

**CITY OF SIGNAGES, OR LEARNING FROM SHOPFRONTS:  
TRACING THE COMMERCIAL SURFACE ON STREETSAPES OF  
BERLIN, YOKOHAMA, AND SYDNEY.**

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## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Christian Williams declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Design, Architecture, Building at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree at any other academic institution except as fully acknowledged within the text. This thesis is the result of a Collaborative Doctoral Research Degree program with the Technische Universität Berlin.

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## HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

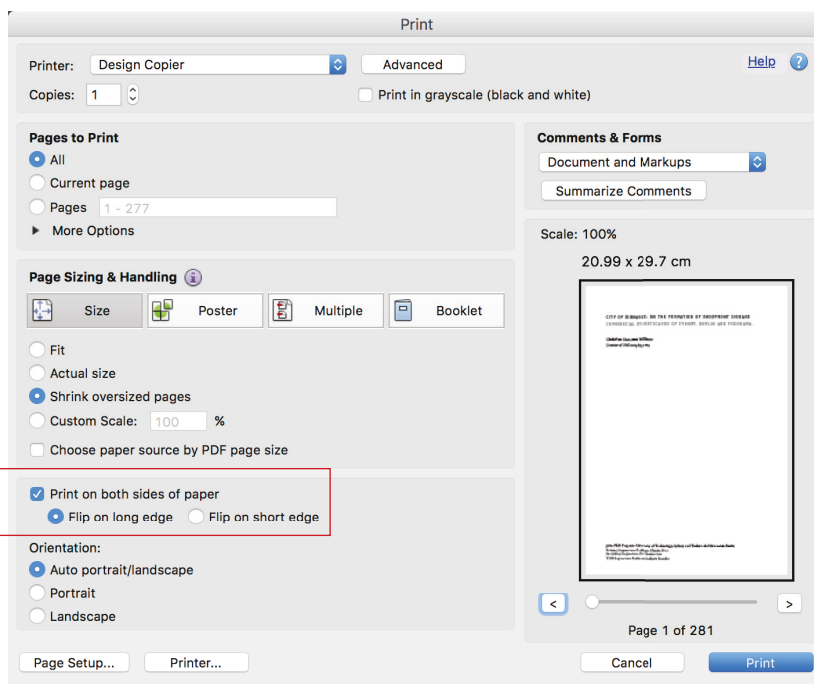
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The following supporting documentaiton is also available to download or view online.

- Larger sized streetscape montages and accompanying coding that provide more detailed views.
- Film versions of the Berlin and Yokohama streetscapes which provide a continuous view of the streetscapes.

To access these files, please click [HERE](#) to be redirected to a Google Drive (no log in required).

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## ABSTRACT

Shopfronts and their signage represent almost all commercial premises: from cheap diners to high-end restaurants, from convenience stores to franchises and the megastores of global brands. They are an omnipresent expression of the urban visage and the backdrop to the everyday performance of the urban streetscape. Yet, the agency of shopfronts and shopfront signage has been neglected in material and spatial interpretations of the urban condition. Within dominant discourses on the architectonics of the urban surface, they are considered to be a false, flat or superficial cloaking of the real nature of the city. They are viewed as an aesthetic conundrum, a tragedy of the commons, and even, an outrage.

This research explores the problem of the neglected yet omnipresent fabric of shopfronts, how their signage can be studied, and what their study can contribute to current architectural discourse on the everyday city. It encompasses a re-examination of their formation within the pages of urban history and on the commercial streetscapes of modern cities. The research is informed by a background in architecture and environmental graphics and further seeks to harness interdisciplinary approaches from sociology, visual communications, material and consumer studies. Historiographic and empirical forms of analysis are combined to interrogate and illustrate if and how the present-day architectonics of shopfront signage have been shaped by local, cultural, and architectural logics.

The thesis is structured in two parts. The first part of the research contributes a spatial history of commercial signage which explores a series of shifting currents between architects, designers, sign makers, advertisers, urban planners and artists and their relationship with the cultural, economic and physical fabric of the street and city. The spatial history forms an armature for the second part of the thesis which involves an empirical study of shopfront signage on continuous four-kilometre streetscapes of three cities – Berlin, Yokohama, and Sydney. The empirical method combines extensive photographic fieldwork, detailed content analysis, and data visualisation, to investigate the patterns and tendencies that can be found within data-thick, socio-spatial readings of the material and socio-spatial agency of shopfronts and the way they dress the city.

The detailed and contrasting encounters with commercial streetscapes, and their visualisation, make explicit the importance of the shopfront as an urban category and offer a way of reconceiving the urban surface to account for the significant morphological contribution of everyday commercial architectonics.