

Cognition, communication, discourse, 2024, 29, 7-24

<https://periodicals.karazin.ua/cognitiondiscourse>

<https://doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2024-29-01>

Received 5.10.2024, accepted 15.11.2024.

TRANSMEDIAL PRESENCE OF VERBAL TEXTS IN ARCHITECTURE AND PUBLIC SPACE. BETWEEN INFORMATIVITY AND EMOTIVITY

Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczevska

Prof., Dr. hab. in Linguistics (full honorary professor, emerita),

Institute of English Studies, Jagiellonian University in Kraków

(ul. Gołębia 24, 31-007 Kraków, Poland);

e-mail: elzbieta.chrzanowska-kluczevska@uj.edu.pl

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0908-1711>

Article citation: Chrzanowska-Kluczevska, E. (2024). Transmedial presence of verbal texts in architecture and public space. Between informativity and emotivity. *Cognition, communication, discourse*, 29, 7–24. [doi.org.10.26565/2218-2926-2024-29-01](https://doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2024-29-01)

Abstract

From the semiotic viewpoint, architectonic structures and the surrounding public spaces can be seen as texts to be read and interpreted within proper historical, social, and cultural contexts. In addition, they are almost always *multimodal*, that is *polysemiotic texts* whose content becomes complemented with pictorial elements (paintings, sculptures), with written or oral language and, on occasion, with music.

I intend to focus specifically on the presence of *verbal texts* inside, on or around buildings (mostly within an urban space), which is a case of *textual embedment*. Functions of written inserts, inscriptions, signboards, tablets, posters, banners, graffiti, etc. are multifarious. They range from informational and explanatory, to devotional, to political–critical, to – in the end – poetic, experimental, creative, funny, and ironical. Aesthetically, they often enrich but sometimes violate architecture and public space. The following types of verbal texts will be considered briefly, according to their content:

- 1) up-to-date information (warnings, advertisements, etc.);
- 2) historical-institutional information;
- 3) religious-devotional (including critical) information;
- 4) political commentaries;
- 5) poetic and experimental creations, mostly artistic critical games played by *conceptual* and *post-modern artists*.

Several of my examples qualify as instances of *urban creativity*, specifically *street art* and *graffiti of resistance* (cf. Awad & Wagoner, 2017; Stampoulidis, 2019).

In the spirit of *cognitive semiotics*, defined by Zlatev, Sonesson, and Konderak (2016) as the transdisciplinary, conceptual-empirical study of meaning, mind and communication, this article (based on a corpus of twenty-six inscriptions gathered from many international locations) raises the issue of the interplay of *informativity* and *emotional load* contained in verbal texts immersed in public settings. Undoubtedly, the message conveyed by architectural carriers and urban space contributes synergically to the overall meaning of the verbal messages that accompany them.

Key words: *verbal text, architectural carrier, public space, urban creativity, street art, graffiti, informativity, emotivity.*

1. Introduction – architecture and public space as polysemiotic texts

From the semiotic viewpoint, architectonic structures and the surrounding public spaces can be seen as texts to be read and interpreted within proper historical, social, and cultural contexts (including religion, politics and ideologies). In addition, they are almost always *multimodal, polysemiotic texts*



(cf. Basista & Nowakowski, 2012; Chrzanowska-Kluczevska, 2019; Li & Zlatev, 2022), whose content becomes complemented with pictorial elements (paintings, sculptures), with written or oral language and, on occasion, with music.

There is a difference, however, between architecture as a non-verbal text and texts produced in natural language. To quote Karl R. Kogler (2018), a professor of architecture and urban design (Hochschule, München): “Architecture talks only about itself – language can talk about anything”. On the assumption that both media produce texts in their own right, it is worth considering in what manner verbal language in an architectonic and urban context can really talk about “anything”.

Amir Biglari (2023) rightly points out that “not only is every sign defined within a system of signs, and therefore in interaction with other signs, but also every system of signs is defined in relation to and in interaction with other systems of signs” (p. 33). This is an essence of *transmediality*, according to its broad definition, that is “the communication of information across more than one medium or sign system” (Saldre & Torop, 2012, p. 25). Undoubtedly, the message conveyed by architectural carriers and urban space contributes synergically to the overall meaning of the verbal messages that accompany them, with *synergy* defined as “the combined power of a group of things when they are working together which is greater than the total power achieved by each working separately” (“Synergy”, 2008, p. 1479). Hopefully, the illustrative material provided below will corroborate the synergic effects of verbal language embedded in architectural and urban settings.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Cognitive semiotics

To quote Biglari again, the contemporary semiotic thought espouses a wide approach, according to which,

semiotics aims to describe and explain under what conditions, how, and why signs and meanings are (or are not!) conceived, produced, organized, oriented, circulated, communicated, shared, perceived, apprehended, understood, interpreted, embodied, felt, lived, transformed, translated, and so forth. (Biglari, 2023, p. 33).

The highlighted aspects of semiosis remain specifically in the focus of attention of the branch of general semiotics called *cognitive semiotics (Cogsem)*, defined by Jordan Zlatev, Göran Sonesson, and Piotr Konderak (2016; cf. also Sonesson, 2010) as the transdisciplinary, conceptual-empirical study of meaning (implying the study of signs), mind, and communication. The authors emphasize two features of Cogsem:

The first feature is that cognitive semiotics focuses on the study of meaning, and does so through a transdisciplinary (implying tighter contact than “interdisciplinary”) combination of methods and concepts from at least semiotics, cognitive science, and linguistics. (Zlatev, Sonesson, & Konderak, 2016, p. 9)

The second feature is a methodological adherence to what Zlatev (2015, p. 1058) dubbed *the conceptual-empirical loop* (discussed also in Stampoulidis, 2019, p. 32). The idea is to start with a conceptual presentation of a given phenomenon and then proceed to its empirical analysis, the results of which should become a feedback to the initial conceptual analysis. In brief, the empirical examination is expected to bring enrichment of the initial statements and ideas, what Zlatev, Sonesson and Konderak (2016, p. 9) refer to as the reinvigoration of theoretical claims by means of real-life experience, that is a field research.

It is in this spirit that my presentation proceeds. Based on a corpus of twenty-six inscriptions gathered from various locations, it raises the issue of the interplay of *informativity* and *emotional load* contained in verbal texts immersed in public and architectonic settings. My study is not a full field research, however, in the sense in which Georgios Stampoulidis (2019) enriched his photo documentation of the stories of resistance in Greek street art with *go-along interviews* with street

artists. In our case the tracking of the anonymous producers of the inscriptions recorded in situ has been impossible for technical reasons. In the future, the enlargement of the photo documentation of verbal inscriptions spotted in a public space could include go-along interviews with people visiting particular buildings or circulating in the urban space where these, mostly anonymous, inscriptions appear. This kind of street research would, however, demand a long and painstaking preparation (of questionnaires, among other things) and might be limited to one location only (like in the case of Stampoulidis, who investigated street art in Athens).

1.2. Informativity

In the broad understanding of this term, *informativity* emerges as:

a fundamental property of the whole existence, beside dynamism and connectivity, structurality and infinity; it consists of the capacity of universe, as well as of each its component of integrating, of structuring and developing, of transmitting and using information. (Pană, 2018, in Ch. 387, n. p.)

In application to natural language, informativity refers to the extent to which an utterance is new or unexpected for the receivers: a) in terms of content, b) in terms of other features, e.g. form. Although Information Theory invokes the notion of *probability* as crucial in measuring information content, in the case of *human language* we talk about a *contextual* rather than *statistical probability* of occurrence of specific information.

We can distinguish between *three orders of informativity* of verbal texts (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1990, Ch. 7):

- 1) **First-order informativity** refers to highly probable/expected utterances (defaults and preferences). Such utterances are trivial, even boring; they do not attract much attention and depend on a low processing effort.
- 2) **Second-order informativity** refers to a standard quality of utterances/texts from which we acquire new and interesting information. Upgrading from first-order or down-grading from third-order to this level are common interpretative practices to make the processing effort viable.
- 3) **Third-order informativity** characterizes rare utterances that call for a heightened attention and increased processing effort. Such texts are unusual, more attractive but can be disturbing or difficult to interpret (e.g. poetry).

Since information content comes in degrees (but still accepting this triple categorization), I will postulate to look at particular inscriptions analysed below as located along a *cline of informativity*, moving from first to third-order informativity.

In his dynamic vision of the *semiosphere*, that is culture seen as a universe of semiotic systems and their constant creative reorganization, Juri Lotman (1992/2004/2009) invokes the notion of *explosion*, a sudden change in a paradigm brought about by “geniuses – the creators of art” (p. 10). Explosion seems to him to be closely related to the concept of informativity: “The moment of explosion is also the place where a sharp increase in the informativity of the entire system takes place. The developmental curve jumps, here, to a completely new, unpredictable, and much more complex path” (Lotman, 2009, p. 14).

1.3. Emotivity in public spaces

Emotivity is a two-sided term – it either denotes the state in which the addresser voices their own emotions (the expressive aspect of this phenomenon) or refers to the emotional response achieved in the addressee/interactant (the affective aspect). While studying emotivity of texts as semiotic constructs, it is worth remembering that the two aspects intertwine and may be difficult to separate. Authors of emotionally-marked messages will certainly want to arouse similar feelings in their recipients.

The literature on the emotive behaviour of human beings is huge – we usually distinguish three *emotion theories*: *neurological* (related to the brain activities in emotional states), *physiological* (descriptive of the corporeal states and reactions related to emotions), and

psychological (focused on the mental side of emotive states and actions) (cf. Jain & Asawa, 2019). It is the last approach which is of special interest to us.

In what follows, I use the terms *emotion* and *feeling* interchangeably (so does LeDoux, 2015), although António Damasio (1994) applies the former to indicate an unconscious state while the latter to describe a conscious experience. Saif M. Mohammad (2017, p. 174) proposes an umbrella term *affect* that includes emotions, feelings, and attitudes.

One of the well-known psychological theories of Paul Ekman (1992), distinguishes six *basic emotions*: fear, anger, disgust, surprise, happiness, and sadness. In that Ekman adapted a previous theory of Silvan Tomkins, who back in the 1960s had distinguished eight *primary emotions*, to wit surprise, interest, joy, rage, fear, disgust, shame, and anguish (cf. LeDoux, 2015, pp. 121-22). Joseph LeDoux has challenged two claims of Ekmanian approach, namely that basic emotions are inborn and universal. His own idea, which is of import to our Cogsem research, sees in emotions *cognitive constructs* “assembled in consciousness” but also influenced by a specific *socio-cultural context*, in which the role of natural language is substantial (LeDoux, 2015, pp. 123-24). Consequently, in studying an emotional load of linguistic texts embedded in architecture and public space, we should analyse two distinct kinds of emotivity – linguistic and architectural/urban.

Linguistic emotivity is centred on the expressive power of language in sharing feelings that appears on all levels of linguistic description – phonetics, lexicon (including morphology), syntax, semantics, stylistics, and pragmatics. In her book *Linguistic emotivity* (2002), Senko K. Maynard explores a vast range of expressive linguistic devices in Japanese discourse, claiming that language does not reflect only *logos* (information) but is equally powerful in voicing *pathos* (emotions). The essence of her study could be extrapolated to other natural languages, albeit a specific repertoire of emotive devices is language- and culture-specific.

Over the last decades, interest in urban emotivity has been gradually increasing, related to a broad issue called *the psychology of public spaces*. Daniel Paül i Agusti and Montserrat Gurrero i Lladós (2021) devote their study to the influence of public spaces on human well-being and specifically to the way different emotions are generated by “the morphology of the space”, which includes a built environment and light effects, among other factors. The study by Sarah Robinson and Juhani Pallasmaa (2015) titled *Mind in architecture: Neuroscience, embodiment, and the future of design* analyses how a built environment affects our conditions of living – our thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. The concept of *emotive architecture* is nowadays related to the creation of such structures that would be not only functional and aesthetically pleasing but also integrated with the fabric of the surrounding city, in sum dweller-friendly.

A number of studies devoted to street art (including graffiti) have emphasized the way in which it emotionally impacts our perception of streetscape and a wider urban environment (Graffiti, n. d.; Street art, n.d.; Stampoulidis, 2019; Pérez-Izaguirre & Liñero-Reglero, 2023). All these research projects testify to the need of developing a holistic, transdisciplinary approach to the position of natural language in architecture and public space.

One of problems in this kind of analysis is related to the issue of measuring emotions, which is a challenge in itself. Paül i Agusti and Guerrero i Lladós (2021) have, for instance, turned to an objective quantitative approach based on measurements of the heart-rate variability of persons in changing public environments. In turn, Jain and Asawa (2019) propose a computational (AI) model of emotion-elicitation conditions for five basic emotions: Happiness, Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, and Surprise. On the linguistic side, Mohammad (2017) compiled the Affect Intensity Lexicon (AIL), which contained approximately 6,000 English words associated with four basic emotions – fear, joy, sadness, and anger – and arranged them on a *scale of intensity* running from 0 to 1 (0.1..., 0.2..., 0.3... etc.). Such scales appear more subjective as they are mostly based on introspection. Also, basic emotions often blend into other feelings, known as *secondary emotions*. In the face of such theoretical problems, for my corpus of inscriptions analysed below I postulate a *scale* similar to that of the cline of informativity and running from emotionally neutral to highly emotional messages, without however daring to measure their intensity in any way. The two scales will be separate but can overlap at times.

2. Discussion – verbal texts in architecture and urban space

I intend to focus specifically on the presence of *verbal texts* inside, on or around buildings (mostly within an urban space), which is a case of *textual embedment* and *situatedness*. Functions of written inserts, inscriptions, signboards, tablets, posters, banners, graffiti, etc. are multifarious. They range from informational and explanatory, to devotional, to political-critical, to poetic, experimental, creative, funny, and ironical. They can but do not need to be decorative; they often enrich but sometimes violate architecture and public space

The following types of verbal texts will be considered briefly:

- 1) up-to-date information (warnings, advertisements, etc.) – Fig. 1–4;
- 2) historical-institutional information – Fig. 5–15;
- 3) religious-devotional (including critical) information – Fig. 16–17;
- 4) political commentaries – Fig. 18a,b–19;
- 5) poetic and experimental creations, among them artistic critical games played by *conceptual* and *post-modern artists*, who elevated the verbal element to form the essence of visual art. They experimented with placing inscriptions within or close to museum buildings such as Carlos Ginzburg (1971) or Perla Benveniste and others (1973) (cf. Kalyva, 2016), or placing inscriptions on posters and boards and exhibiting them in urban spaces, as in J. Holzer's *Truisms* (1977-1987), which appeared across New York and *Projections* (1996 – ongoing), with poetic quotations executed in neon on important buildings worldwide (cf. Sobita, 2018) – Fig. 20–24.

Several of our examples qualify as instances of *urban creativity*, specifically *street art* and *graffiti of resistance* (cf. Awad & Wagoner, 2017; Stampoulidis, 2019).

Figure 1 shows a bronze statue by Eduardo Paolozzi, based on William Blake's study of Isaac Newton's figure and placed in the courtyard of the British Library in London. On the pedestal of the statue there appears an informational tablet that says: "For your safety do not climb". It is a warning, thus informative and performative at the same time, but its banal information (first order informativity) stands in stark contrast with the grandiose statue of Newton, who would probably smile at the message, which, unintentionally, corroborates his theory of gravity. The feeling of discomfort, if not of fear itself, habitually related to warnings will probably evaporate in this particular artistic context that is able to trigger a jocular interpretation.



Fig 1. Eduartdo Paolozzi, Isaac Newton. The British Library, London, UK.



Fig.2. A traditional brick house, early 20th c. Tyumen, Western Siberia.



Fig.3. A barber's shop signboard, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Figure 2 features a traditional brick house in Tyumen, Western Siberia, which belonged once to a family of Polish merchants and industrialists active there since the 19th century until the Soviet Revolution. One of informational tablets about the historic value of the building says: “A monument of architecture from the beginning of the 20th century. Under the state protection” (second order informativity). The second, warning tablet (Fig. 2) on the upper window frame stands in contrast with the official tablet and alerts the viewer: “Be careful! Snow may fall from the roof” (first order informativity). Interestingly, the notice itself appears in a very safe place. Warnings, by pointing to danger, are meant to arouse the feeling of disconcert and prompt to cautious behaviour.

Figure 3 shows a painted notice that functions like a *signboard*, advertising a barber shop around the street corner in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Nepali inscription, based on an English phrasal loan, informs: “Maharadžagandź Famous Gents Hair Parlour”. A rather unimpressive streetscape spices up this high-flown ad, making it – in a sense – grotesque. This is a good example of how the architectural surroundings influence the content of the verbal message. Meant as a proud description of the barber's shop, the positioning of the message can trigger an unwanted, humorous connotation. The moral is to examine the building and its environs before one puts up a verbal text on it.



Fig.4. Linguistic landscape in George Town, Penang, Malaysia.



Fig.5. A tablet on the Old Townhall, Ingolstadt, Bavaria, Germany.

Figure 4 features a linguistic landscape in George Town, Penang, Malaysia. Signboards and commercial ads display a “decorative” mosaic of alphabets and scripts. The Romanized Malay (Rumi), Chinese and Tamil scripts intermingle. THE PEARL signboard contains information in four languages – English, Rumi, Chinese, and Tamil. Since this commercial signage belongs to private owners, it can evade the regulation protecting Malay (*Bahasa Malaysia*) as the official language. Signboards are informative (second order), albeit the information seems chaotic. However, the aesthetics of the street has been severely violated, making it far removed from the idea of emotive architecture.

Figure 5 shows an informational decorative tablet on the wall of the Old Townhall in Ingoldstadt an der Donau (Bavaria, Germany), with the city's heraldic symbol (1882). A nice example of second order informativity, it summarizes the city's history: "8th c. property of the Carolingian dynasty; 841 property of the Niederaltaich monastery; [...] 1472-1800 seat of the Bavarian State University; 1828 fortress city of Bavaria". It is both informative and aesthetically pleasing.



Fig.6. A commemorative tablet, Toledo, Spain.



Fig.7. Signboard over the entrance to the Tartu University Library, Estonia.



Fig.8. A commemorative tablet, Vilnius, Lithuania.

Figure 6. Beautifully executed in ceramic tiles, this tablet from a building in Toledo, Spain commemorates Queen Isabel I Catholic (1451-1504) on the five-hundredth anniversary of her death. The ruler of Castilla, called also "the mother of queens", Isabel passes as the creator of modern Spain. She was very devout, even fanatical in spreading Roman Catholicism, but also clever, bold and independent in her decisions. The tablet does not provide any historical details but mentions only its founders, hence its informativeness is rather low (first order), which is compensated by the pictorial effect.

Figure 7 shows an informational inscription (in Latin) and a bilingual (Estonian-English) signboard over the entrance to the Tartu University Library. Apart from the historical information, the board contains an apt motto: "meeting point of wisdom and youth", which is emotionally positively tinged. The Latin name of the institution *Bibliotheca Universitatis Tartuensis* strengthens its academic position.

Figure 8 features a bilingual Lithuanian-Polish commemorative tablet from Vilnius, Lithuania dedicated to the great Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz: "On 6 November (25 October) 1824 from this house departed Adam Mickiewicz, exiled to Russia, leaving Vilnius for ever". This tablet,

apart from objective historical information (second order), is filled with a political allusion to the poet's deportation and with emotional undertones. The emotion triggered is that of sadness caused by losing one's home and possibly a suppressed anger directed against the Tzarist Russia.



Fig.10. A monument to Viacheslav Chornovil in Kyiv, Ukraine.



Fig.9. A commemorative tablet, Ingolstadt, Germany.



Fig.11. A World War II notice, Beamish Living Museum of the North, Yorkshire, UK.

Figure 9 features a commemorative tablet from one of the houses in the Old Town in Ingolstadt: “Dr. Jörg Faustus from Heidelberg stayed in Ingolstadt in 1528. This is what is stated in the report of the city council of Ingolstadt from Wednesday after St. Vitus’ Day in 1528. According to a trustworthy document, the same Dr. Jörg Faustus lived in this house”. The inscription contains a specific historical information (second order) about a famous personage. However, it does not mention the fact that Faustus was quickly expelled from the city for practising black magic and necromancy, which can be treated as a case of the so-called *partly suppressed information*.

Figure 10 shows the monument to Vyacheslav Chernovil (1937-1999) – a prominent politician, public figure, journalist, human rights activist, one of the main fighters for Ukrainian independence during the Soviet era, and a Hero of Ukraine (posthumously). He spent more than 15 years in Soviet prisons and exile. In 1991, Chornovil became a candidate for the presidency of Ukraine, but died in a car accident. Clearly another case of *partly suppressed political information*, the inscription commemorates the Hero who devoted all his life to the independence of his country and wrote: “May God help us to love Ukraine more than anything else ...”.

Figure 11 takes us to the Beamish Open-air Museum, called The Living Museum of the North, in Yorkshire, the United Kingdom. This is an official warning from the period of World War II, which may come as a surprise to the visitor (third order informativity). It is another instance of *partly suppressed information*, unclear to the reader. Only upon asking a guide, we learn that the view of sheep giving birth to lambs may, apparently, result in a miscarriage (!). The warning must have been highly emotional in the period when it appeared but it has lost its impact of arousing fear with the passage of time.



Fig. 12. A decorative tablet, Toledo, Spain.

Figure 12 presents a historical decorative tablet in the Old Town in Toledo which contains a highly emotional description of the city, authored by Miguel de Cervantes:

*TOLEDO,
A ROCKY SADNESS,
THE GLORY OF SPAIN,
THE MOST LUMINOUS OF HER CITIES.*

It expresses a praise of the beloved city, not unique to the Spanish spirit and culture, as illustrated below. The praise implies joy and happiness at being the city's dweller and/or lover and its informativity appears to be high (third order, possibly, due to its poeticity).

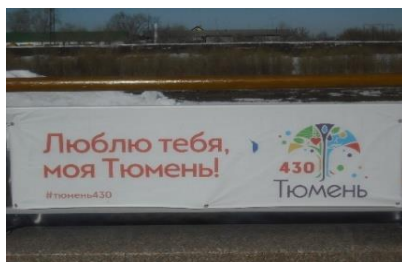


Fig.13a. First banner, Tyumen, Western Siberia.



Fig.13b. Third banner, Tyumen, Western Siberia.



Fig.14 A street money-box, Tyumen, Western Siberia.

Figure 13a features a banner on the bank of the River Tura in Tyumen, Western Siberia. The banner declares in a highly emotional way “I love you, my Tyumen”. The number 430 refers to the age of the city (1586-2016), stated in the second banner that refers objectively to the foundation of the city in the territory seized from the ancient Tatar khanate of Tyumen (from *tumen* – “a thousand horses”). The emotional load of the message far surpasses the historical information.

Figure 13b. The third banner in this series is highly emotional as well, in fact based on a *hyperbole* strengthened by an exclamation mark. It boasts that Tyumen is the best city in the world. It again mentions the 430-year-long period of the city's existence under Russian Empire but ignores the ancient Muslim culture of the enslaved Tatars whose descendants still live there today.

Figure 14. A street sculpture-money-box asking for donations to support homeless dogs in Tyumen contains a very emotional inscription that makes a moving appeal to passers-by to set in motion their empathy: “Take a liking to a helpless, lonely, homeless dog!”



Fig.15. A historical notice, Beamish Open-air Museum, UK.

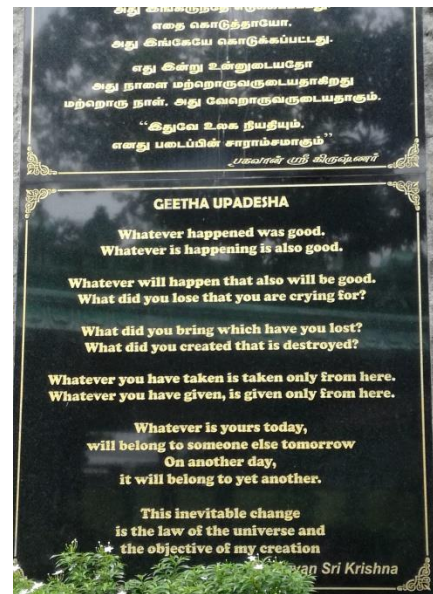


Fig.16. A meditative tablet, the Batu Caves, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Figure 15. In stark contrast to the previous message, this historical notice in Beamish Open-air Museum warns people against trespassing private grounds. The message is clear – there will be no mercy shown to the roaming dogs and so its unexpected cruelty makes it belong to third order informativity. The notice comes from the pre-World War II times, apparently, and may have referred to an area with the protected wildlife.

Figure 16 shows a bilingual meditative tablet at the entrance to the Batu Caves near Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Caves are not only a natural wonder but also a sacred place of pilgrimages for the Hindu believers who come here to worship Rama, Krishna, Hanuman, and the local deity Murugan. Inside the Smaller Caves, colourful sculptures tell the visitors the story of Rama, his beloved wife Sita, the monkey-god Hanuman, and the demon Rawana. Part and parcel of the Hindu tradition, the myth of *Ramayana* is made accessible to foreigners thanks to bilingual tablets in Tamil and English. This ornamental, truly decorative bilingual tablet, with its dual sacral and informational function, helps tourists appreciate the wisdom of a religious citation from the *Geetha Upadesha* on the instability of human existence (situating itself close to third order informativity).



Fig.17. A religious graffiti, Kraków, Poland.

Figure 17 contains a critical religious graffiti from Krupnicza Street in Kraków, Poland, photographed in 2023. The inscription declares that Pope John Paul (Jan Paweł) is not saint at all.

The criticism of the Pope is related to the disclosure of the wave of paedophilia raging across the Roman Catholic Church that the Pope had no courage to eradicate. Pope John Paul II is still considered saint by the majority of Polish older populace, no wonder then that this year a part of the graffiti has been painted over, covering the words “not at all”. As a result, we get the confirmation of the anonymous painter’s belief in the Pope’s sanctity (and possibly their anger at the original graffiti). This testifies to the fact that verbal messages placed within a public space can enter into a dialogue or argument, carried on by anonymous participants who feel free to physically alter some graffiti.



Fig. 18a. An anti-war notice, Tartu, Estonia.



Fig. 18b. A political poster, Tallinn, Estonia.

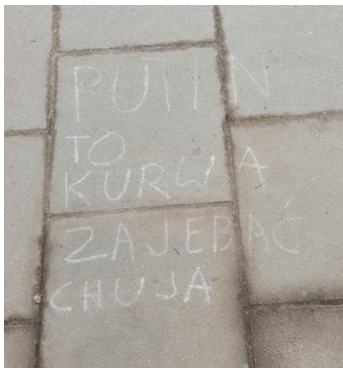


Fig. 19. A political graffiti on the pavement, Kraków, Poland.



Fig. 20. A classroom panel, University of Huddersfield, UK.

Figure 18a. A notice protesting against the attack of Russia on Ukraine in Tartu, Estonia, appeared near the Arch Bridge over the Ema River in February 2022. Accompanied by candles decorated with the Ukrainian national colours, this notice, also in blue and yellow, is emotional in a succinct and restrained way. It uses also a widely recognized symbol of peace, a white dove.

Figure 18b features a political poster in a shop window in Tallinn, Estonia, soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The angry appeal to Putin, the invader, makes an apt visual allusion to the Stalinist past of Russia. The face is half-Stalin and half-Putin and the notice plays visually on four colours, each with a symbolic undertone.

Figure 19 records a political graffiti on the pavement at a bus-stop in Kraków, Poland, executed in March 2022. The message is highly emotional, verbalized in an extremely vulgar way (cf. Lefebvre, 1970/2003, p. 19 on political speech going “savage”). It says, “*Putin is a whore*”,

which is followed by a general appeal, “*Let us slam this fucker*”. It clearly belongs to the **graffiti of resistance**.

Figure 20 shows a classroom at the University of Huddersfield, Yorkshire. The University architecture makes a clear allusion to the industrial past of Yorkshire. The wall in front is decorated with a colourful panel. You have to move closer to read the motto addressed to the students and scholars who happen to share this interior, “*Scientists investigate that which already is; Engineers create that which has never been*”. The quotation comes from Albert Einstein, contrasting the activity of scientists with that of engineers, in a sense endowing the second group with greater creativity. This message can be categorized as third order informativity, unexpected and surprising to many beholders.

Figure 21a¹ (reproduced and discussed in Kalyva, 2016, p. 88) takes us to the exhibition *Arte de Sistemas I* in the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires in 1971. Specifically, we are faced with Carlos Ginzburg’s artwork *Tierra*. This example of **conceptual art** consisted of a series of placards and notes hung on the fence of an empty plot opposite the museum building. One of the placards asked: “*What is there inside this terrain?*” The verbal text was inserted into a public space of a dreary townscape. The notices, engaging the attention of passersby, invited them to enter the museum (“here opposite”), climb the stairs, and take the elevator to the 9th floor. They promised “an aesthetic experience” taking place within that mysterious enclosed plot. If one followed all indications, one would arrive at the museum’s top floor and find the notice “*look here*”, readable from the outside, glued on the windows. If one looked out of the windows, one would see the plot across the street from where the “aesthetic experience” had started. “*Tierra* operates on the borderline between the inside and the outside of the museum, treating it as that which isolates art from life and helps maintain a disjointed experience of social reality” (Kalyva, 2016, pp. 88-89). So far, the artwork exists as a sequence of written verbal messages combined with architecture and cityscape. Let’s look out of the window, then.

Figure 21b¹ (reproduced in Kalyva, 2016, p. 89) is another work from Carlos Ginzburg’s series of placards and notes. Now, we can see the word ‘*tierra*’ (‘earth’) written in huge white capital letters on the plot behind the fence. At this point, as Kalyva notices, the work triggers an interplay between what one reads and what one sees (*signifiant – signifié*). Instead of having a body of its own, this work juxtaposes its textual components with what we can see around us. “Standing behind a glass window at the intersection of private/public and social/artistic, the gallery visitor is forced to confront the reality” (Kalyva, 2016, p. 90). The reality of the 1970s in Argentina was very grim – Ginzburgian “fenced and muted earth” makes a strong allusion to the atmosphere of political repressions, acting as a critique of imprisonments and murders, though seen nowadays, it would have probably lost its original political impact and might be interpreted in an ecological perspective (“fenced and muted earth of urbanization, industrialization, climate changes, etc.”). This proves that artworks, especially of the described type, undergo **re-contextualization** with the passage of time.

Figure 22¹ (reproduced and described in Kalyva, 2016, p. 170) is a view of the installation “*Proceso a nuestra realidad*” produced by Perla Benveniste, Eduardo Leonetti, Luis Pazos, Juan Carlos Romero, and Edgardo Antonio Vigo in the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires in 1973. The installation consists of a piece of wall covered with political posters and a huge inscription “*Ezeiza is Trelew*”. The reference is made to the political prisoners killed in Trelew on 22 August 1972 and to the massacre at the Ezeiza airport upon Juan Perón’s return from exile on June 20, 1973. Political slogans frequently seen in the streets, what we can call **the street art of resistance**, are now inserted into the museum space as a “non-elitist” art, which becomes upgraded:

The erection of a concrete wall with political posters and sprayed slogans and its placement in an exhibition room brings the “street” inside the museum room. But it not only does so in terms of materials and structure, but also in terms of what the public sees daily in the streets, and is circulated and mediated by the press. Moreover, it [the wall] physically divides the space of art and impedes the circulation of the gallery visitors, who are now faced with the wall’s subject matter of murder, impunity and repression. In this way, and rather than representing violence as something that takes place elsewhere, the work forces the viewer to confront reality in this supposed asylum for art and to recognise the extents of violence and corruption blocking the path towards democracy. (Kalyva, 2016, p. 170)

Through political slogans and posters, as well as their association with the mass media, prominence is given to the verbal text. Yet, its support (the wall) and the new architectural context (the museum interior rather than an open public space) are indispensable in providing a fuller interpretation of this *multimodal, polysemiotic artefact* (verbal, visual, spatial, tactile). The change of the original setting (the street) into the museum space adds a new quality to the message communicated by the wall, the graffiti, and the posters that it carries. In a word, a *synergic artefact* has been produced, in which particular elements strengthen one another mutually.



Fig. 23. One of Jenny Holzer's Truisms, New York, USA.



Fig.24a. Jenny Holzer, Projection, Chicago, USA.



Fig.24b. Jenny Holzer, Projection, Kraków, Poland.

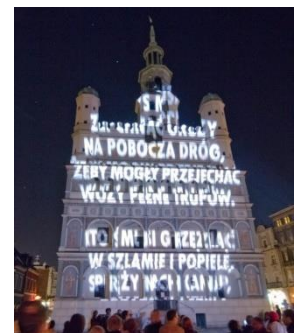


Fig.24c. Jenny Holzer, Projection, Poznań, Poland.

*Figure 23. One of Jenny Holzer’s Truisms placed in Times Square, New York, in 1982 (Sobita, 2018, p. 228). Between 1977 and 1987, Holzer, an important American representative of *text art*, produced around 300 clichés, slogans, aphorisms, and quasi-aphorisms, executed in a wide range of media and placed, among other locations, on various buildings and walls. “Times Square Show” displayed various truisms on the famous Spectacolor Board, among them my favourite, “Expiring for love is beautiful but stupid”.*

Figure 24a features one of Holzer's *Projections*, the artistic program started in 1996 and still ongoing, in which poetic texts have been projected (mostly as neon light) on famous buildings around the world. Holzer drew some of her inspirations from Polish poetry, so in 2008 she had a quote from Wisława Szymborska's poem "Children of Our Age" (1986, translated into English by Stanisław Barańczak and Claire Cavanagh) shown on the Chicago Opera. The text read "*Whatever you say reverberates, whatever you don't say speaks for itself. So either way you're talking politics*". This projection imitated a political banner carrying a slogan that generated associations with ideology. Arguably, it functioned as a decorative element on the building's façade as well. Using the Lotmanian parlance, poetry inscribed into the architectural texture becomes a text embedded in the *semiosphere*.

Figure 24b. In 2011, Holzer displayed a quote from Czesław Miłosz's "Pory roku"/"Seasons" on the walls of the Wawel Castle in Kraków. We can see only a part of the poem: [Transparent] *TREE FULL OF MIGRATING BIRDS ON A BLUE MORNING, [Cold because there is still snow] IN THE MOUNTAINS* (translated by Renata Gorczyńska and Robert Hass). This poetic text decorates one of the most famous architectural landmarks in Poland and is reflected in the Vistula River. In this way the semiosphere overlaps with the biosphere, quite aptly, as the poem is dedicated to the latter.

Figure 24c shows another of Holzer's *Projections*, this time on the Townhall in Poznań, from the year 2011. A citation from Wisława Szymborska's "Koniec i początek"/"The end and the beginning" appeared on the Townhall's façade:

*After every war/someone has to clean up./Things won't straighten themselves up, after all.
//Someone has to push the rubble/to the sides of the road, so the corpse-laden wagons can pass.
//Someone has to get mired/in scum and ashes,/sofa springs,/splintered glass,/and bloody rags. (Szymborska, 1993).*

The message of this poem, shocking at times, is ultimately optimistic: The end of every war marks a new beginning.

With our discussion of the empirical corpus ended, it is time now to recapitulate our findings.

3. Conclusions

I hope that my selection of twenty-six figures analysed above (drawn from a wider corpus of sixty inscriptions and notices gathered from several urban locations over the period 2009–2023, enriched with three examples of urban conceptual art from the 1970s) presents the gamut of verbal texts of varying types and content situated in different architectural and urban settings.

As for the *informational load*, unsurprisingly, a large number of notices belongs to **second order informativity**, that is they carry important but not striking information (*Figs. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13a, 14, 18a,b, 19*). Only *Figs. 1, 2* and *6* seem to be banal enough to be classified as **first order informativity**. In turn, *Figs. 11, 12, 13b, 15, 16, 17, 20-24* can be classified as **third order informativity**.

As a result, we obtain the following, very rough, **informativity scale**:

1, 2, 6 ... 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13a, 14, 18a,b, 19 ... 11, 12, 13b, 15, 16, 17, 20-24

One caveat, however, is in place – the informational load of a given message will ultimately depend on the individual expectations of the viewers, their general knowledge, cultural background, historical awareness, etc. For this reason face-to-face interviews with recipients of such messages would be of immense help. This is, of course, a programme for future research.

The **emotivity cline**, subjectively arranged according to my own appraisal, runs from neutral to emotional and highly emotional:

EMOTIONALLY NEUTRAL => EMOTIONAL => HIGHLY EMOTIONAL:

3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 16, 20, 21a, 23, 24b =>

1, 2, 7, 10, 18a, 21b, 24a =>

8, 11, 12, 13a, 13b, 14, 15, 17, 18b, 19, 22, 24c

All the above-listed non-artistic and artistic projects testify to the importance of verbal texts inside, on, or near architectural creations and within public spaces, and to the need of interpreting this kind of polysemiotic/hybrid textuality against a specific cultural, social, and ideological background. The verbal text within an architectural setting can inform, enlighten, please aesthetically, make the viewers think, or even shock them. The architectural and urban text may be completed, adorned, or disturbed by the presence of the verbal text. But neither of them will remain untouched in such a coexistence, in a novel co-construction of meaning. A new artefact comes to life and a new reading is required according to the assumption of *synergy*. This powerful semiotic mechanism constantly reshapes the Husserlian *Lifeworld* of our experience and the Lotmanian *semiosphere*, which constitutes a fundamental part of the former. The ephemerality of several verbal texts in their urban locations on walls and pavements makes their semiosis a fleeting and fragile phenomenon. If we want to preserve at least part of them as corpora valid for research and memory, their recordings should be taken without delay.

Two *clines* emerge additionally while grouping the above-mentioned texts: that of *informativity* (*informational content*) and of *emotivity*. The scales overlap in an irregular fashion. Whereas informativity appears to be more open to objective evaluation, the emotional load of specific inscriptions may vary greatly between the intended emotionality of the creator and the emotional interpretation (if any) of the receiver. For this we would need a *go-along interviewing* with the creators and interpreters of verbal texts in architecture and social space (cf. Stampoulidis 2019).

Notes

¹Figures 21a, 21b, and 22 cannot be reproduced here due to the copyright issues.

Declaration of competing interest

There are no conflicts of interest relevant to the content or financing of this article that the author has to declare.

References

- Awad, S. H., & Wagoner, B. (Eds.). (2017). *Street art of resistance*. London, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Basista, A., & Nowakowski, A. (2012). *Jak czytać architekturę?* [How to read architecture?]. Kraków: Universitas.
- de Beaugrande, R.-A., & Dressler, W. U. (1990). *Introduction to text linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Biglari, A. (2023). General introduction to *Open semiotics*. In A. Biglari (Ed.), *Open semiotics. Volume 1: Epistemological and conceptual foundations* (pp. 33-42). Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Chrzanowska-Kluczevska, E. (2019). Verbal text in architecture – a text within a text. In G.T. Papanikos (Ed.), *Abstract book. 9th Annual International Conference on Architecture. 8-11 July 2019. Athens, Greece* (p. 29). Athens, ATINER.
- Damasio, A. (1994). *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason, and the human brain*. New York, NY: Gosset/Putnam.
- Ekman, P. (1992). An argument for basic emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 6, 169-200.

- Graffiti. (n. d.). *Wikipedia*. Retrieved January 27, 2024, from <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graffiti>
- Jain, Sh., & Asawa, K. (2019). Modeling of emotion elicitation conditions for a cognitive-emotive architecture. *Cognitive Systems Research, Volume 55, June 2019*, 60-76. Retrieved November 26, 2024 from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S138904171...>
- Kalyva, E. (2016). *Images and text in Conceptual Art. Critical operations in context*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kegler, K.R. (2018, Sept. 28–29). *Frankenstein. Parabel der Moderne 1818 – 2018* [Conference presentation]. International Symposium of the Inklings-Society, Ingolstadt, Germany. <https://arthist.net/archive/17088>
- LeDoux, J. (2015). *Anxious. The modern mind in the age of anxiety*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Lefebvre, H. (1970/2003). *The urban revolution*. Minnesota, MN: Minnesota University Press.
- Li, W., & Zlatev, J. (2022). Intersemiotic translation from fairy tale to sculpture: An exploration of secondary narrativity. *Sign Systems Studies, 50(2/3)*, 317-345. <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.3>
- Lotman, J. (1992/2004/2009). *Culture and explosion*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Maynard, S. K. (2002). *Linguistic emotivity. Centrality of place, the topic-comment dynamic, and an ideology of pathos in Japanese discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Miłosz, Cz. (1996/2008). *Poezje wybrane/Selected poems*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Mohammad, S. M. (2017). Word affect intensities. Retrieved December 21, 2020 from <https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/L18-1027.pdf>
- Paná, L. L. (2018). Towards a general theory of information (Ch. 387). In Mehdi Khosrow-Pour (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of information science and technology* (4th ed). <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2255-3.ch387>
- Paül i Agustí, D., & Guerrero i Lladós, M. (2021). The influence of public spaces on emotional states. *Journal of Urban Design*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2021.1960155>
- Pérez-Izaguirre, E., & Liñero Reglero, A. M. (2024). What can graffiti tell us about emotions and motivation? Some key points for learning. *Trends in Psychology, (2024) 32*, 84-99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-023-00304-9>
- Robinson, S., & Pallasmaa, J. (2015). *Mind in architecture: Neuroscience, embodiment, and the future of design*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press.
- Saldre, M., & Torop, P. (2012). Transmedia space. In I. Ibrus, & C. A. Scolari (Eds.). *Crossmedia innovations. Texts, markets, institutions* (pp. 25-44). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Sobita, W. (2018). *Textualisation as an interpretative strategy: Intermediality in contemporary verbal-visual artistic texts* (Unpublished PhD dissertation). Philological Faculty, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland.
- Sonesson, G. (2010). Here comes the semiotic species. Reflections on the semiotic turn in the cognitive sciences. In B. Wagoner (Ed.), *Symbolic transformation* (pp. 38-58). London, New York: Routledge.
- Stampoulidis, G. (2019). Stories of resistance in Greek Street Art: A cognitive-semiotic approach. *Public Journal of Semiotics, 8(2)*, 29-48. <https://journals.lub.lu.se/pjos/article/view/19872>
- Street art. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved January 27, 2024 from https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Street_art
- Synergy. (2008). In *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (3rd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Szyborska, W. (1993). „Koniec i początek”/ “The end and the beginning”. Retrieved January 24, 2024, from <https://exceptindreams.livejournal.com/359394.html>
- Zlatev, J. (2015). Cognitive semiotics. In P. Trifonas (Ed.), *International handbook of semiotics* (pp. 1043-1067). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Zlatev, J., Sonesson, G., & Konderak, P. (2016). Introduction. Cognitive semiotics comes of age. In J. Zlatev, G. Sonesson, & P. Konderak (Eds.), *Meaning, mind and communication:*

Explorations in cognitive semiotics (pp. 9-30). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Sources for illustrations

- Fig.1. Eduardo Paolozzi, Isaac Newton. The British Library, London, UK. Phot. by the author, 2009.
- Fig.2. A traditional brick house, early 20th c. Tyumen, Western Siberia, Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.3. A barber's shop signboard, Kathmandu, Nepal. Courtesy of Nawang Tharchen Sherpa, 2020.
- Fig.4. Linguistic landscape in George Town, Penang, Malaysia. Courtesy of Samantha Soon Sze Min, 2017.
- Fig.5. A tablet on the Old Townhall, Ingolstadt, Bavaria, Germany. Phot. by the author, 2018.
- Fig.6. A commemorative tablet, Toledo, Spain. Phot. by the author, 2012.
- Fig.7. Signboard over the entrance to the Tartu University Library, Estonia. Phot. by the author, 2022.
- Fig.8. A commemorative tablet, Vilnius, Lithuania. Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.9. A commemorative tablet, Ingolstadt, Germany. Phot. by the author, 2018.
- Fig.10. A Monument to Viacheslav Chornovil, Kyiv, Ukraine. Retrieved from <https://vandrivka.com.ua/pam-yatnyky-kyyeva/>
- Fig.11. A World War II notice, Beamish Living Museum of the North, Yorkshire, United Kingdom. Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.12. A decorative tablet, Toledo, Spain. Phot. by the author, 2012.
- Fig.13a. First banner, Tyumen, Western Siberia. Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.13b. Third banner, Tyumen, Western Siberia. Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.14. A street money-box, Tyumen, Western Siberia. Phot. by the author, 2014.
- Fig.15. A historical notice, Beamish Open-air Museum, United Kingdom. Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.16. A meditative tablet, the Batu Caves, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.17. A religious graffiti, Kraków, Poland. Phot. by the author, 2023.
- Fig.18a. An anti-war notice, Tartu, Estonia. Phot. by the author, 2022.
- Fig.18b. A political poster, Tallinn, Estonia. Phot. by the author, 2022.
- Fig.19. A political graffiti on the pavement. Kraków, Poland. Phot. by the author, 2022.
- Fig.20. A classroom panel, University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom. Phot. by the author, 2017.
- Fig.23. Holzer, J. (1984). *Truisms*. Retrieved from <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/holzer-truisms-t03959>
- Fig.24a. Holzer, J. (n.d.). *Projection, Chicago, 2008*. Retrieved from <https://projects.jennyholzer.com/projections/chicago-2008>
- Fig.24b. Holzer, J. (n.d.). *Projection, Kraków, 2011*. Retrieved from <https://projects.jennyholzer.com/projections/krakow-2011>
- Fig.24c. Holzer, J. (n.d.). *Projection, Poznań, 2011*. Retrieved from <https://projects.jennyholzer.com/projections/krakow-2011>

ТРАНСМЕДІЙНА ПРИСУТНІСТЬ ВЕРБАЛЬНИХ ТЕКСТІВ В АРХІТЕКТУРІ ТА ПУБЛІЧНОМУ ПРОСТОРИ. МІЖ ІНФОРМАТИВНІСТЮ ТА ЕМОЦІЙНІСТЮ

Ельжбета Кшановська-Ключевська

Професорка, Dr. hab. з лінгвістики (почесна професорка, почесна докторка),

Інститут англійських студій Ягеллонського університету в Кракові

(вул. Голенбія 24, 31-007 Краків, Польща);

e-mail: elzbieta.chrzanowska-kluczewska@uj.edu.pl

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0908-1711>

Як цитувати (стиль ДСТУ 8302:2015): Chrzanowska-Kluczewska E. Transmedial presence of verbal texts in architecture and public space. Between informativity and emotivity. *Cognition, communication, discourse*. 2024. № 29. Р. 7-24. doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2024-29-01

Анотація

З точки зору семіотики, архітектурні споруди та прилеглі до них публічні простори можна розглядати як тексти, що мають бути прочитані та інтерпретовані у відповідному історичному, соціальному та культурному контекстах. Крім того, вони майже завжди є мультимодальними, тобто полісеміотичними текстами, зміст яких доповнюється образотворчими елементами (картинами, скульптурами), письмовою чи усною мовою, а іноді й музикою.

Я маю намір зосередитися саме на присутності вербальних текстів всередині, на або навколо будівель (переважно в міському просторі), що є випадком текстової емблематики. Функції письмових вставок, написів, вивісок, табличок, плакатів, банерів, графіті тощо різноманітні. Вони варіюються від інформаційно-роз'яснювальних, присвятних, політико-критичних до поетичних, експериментальних, креативних, жартівливих та іронічних. Естетично вони часто збагачують, але іноді порушують архітектуру та публічний простір. Коротко розглянемо наступні типи вербальних текстів, відповідно до їхнього змісту:

- 1) актуальна інформація (попередження, реклама тощо);
- 2) історико-інституційна інформація;
- 3) релігійно-обрядова (у тому числі критична) інформація;
- 4) політичні коментарі;
- 5) поетичні та експериментальні твори, переважно художньо-критичні ігри концептуальних і постмодерністських митців.

Деякі з моїх прикладів кваліфікуються як приклади урбаністичної творчості, зокрема стріт-арту та графіті опору (див. Awad & Wagoner, 2017; Stampoulidis, 2019).

У дусі когнітивної семіотики, яку Zlatev, Sonesson, і Konderak (2016) визначають як трансдисциплінарне, концептуально-емпіричне дослідження значення, свідомості та комунікації, моя стаття (на основі корпусу з двадцяти шести написів, зібраних з багатьох міжнародних локацій) піднімає питання взаємодії інформативності та емоційного навантаження, що міститься у вербальних текстах, занурених у публічне середовище. Безсумнівно, повідомлення, що передається архітектурними носіями та міським простором, синергетично впливає на загальний сенс вербальних повідомлень, які їх супроводжують.

Ключові слова: вербальний текст, архітектурний носій, публічний простір, урбаністична творчість, стріт-арт, графіті, інформативність, емоційність.