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The Street as a Vernacular Archive

How have formal regulations and informal everyday practices shaped vernacular sign-making in public space, and how do these signs function as an unofficial archive of otherwise undocumented social life?

1. The Material and Social
Information Held by Street Signs

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The Material and Social Information Held by Street Signs

1.

For the past few years, I have been documenting street signs that catch my eye, from DIY stickered window fronts and rough paint jobs to weathered, sun-bleached, and ripped posters. What attracts me to the semiotics of the street is the information the signs hold, beyond their letterforms. In this collage essay, I explore the types of information stored in public signage and the social and material influences that affect how knowledge is produced and preserved. What determines the shape that an archive takes? I pair this investigation with my personal photo archive, influenced by my own background as a German-Ukrainian, raised in the UK, who has studied in the Netherlands and now finds herself studying in Finland.

Roman Mars:

But the best thing about these trips is that Justin actually teaches us how to look at old hand-painted signs.

Justin Green:

I literally did that. I mean, I would stand in front of these old sunburnt signs like a history detective and I would see how good the craftsmen were.

Justin Green:

If someone was a fledgling or a drunk, you would see lots of brushwork around the tricky parts like an 'O.' And an 'O' by an old-timer was done in about four strokes amazingly. Although any neophyte can use fifty strokes to get in the ballpark but at that point, you can't make a living so you very quickly learn how to coordinate your eye and hand.

Faythe Levine:

It's mind-blowing to think about what was done by hand and in comparison to how things are done now.

Benjamin Walker:

That's Faythe Levine. She just co-directed a movie about sign painters-

signs on the street not only carry information about what was valued at the time, but also environmental information.

observing old street signs shows us the craftsmanship of the past, what tools and materials were used. It becomes an informal archive, preserving

Not only do street signs contain information about the environment, the craftsmanship of the past and values, but also about the person themselves. In a standard archive, there is mainly only work preserved from professional, whereas in this peripheral, vernacular archive, anyone can be a part of it even a 'fledgling' or a 'drunk'. This way, we receive fuller information about all aspects of society.

past values, styles and how the environment and people reacted to it. Instead of being preserved in a sterile vacuum in an official archive, this informal archive absorbs information that would not be possible if the sign was in a glass box.



Here is one of my own photos, taken in Berlin, DE, 2025. The sign stood out to me for exactly the reason detailed in the podcast transcript. There was so much personality and electricity behind the sign. There is so much information we can glean from the way it was made and the materials that were used, that it in effect becomes an archival object.

The Lived Experience of Graphics in Daily Life

Despite graphics being such a familiar part of everyday life, it appears that because they are designed, which is another way of saying that they come about by way of particular, deliberate intentions, we lose sight of their graphic nature, which is often awkward, unplanned, and contingent. In other words, what we see and hear in established discourse is the priority of the designed image of graphics and the dismissal of the lived experience of graphics in daily life.¹ The former concerns the preservation of ideal intention (design's necessity) the latter amplifies concrete experience (graphic's contingency). It seems, to some degree, that crystallizing the actuality of a design relies on virtualizing the graphic. At a cultural scale, isn't this what is happening in *Art of Revolution*? The way the graphic lives in excess beyond its design is not worth noticing, it is disregarded and therefore has no sensible appearance in the grander narrative of the graphic-as-design.² This is, as Sontag points out, what makes the collection and consumption of the political Cuban posters possible without "risk of cultural indigestion".³

We can see this loss of detail for the sake of coherent structure happening at a material level too. For example, with few exceptions, in John Barnicoat's *Posters: A Concise History*, there is no mention of striated textures from irregular substrates pushing through the paper, no air bubble blisters, or welts from nails sticking out of chipboard, there is little mention of neighbouring graphics or the possibility of their being graffitied, torn, or even pasted over with other posters.⁴ But those material qualities are still noticeable, even if they are not being treated as sensible. We can see it in the photographs of posters on display in Margate and in the creases of the poster *Five Celebrated Clowns*, but it's a seamy part of a graphic's life, and it remains unsaid; not part of the concise history.⁵ Instead, the graphics are shown to be designs that exist in a matter-of-fact way, simply and reliably just the way they were intended to be.

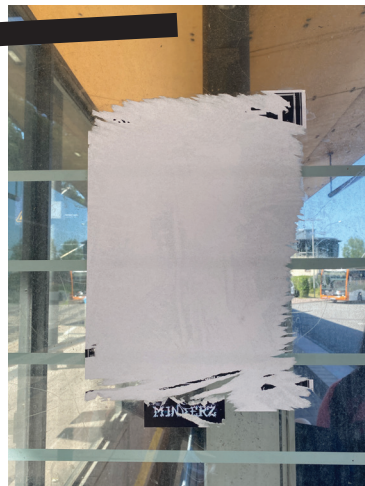
When thinking about "everyday surface aesthetic qualities" Thomas Leddy, a philosopher of art and aesthetics, designs don't exist in a vacuum.

When graphic design, (such as street signs) is put out into the wild, naturally ~~they~~ it starts living a life of its ~~their~~ own. Perhaps the sign gets rained upon, or somebody graffiti's it - the more it lives the more it absorbs. It becomes a rich archive documenting not only the decisions of the designer, such as typeface, colour, material, but also the environmental context around it. It also starts to come into play with the signs that are found in close proximity to it.

The images below were taken in:

1. The Hague, NL, 2024
2. Heidelberg, DE, 2025
3. Helsinki, FI, 2025

1.



2.



3.

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

social dynamics that have been in play for decades. What is left to rot? To rust to fade in the sunlight? And what is preserved, renovated and therefore valued?

Miranda-Dos Santo, T. J. (2019). Typography as a mediator of art, space, memory and presence on toponymy.

During the research, there has been a certain amount of care and attention while registering the surroundings of each sign, as well as other widely available typographic assets. Warnings, posters, advertisements are also a part of each place's identity, so it is possible to interpret that information as an open-air museum, or a museum of the every day, which is bringing a radical transformation of the function of art (Reis, 2012), because if typography makes any sense, it is visual and historical (Bringhurst, 2004). In the course of history, typography has always been an activity at culture and written communication's service (Balius, 2013).

The diversity of typographic families urges the need to classification it. The forms of letters are not exclusively scientific objects, they are also a part of art and history, as well as a part of disciplines like music, painting or architecture (Bringhurst, 2004). The history of typography should be understood as the relation between the several styles and the history of mankind from a political, philosophical and artistic point-of-view (Bringhurst, 2004). Adrian Frutiger (cited in Ruder, 2009) adds that typography is a record of the cultural heritage of every epoch. Emile Ruderalso states that typography has an active and functional role in the history of communication and mankind (2009).

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1. Aachen, DE, 2024
2. Eberbach, DE, 2025
3. Helsinki, FI, 2025

1.



2.



3.



Huerta, R. (2010). I Like Cities; Do You Like Letters? Introducing Urban Typography in Art Education.

Experience of the city, especially one's own city, considered from the angle of its typographic wealth, is related to enjoyment and learning. In a similar way to what we experienced in the museum visits by creating significant actions (Chang 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 1994), our attitude as visitors to the city can be articulated in relation to the texts which cover the urban fabric. In order to get citizens to think critically about their environment, we suggest walking as an aesthetic practice, and the creation of pictures as a personal artistic intervention. In this sense, calligraphy and typography should be considered an important graphic resource in art education exercises, and used by teachers to educate. For

This article from the journal on art education as well as this article on toponymic signs - both suggest that city streets can be perceived as an open-air museum, where signs are exhibits of everyday life in different epochs. Typography preserves the artistic spirit of a specific time in a particular place.

Diana's commentary from the 2024 Reader is relevant here. Typographic street signs made in informal ways capture and preserve the spirit of vernacular designers, who make up a large proportion of society, yet are not present in formal archives.

De tentoonstelling was niet louter bedoeld als 'een kans om een aantal bekende beelden weer eens te zien', maar moest 'de productie van nieuwe materialen bevorderen via een actieve betrokkenheid van de uitgenodigde kunstenaars'.^{6,7} De tentoonstelling, opgebouwd in twee delen, strekte zich uit over de mezzanine van het arsenaal waar een min of meer traditionele presentatie van panelen en maquettes te zien was van 55 jongere en minder bekende architecten. De belangrijkste exposanten – de 20 van de 'Strada' – werd gevraagd een reeks huizen te bedenken.⁸ Het kon hierbij gaan om, hetzij a) de woning van de architect, met een plek waar hij werkt, of een persoonlijk museum, of een ruimte om zijn eigen ideeën te presenteren en te 'verkoppen', b) gewoon een 'woning', een plek voor het dagelijkse en persoonlijke leven, of c) een façade (of een deel ervan) van een gebouw bestemd voor vergaderingen (in verband met werk of studie), bijeenkomsten, ontspanning.⁹ De architecten van de mezzanine kregen het specifieke verzoek een 'architectonisch zelfportret' te maken (conceptueel, biografisch of zelfs fysiek).^{10,11} Dit maakt in elk geval één ding duidelijk: de tentoonstelling wees vooruit naar projectmatig (en zichzelf representerend) werk – wat Portoghesi in de tentoonstellingscatalogus 'architectuur in actie' noemde.¹² Eveneens belangrijk was de 'speciale verwijzing naar het thema van de tentoonstelling, dat wil zeggen de huidige relatie tussen het ergoed uit het verleden en het projectmatige werk'.¹³

De zeer specifieke tentoonstellingsvorm van de 'straat' was meer dan louter een formele vondst of een pragmatische keuze. Het was een kritiek op de moderne stedenbouw en een poging de relatie van de architectuur met de menselijke schaal te herdefiniëren.

Straten zijn als de gangen in een huis, de ruimten die ontmoetingen tussen mensen mogelijk maken (...) Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat deze behoefte aan omsloten ruimten iets is dat door de moderne mens [recentelijk] is herontdekt, en dat maakt de terugkeer naar de straat in deze tijd dan ook een hypothese van wezenlijk belang.¹⁴

Onder invloed van wat er in de jaren 1960 en 1970 over de stad is geschreven (met name *Death and Life of Great American Cities*¹⁵ van Jane Jacobs uit 1961, *L'architettura della città* van Aldo Rossi uit 1966 en *Learning from Las Vegas* van Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown uit 1972) streefde Portoghesi ernaar de door Le Corbusier¹⁶ zo gehate *rue-corridor*¹⁷ een nieuwe bestemming te geven. Het concept van de 'Strada Novissima', een omgeving om in op te gaan, verwijst naar het historische model van de Strada Nuova. Beide zijn scenografische, stedelijke enclaves met een cen-

of an active involvement of the artists invited'.^{6,7} A two-speed system, the exhibition extended into the mezzanine of the Arsendale with a more traditional display of panels and models by 55 younger and less-known architects. The main exhibitors – the 20 of the Strada – were asked to imagine a series of houses.⁸ This could be either: a. the architect's dwelling, with the place where he works, or a personal museum, or a space for the exhibition and 'sale' of his own ideas; b. simply a 'dwelling', a place for everyday and private life; or c. a façade (maybe only partial) of a building destined for meetings (for work or study), gatherings, entertainment.⁹ The architects of the mezzanine were specifically asked to produce an 'Architectural self-portrait' (conceptual, biographical, or even physical).^{10,11} This invokes one clear thing: the exhibition heralded projective work and self-representation – Portoghesi called this 'architecture in action' in the exhibition catalogue.¹² Also important was the 'special reference to the theme of the exhibition, that is the relationship existing nowadays between the heritage from the past and the projectual work'.¹³

The very particular exhibition format of the 'street' was more than a simple formal invention or a pragmatic choice. It was a critique of modern urban planning and an attempt to redefine the relation of architecture to the human scale.

Streets are like the corridors of a house: they are precisely spaces that facilitate encounter between people... I believe that this need for enclosed spaces is something that modern man has [recently] rediscovered, and therefore the return to the street is now a truly vital hypothesis.¹⁴

Influenced by 1960s and 1970s writing on the city (notably Jane Jacobs' 1961 *Death and Life of Great American Cities*,¹⁵ Aldo Rossi's 1966 *L'architettura della città*, and Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown's 1972 *Learning From Las Vegas*), Portoghesi aimed at repurposing the '*rue-corridor*'¹⁶ so much hated by Le Corbusier.¹⁷ An immersive environment, the Strada Novissima was conceived in reference to the historical model of the Strada Nuova. Both were scenographic urban enclaves with a central monumental perspective axis, and, most importantly, both acted as '*public presentation spaces*'.¹⁸ Part of the strength of this exhibition lay precisely in the fact that its theoretical discourse was in perfect adequacy with the unusual form of its display.¹⁹

The Strada Novissima allowed Portoghesi to insist on the mirroring concepts of the exhibition as street and the street

Space, may be able to provide us with a more comprehensive view of our history, present and future.

Nothing really exists in a vacuum, so why should that be the case with design? Seeing the street as a curatorial archive rather than an enclosed



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It is interesting to note that streets work in different ways in different countries and contexts. In this article, it is detailed that 'spaces facilitate encounter[s] between people', which may be the experience in a city like The Hague, NL, where there is an international communal atmosphere, almost like a (very global) village. The experience may be different for Finnish people, for example, where social encounters such as small talk could be frowned upon. When we consider the street as an archive, absorbing rich environmental information, the architecture of the street as the space that contains said information can also have a huge impact on the content of the archive.



1. Basel, CH, 2025



2. Leeds, UK, 2018

Unregulated Semiotics & Multimodal Ensembles

2.

[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 metrolingual 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

I grew up in Leeds, visiting the market described in the text (Kirkgate Market). The semiotics of this public space became very familiar over time, an assemblage of varying mismatched identities, together forming a depiction of the ethnic landscape of Leeds.

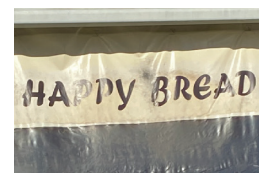
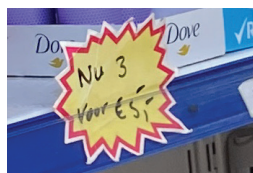
The identities of markets also bring up the issue of class. Having the freedom to create signs on your own terms enables people with less power within society to express their needs and desires. In doing so, people who are generally not represented in society become a part of the fabric of the archive, eventually building a more representative documentation of our time, rather than simply representing the upper classes.

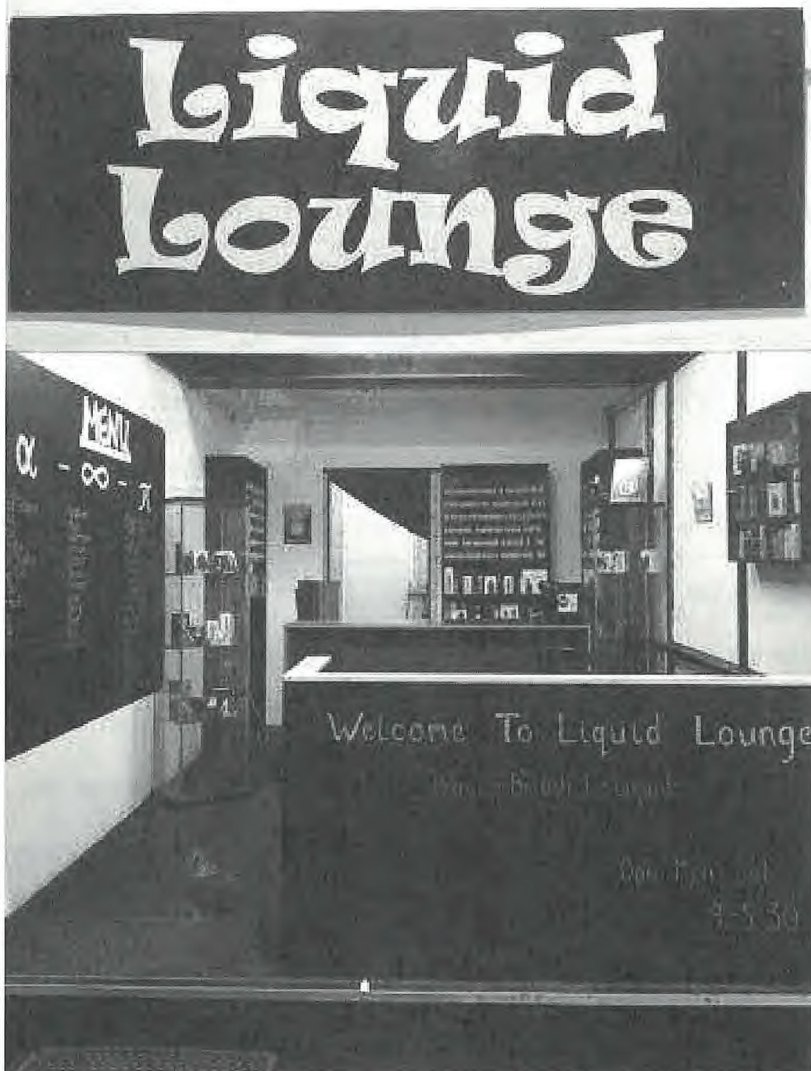
In this way, markets are a perfect jumble of 'multimodal ensembles'. When moving to

These composites of connotations are an assemblage of everything that we know, everything that has come before us, that has led to those connotations being formed. Therefore, sign-making can yet again be seen as an archive.

People who are not professionally trained designers create these 'multimodal ensembles', away from the 'centres of prestige', allowing information to be stored and accessed that may not be available in formal archives.

the Netherlands to study, the Haagse Markt in the Hague became a familiar mishmash of grassroots-shaped signage, people using the tools, materials and knowledge they have available to express whatever needs to be expressed. These can be seen in the images below, photographed in 2022. Even though here there were a different set of people, nationalities and cultural backgrounds compared to the market in Leeds, the visuals of the archive were familiar to me. When we pay attention away from the 'centres of prestige' we begin to notice shared mutually understandable visual languages on the margins.





Personal images:
The Hague, NL, 2022

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

We can learn a lot about the values of the people through the signs they make with the tools they know. At this store, the font was chosen because the owner liked that one the most. Paying attention to these informal design choices, we begin to access the vernacular archive, which documents further facets of society, beyond the vacuum of a formal archive.

The Street as a Vulnerable Archive: Imitation Infiltration

3.

Availability and accessibility of materials, tools and knowledge sets the limits for what is possible to be created. The more diverse voices are creating signage, due to an increase in accessibility, the public archive becomes more vast, and therefore a more accurate depiction of society at the time.

The lack of accessibility in old technology made it difficult for non-Latin scripts to progress. Nevertheless, since the availability of digital tools such as Unicode and OpenType, the production of typefaces has globalised, as a result creating space for more diverse voices in the fields of type and graphic design.

With the globalisation of type design, there has been a shift towards questioning and re-evaluating the Latin and Euro-centric approach to typographic practices. Movements, such as 'Decolonising Typography', aim to "disrupt the Euro-centric status quo in type design, education and practice" and "challenge the modernist and Latin-centric type design canon" in order to promote more inclusive and culturally diverse design practices.⁴ This shift is further evidenced in how typeface families have expanded to include several different non-Latin scripts, such as Arabic, Greek, Cyrillic and Hebrew in addition to variations of styles and weights.⁵

Given the diverse voices in the field today and the movement away from Euro and Latin-centric type design, new classifications that view letterforms in an entirely new light have emerged. These include categories like 'feminist type' and 'queer type.' Diverse voices and new ways of looking at letterforms brought forward the cultural biases present in typographic treatments such as 'ethnic typography'. Typefaces are now seen beyond their visual attributes. Their background, historical context, who designed it, and the ethos on which it was designed and produced all play a role in situating the typeface.

Chinatown & Chop Suey

The first examples of ethnic typography can be found as early as the 1800s. The typeface *Mikita* is considered the oldest example of ethnic typography, as its 'Asian' design can be traced back to a font by Bruce's New York Foundry in 1867.⁶ It was followed by the typeface *Mandarin*, designed and patented in 1883 and is the first known example of a 'chop suey font'. 'Chop suey fonts', named after a Chinese dish invented for the American market, are a category of fonts that use a lettering style that mimics the brush strokes used in Chinese calligraphy to reference 'Asianness'.⁷ In 1899, *Mandarin* was used by the Beggarstaff brothers in a poster titled 'A Trip to Chinatown'; the poster went on to be published in the *Maîtres de l'Affiche* publication alongside other iconic posters, which contributed to the typeface's popularity.⁸

However, it was Chinese restaurants in the United States of America that brought *Mandarin* into the mainstream. In 1906, after an earthquake destroyed San Francisco's Chinatown, a new neighbourhood was built to replace it. The redesign, undertaken by an architect and an engineer who had never been to China, referenced ancient Chinese temples. As a result, they built an exaggerated and exoticized version of China.⁹ Their design went on to set a template that was followed by Chinatowns across the country. The 'chop suey fonts' used in the restaurant signage contributed to this exoticized representation of Chinese culture. Consequently, the style of fonts became synonymous with the neighbourhood.¹⁰

By the 1940s, 'chop suey fonts' became a widely recognisable visual trope in the Western world.¹¹ What is most interesting about these fonts is that they are a product of their unique environment and history.¹² The development of 'chop suey fonts' is rooted in a long history of Chinese immigrants in the United States of America. 'Chop suey fonts', as well as other examples of ethnic typography, exist at a complex intersection of history, slavery, immigration, community, cultural representation, architecture, public spaces, aesthetics, capitalism, graphic design, and type design. Having looked at the history of 'chop suey fonts', it is worth noting that while the first examples appeared as early as the 1800s, graphic design academics and researchers only began writing on the subject in the early 2000s.

The pitfall to be aware of here in sign-making is mimicking what you think to be true without it being your own experience, reinforcing stereotypes, 'visual tropes' that may not actually represent the message truly. If we think about the street or public space as an archive, an issue arises. These visual artefacts, created by outsiders, become a false documentation of their time, potentially misleading the unofficial archive. We are left with a false archive, overshadowing the grassroots-shaped public archive.

4. Futuress, "A Resource Hub for Decolonizing Typography," futuress.org.

5. Gerry Leonidas et al, "Beyond Latin," 81.

6. Paul Shaw, "Stereotypes," *In Print Magazine*, 109-110.

7. Linus Boman, "How this font became the face of Chinese food in America," youtube.com.

8. Ruben Pater, *The Politics of Design*, 42-43.

9. Boman, "How this font became the face of Chinese food in America".

10. Shaw, "Stereotypes," 109-110.

11. Boman, "How this font became the face of Chinese food in America".

12. *ibid*.

The Street as a Vulnerable Archive: Top-Down Regulations

foreign-made coins bearing inscriptions in Norse runes, Latin, Kufic, Arabic and Greek, princely seals and amulets sporting Greek or bilingual Greek-Slavonic inscriptions, and a stone mould with an inscription in Arabic (Franklin, 2002; Franklin & Shepard, 1996; Rybakov, 1982).

What we see then is that the earliest period of Kievan history already displays a discontinuity between the languages of official signage, Old Church Slavonic and Greek, and the language of commercial and private signage and of everyday interaction, East Slavonic. This discontinuity can be understood as a form of diglossia, with Greek and Old Church Slavonic functioning as languages of the church and East Slavonic as the language of civil administration, commerce and everyday interaction (Franklin, 2002; Franklin & Shepard, 1996; Press, 2007).

Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: 14th to 17th century

The next period of the city's history begins with the near-total destruction of Kiev by Tatar-Mongols in 1240. Its churches and buildings ruined and its population decimated, Kiev lost its significance as a political, economic, religious and cultural center and its population dwindled to 8,500–10,000 inhabitants (Hamm, 1993). Eventually, northern Rus united around Moscow and Novgorod, becoming the land of Muscovy, while southern Rus came under control of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Kiev in 1363) (Snyder, 2003). The separation of the former territories of the Kievan Rus led to divergence between East Slavic dialects and to the emergence of a new vernacular, *ruski* (Ruthenian), on the southern territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Due to repeated Tatar-Mongol invasions, very few material traces remain of the Lithuanian period in Kievan history. The main information comes from manuscripts and documents of the era and from written testimonies of travelers, such as Martin Gruneveg (1584), Erich Liasota (1594) and Abraham von Vesterfeld (1651), with the latter also producing very detailed drawings of mid-17th-century Kiev (Nikitenko, 2008; Rusina *et al.*, 2008). What is known, however – and is highly unusual – is that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Rus and Samogitia did not put its linguistic stamp on the newly conquered territories. Instead, it adopted as its official language the literary version of Ruthenian, written in Cyrillic and also known as Chancery Slavonic; Latin and Polish were also used as official languages in the Grand Duchy, while Lithuanian did not play an important role in the state and was spoken by a small number of people (Magocsi, 1996; Rusina *et al.*, 2008; Smolij, 2008; Snyder, 2003).

Consequently, the linguistic landscape of Kiev did not change much with its incorporation into the Grand Duchy and the public writing continued to be in Cyrillic, as seen in manuscripts and documents,

In conclusion, public space is a great environment for an archive to take shape in, for a multitude of reasons. It enables us to capture a larger picture of society, representing people from various backgrounds, rather than what the government, designers, archivists, and others in charge deem is valuable enough to be preserved in regular archives. Furthermore, the architecture of the street as a place that holds the archive enables further information to be stored within the archival object. Design does not exist in a vacuum, so it seems reasonable that the archive would also contain information about what kinds of people interacted with the objects, left marks, or pasted over the objects.

However, we need to pay attention to the vulnerabilities present. Firstly, in imitation design that infiltrates archives, presenting itself as true depictions of the people. Secondly, in regulations imposed upon those creating. When regulations are imposed, creative expression is limited. When there is a lack of top-down regulations imposing restrictions on the creative freedoms of the people making them, the varying knowledge shared between different types of people is free to be represented in the form of sign-making.

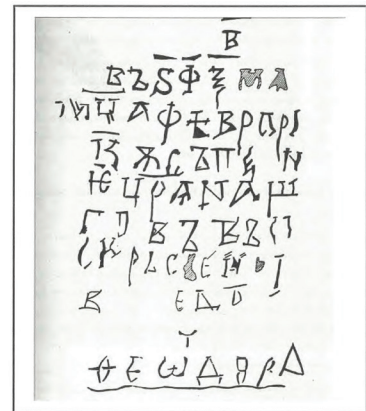
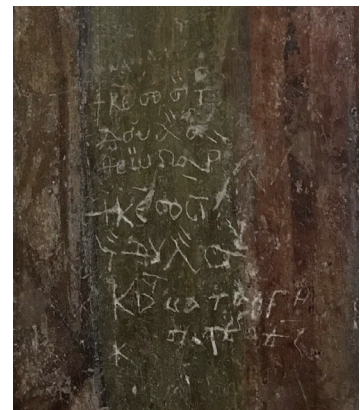


Figure 8.1 Graffiti on the wall of St. Sophia Cathedral announcing the death of Prince Yaroslav the Wise, 20 February 1054 (reproduced from Rybakov, 1982)



Kyiv, UA, 2019

Even though the typographic wooden signs pre-1240 were burnt due to Tatar-Mongol invasions, through volatility and vulnerability, the archive of the public space still finds ways to hold its space. For example, the paper details graffiti on the walls of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, which is still visible today, as seen by my personal photo. An important question to keep in mind here is how can we ensure the vulnerability of this public archive remains a positive, rather than a feature to exploit?

Annotated Bibliography

ADAMI, ELISABETTA. "Shaping Public Spaces from Below: The Vernacular Semiotics of Leeds Kirkgate Market." *Social Semiotics*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2020, pp. 89–113. White Rose Research Online, https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/137407/3/Adami_VernacularSemiotics_OpenAccess%5B1%5D.pdf

The visual landscape of city markets in the UK has constantly been shaped by traders' informal, grassroots interventions. By examining the Kirkgate Market in Leeds as a semiotically "unregulated" space, Adami explores the vernacular nature of signage practices.

DRUCKER, JOHANNA. "The Lived Experience of Graphics in Daily Life." *Graphic Events*. 2023

Drucker explores how graphics do not exist in a vacuum, but rather have a lived nature, going beyond their intended design. Designs absorb and embody everything around them, from hammered nails to scratches.

LISITSA, DIANA. "Should We Keep Old Signs in Cities? Urban Typography in Ukraine and Efforts Toward Its Preservation." 2024.

A collage essay on the typographic landscape of Ukraine, arguing that public lettering functions as a cultural archive, preserving layers of social memory. Therefore, city streets can be seen as open-air museums, where historical and social memory is preserved within the signage.

MARS, ROMAN. "Hand Painted Signs." 99% Invisible, episode 74, Aug. 2013, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/episode-74-hand-painted-signs/transcript/>

This podcast episode of 99% invisible discusses the craft of hand-painted signage, highlighting the cultural and material histories embedded in everyday signs. A variety of examples of vernacular typography and informal design practices are discussed.

PAVLENKO, ANETA. "Linguistic Landscape of Kyiv, Ukraine: A Diachronic Study." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2018, pp. 105–120.

Pavlenko traces the evolution of public signage in Kyiv- how language, culture, and politics shape the city's visual and typographic landscapes. The article studies the changing history of street signage and highlights how vernacular/informal visual practices coexist with official, archival signage.

RASHEED, MUNIBA. "Subcontinental Helsinki." 2024.

Rasheed examines the typographic landscape of Helsinki, particularly how ethnic typefaces are used within the restaurant scene, exploring how migrant and local visual practices interact in the cityscape.

PERSONAL ARCHIVE OF PHOTOGRAPHS. 2018-2025.

A curated collection of photographs documenting storefront signs, market signage, and hand-made posters. These images showcase vernacular and ephemeral design practices in the street environment, illustrating signage as living objects that carry social and environmental information.