the new hall were sent a letter by the management with a regulation and policy on the allowed size and permitted colour range and typeface of the banner. She looked particularly sad about this and added “the small image of a chilli is the only thing I could add, but had to insist”. As emerged from the interview, the institution is regulating sign-making in the new hall, with a series of constraints toward homogenization and standardization of the multimodal deployment. Moreover, as noticeable in Figure 6.9, while the old stall had almost no labelling of the exotic fruit and vegetables on sale, labels appear in the new one in the form of writing on paper. My remark on the new labelling originated the following exchange:

Researcher: you have labels now... [pointing at one of them]

Trader: yes we’re now trying to put labels

Researcher: oh so people would know...

Trader: yes, but I have always been willing to give indications and explain how to cook something

Her resigned face expression and tone of voice, combined with her subject shift from “we’re trying to...” to “but I’ve always given indications”, seem to indicate the trader’s distancing from the decision to label the products on sale. The change in the trader’s sign-making with the appearance of labels indexes -a different type of customer they intend to address in the

new hall, that is, customers who do not have shared background knowledge on the products on sale and are not willing to interact and ask, i.e., strangers and occasional visitors, who browse silently (as in shopping centres), rather than habitual market customers, who either know what is sold or are open to the face-to-face interacting conventions typical of the marketplace.



Figure 6.9. The Spice Corner in its old location (left) and after relocation (right).

A second case of changed sign-making practices is notable in the stall owned by a Kurdish couple. Their stall is at the boundaries of the new hall; while the latter was closed for renovation, the stall had a plastic banner with Arabic and English writing (top of Figure 6.10). After the hall re-opened, the stall changed the signage following regulations (bottom of Figure 6.10), with a multimodal deployment similar to that of the Spice Corner discussed above (enhancing cohesion and values of tradition in the colour, framing and serif font). In the new banner the Arabic has disappeared. To my question “aren’t you using Arabic anymore?”, the owner (who speaks very limited English) replied “Arabic, no!” with a face

expression -of dislike and a gesture of the hand that I have interpreted as “no, we don’t want it anymore/it’s no longer apt”, again showing the trader’s attempt at accommodating her stall’s communicated identity - to the assumed tastes of the new customer audience of the hall.



Figure 6.10. The pre- and post-hall renovation of the Veg Falafel Chicken Shawarma stall.

Along with accommodation, signs of conflict are also present, as in the case shown in



Figure 6.11, in which the positioning of the boxes of goods and their signage are clearly contravening the institution's regulation expressed in the notice (designed in the market's branded style) attached to the wall just behind them, which says,

This area must be kept clear of boxes, refuse, stock & containers after 10 a.m. and throughout the trading day. Enforcement action will be taken for non compliance

More than a mere transgression of a rule, this instance represents a sign of resistance; the trader opposite the stall used to occupy the space with his boxes well before the branding of

the market and the introduction of the new rule; his keeping to his practice has forced the institution to make explicit the new rule through the notice.



Figure 6.11. Signs of transgression and resistance to institutional regulations.

The place is still evolving, and with the ongoing renovation plans it is likely to continue changing as a result of the interaction between the institution's semiotic regulation, the

image-branding, and the varied agency of its inhabitants. These examples, however, show the early signs of both regulatory forces from above producing standardisation, and traders' changes in sign-making, as forms of self-styling (and self-censoring, as in the case of Arabic), to adapt to the new place and its assumed new audience, in line with the one targeted by the institutional branding, as well as signs of resistance and conflict.

In the meantime, the oldest hall of the market (in the Victorian-style building facing the commercial hub of the city centre and charging the highest rents for stalls), is witnessing the first signs of gentrification in its stalls composition, with the opening, at the beginning of 2017, of the bakery shown in Figure 6.12. Its multimodal deployment in colour palette, font types, writing, materiality of the stall walls, shape of windows, objects (such as the lamps), type of lighting and overall layout, align with current trends of distinction shop design aesthetics in gentrified areas. For the moment, this insertion of distinction does not disrupt the overall aesthetics of the market, since it clashes with the vernacular styles of the multimodal deployment of its neighbouring stalls, thus increasing diversity and variety rather than producing homogenization (unlike the effects of the institutional regulations on the stalls signage in the new hall). Still, other stalls are currently being refurbished for the opening of new activities; it remains to be seen whether, in the years to come, further innovation in this sense will generate a felicitous hybridity (in aesthetics, as well as in customer audiences), or a change towards enhanced gentrification and homogenization, forcing the more traditional and low-budget stalls to close, as an effect of the rising rents and the marketing campaign for the image-branding of the place. This latter scenario would mean the loss of the last remaining market (with its distinctive type of interaction and socialization) for affordable shopping in the city centre, following similar trends in London and other UK cities, thus marking further the signs of social inequalities and exclusion practices in UK urban areas.



Figure 6.12. The new bakery in the Victorian hall.

CONCLUSIONS: GAINS AND LOSSES

The analysis has traced a series of changes in the visual landscape of Leeds Kirkgate Market, as a result of the ongoing renovation of the place. Identified semiotic changes involve (1) an increased presence of institutional signage aimed at branding the place, (2) an increased semiotic regulation of visual resources, (3) traders' self-styling of their stalls in line with the assumed new intended audience, as well as signs of resistance to semiotic regulation, and (4)

a changing composition of stalls, with insertions of distinction aesthetics. These changes involve gains and losses in (1) meanings and aesthetic values, (2) sign-making power and agency among the people and institutions shaping the space and engaging with it, and (3) fostered/enabled or discouraged/hindered social practices and activities in the place.

In terms of meanings and aesthetic values, the semiotic regulation of the place is producing an increased standardisation and normalisation in the use of semiotic resources, within an overarching semiotic technologization process, whereby “expert technologists” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 103), i.e., brand image designers, commissioned by the institution, promote, police and prescribe patterned uses of semiotic resources in the place, enforced by the management. This results in a loss of diversity in the visual landscape, with a gain in visual cohesion instead. Aesthetic values in the institutional signage and in the new insertion of higher-budget stalls foreground minimalism, elegance, cohesion and distinction, while backgrounding vernacular values and the chaotic and colourful low-budget diversity resulting from multiple sign-makers with different interests and resources (increasingly rare in the heavily regulated visual landscapes of UK city centres). A gain in the cohesive image of the market through branding shaped to promote it as a uniquely local and traditional heritage place, is coupled with a loss in its unique richness in sign-making, which is the expression of the lived (rather than promoted) practices in the space.

For the people/participants, changes involve a shift in sign-making power, with increased semiotic intervention by the institution in shaping the aesthetics of the place, and traders’ diminished freedom of expression through visual and material resources, because of the semiotic regulation imposed, but also their increased self-styling (with cases of self-censoring, e.g., the avoidance of Arabic in the signage), in an attempt to accommodate to the new type of audience targeted by the institutional renovation. For customers and visitors as meaning-makers of the place, a loss can be traced in terms of exposure to vernacular sign-

making deviating from mainstream aesthetic patterns; the gain in semiotic uniformity, in line with distinction aesthetics, reinforces hegemonic social connotations for patterned uses of resources towards mainstream taste (e.g., what is socially-constructed as tasteful and what is shabby, or an index of neglect). The renovation is still ongoing. If, as it proceeds, it - imposes further semiotic regulation, as has happened in other city markets (a case close to Leeds is Grainger Market in Newcastle, which has been fully homogenized in the multimodal deployment of its visual landscape), Leeds will lose a unique central place of semiotic expression from below, with its disorienting effect that has the potential to question naturalised ideologies of taste.

In terms of social practices and activities, the changes involve gains and losses in functionality. As for gains, the increased uniformity of stalls signage, the more salient presence of institutional signage, and the more explicit signposting (also in the traders' self-styling through labelling the goods on display) make the place less disorienting and easier to navigate for newcomers, like supermarkets or shopping centres. At the same time, a facilitated and signposted navigation diminishes the need and possibility of "finding one's own way through the place", of navigating it with a sense of personal exploration and discovery, and familiarising oneself with it through time, through direct experience and active interaction with traders and the place itself. This is part of the sense of becoming an insider, a habitual customer of the market, with a continuously developing unique personal knowledge of the place and the services/goods provided by the hundreds of stalls, through lived encounters with it/them. Changes also involve backgrounded and foregrounded uses of the place, with daily shopping being backgrounded in favour of the foregrounding of leisure and foodie-style activities. The signposting invites one to experience the place, and to socialise (chat, meet), drawing on community and conviviality discourses that are supposedly typical of the marketplace, yet with foregrounded emphasis on the cultural and historical value of the

place, thus inserting it into a heritage discourse. Precisely by signposting them through invitations in the signage (within their overall distinction aesthetics), these triggered/invited/promoted activities achieve values of tourist discourse, rather than lived practices. While the institutional signposted invitations explicitly invite visitors/outside to engage with the place, semiotic regulation in fact hinders the very practising of these activities as carried out spontaneously through the semiotics and materiality of the place. As the analysis has shown, traders' vernacular sign-making enabled consumption-free socialising, resting, and chatting (as in the case of the welcoming chairs) and invited face-to-face interaction with traders (necessary to gain knowledge of goods on display, in the absence of labels, as in the case of the Spice Corners), while the materiality of the place required "rubbing-along" with strangers when walking the narrow aisles punctuated with boxes of goods displayed outside the stalls. Semiotic regulation and institutional control over the multimodal composition of the space reduces in fact the spontaneous enabling of social practices (such as welcoming and socialising) that are not strictly functional in profit making, while the branding of the place through professional sign-making reinforces mainstream aesthetic values, triggers museification effects (i.e., a place to be visited for its past, through tradition and heritage discourse) and leisure activities related to consumption, with diminished interactions among strangers, through a layout of the space more functional for activities typical of shopping centres.

Socially overall, at the moment at least, there seems to be a gain in terms of wider social composition (with spaces and activities also hosting and attracting higher budget traders/customers), however, with the rising rents and the overall plans and efforts to attract a higher-budget and younger population come real dangers of a potential loss of a place for affordable daily shopping in the city centre, with its characteristic socialising and interacting practices. This loss would affect not only lower-budget and elderly customers (who would be

left with online shopping and chain discount superstores located in the city's outskirts), but also the type of low-budget entrepreneurship that the relatively affordable prices of opening a stall in the market make possible, impacting particularly on occupationally-disadvantaged demographics such as ethnic minority women and newly-arrived migrants (which constitute a high proportion of the traders in the market). This would determine a further sign of the processes of expelling lower and marginalised social segments from the centre of Leeds, within an across-the-board exclusive/exclusionist regeneration and gentrification process of the city, analogous to most urban centres in the UK and Europe.

The analysis in the present chapter accounts only for a very short period in time in the continuing evolving history of the place, and would require further exploration along multiple timescales and by integrating data and insights from other fields (e.g., urban studies, sociology and economics). Yet it shows the potential contribution of a social semiotic ethnographic approach to the investigation of public places. Considering a place as a meaning-making environment, the approach analyses it in terms of its meaning-making resources (encompassing not only writing and image, but also objects, architecture, and their materiality and layout), as traces of the sign-making of the different agencies inhabiting the place. Through fieldwork observations of the space and supporting the analysis with interviews of the sign-makers, the approach enables the mapping of aesthetic values in relation to their social significance, yielding insights into the social dynamics shaping a place. Analysis of the semiotic regimes governing a place reveals the social dynamics and practices projected by it, those governing it and those hindered/enabled in it, as well as who gains and who loses in terms of freedom of shaping and living/accessing it. In today's increased semiotic technologization, aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone, 1991), and mediating/mediatising functions of urban spaces (Aiello, 2013), the approach seems

particularly useful in revealing the direct relation of these apparently formal features to profoundly significant practices and dynamics of social exclusion.

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