



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

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Christian is a doctoral candidate, designer and studio leader with a particular interest in the spatial role of graphic and communicative surfaces in the urban environment. Christian graduated with first class honours in architecture and is currently undertaking a PhD by Cotutelle with the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Vienna.

Christian spent 10 years with Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects, heading their work with visual communications, environmental graphics and signage systems and continues to collaborate with the renowned firm as co-director of independent production studio, Marshmallow Productions. In 2010 she won a Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship and spent 3 months in 26 cities researching global environmental graphic design to inform the architectural design process. In 2004-2005 Christian spent 18 months in Barcelona, studying and working at the interface of graphics and architecture.

Spatial Textures of Signification

Paper Abstract

Signage in our built environment is viewed as an eyesore, visual pollution, both covering over and darning together our urban present and past. City planning and designed visions of the city rarely account for the stubborn pervasiveness of these surfaces that mediate between built form and its audience. The reality is that great tissues of signs weave through the urban landscape, both structuring and deconstructing our experience of space.

In order to understand and analyse signage as a fundamental element of the urban fabric, we must first accept it as spatial. Austrian architect and art theorist, Gottfried Semper (Style, 1860-2) noted the relation of the Germanic words *wand* (wall) and *gewand* (garment), 'directly alluding to the ancient origin and type of the *visible* spatial enclosure'.

Textiles and cloth(ing) as material objects and systems have been highly analysed metaphors for spatial enclosure from Semper's meticulous classification of the historic elements and methodologies of textiles to French Philosopher, Henri Lefebvre's (The Production of Space, 1974) preference to read the space of the urban environment texturally rather than textually. The term texture is etymologically routed from the Latin, *textura*, 'web, texture, structure' and its stem, *texere*, 'to weave.' As textural spatial systems signage and garments, subject to the contemporary whims of consumerism and representation, both act as 'enclosures' covering bodies, mediating and weaving meaning from interior to exterior.

Underpinned by these notions, this presentation focuses on a study of signage along Sydney's historic and aesthetically controversial major artery, Parramatta Road, proposing that the system of signage, weaves together a structure of signification that is spatial and performative. The study articulates a taxonomy of signage based on basic systems of structural semiotics and textile metaphor that allow a visualisation of the axes and dimensions of signage, such as proximity, tension and warp. This paper argues that to gain an understanding of our contemporary spatial urban environment, signage must be understood as a spatial element of our historic and present urban fabric.