

A quick guide for landscaping pavements

1. Urban collage and contact zones

If pavements are landscapes, that means they are not made of one single thing. Let's learn to read them as *urban collages*.

Go to the street, wherever you might be. Start looking down. No, harder! Take at least half an hour to look in front of your feet.

Follow the patterns on the ground, pay attention to compositions and the contact zones between materials, the overlaps and the interpenetrations, but also the separations.

Draw or take pictures and compare.

Can you distinguish their materials? What are these compositions on the ground telling us?

Perhaps like this we could understand the architectural dreams of order and how they clash with little glitches or cracks: sometimes violent, like in an Earthquake; sometimes hopeful, like a weed searching to prosper in the asphalt.

2. Layered palimpsests

If pavements are landscapes, its composition runs much deeper than the

ance technicians do. Their knowledge, hands-on manipulation and expertise is what governs life deep below.

Go to a street of your choice and look down, again. But this time try to look beyond the surface. For this, you'll need to speculate and draw.

Again and again, ask yourself: What's beneath your feet? It might be just random land, granite, concrete, asphalt. But can you know more? Is there any way for you to understand its underground life, its beings and materials?



surface, the street's crust that holds us or provokes us to fall.

It's important to train ourselves to look at the surfaces. But another important exercise is to look below the surface level. What's beneath, what's below, what's underneath?

We know very little. Part of the problem has to do with the fact that in Euro-American forms of urbanisation we're regularly forbidden to meddle with the guts of our cities. That's something only experts or mainten-

In the midst of the Cold War, the USA and the USSR competed to see who could dig deeper into the Earth. The attempt was to find out more about the hidden subsoil. As a result, the main opening into the Earth to date remains the Kola Superdeep Borehole, a 12.2 km small opening in Murmansk Oblast, Russia. But our urban arenas are full of smaller kin of this big holes! Perhaps you could attempt to do one yourself?

If not feeling too adventurous, perhaps you need to go to a place where pavement is cracked because of an incident or being under renovation... Our cities are packed with holes on the ground enabling an entry-point to another life underground: works, cracks, openings, some intentional, many unintentional, revealing the layered palimpsests that our pavements are.

And yet, we don't even know how it got there, do we? Who could you ask? Perhaps a worker, another bystander? Think together, and take notes of your encounter.

Once we've done all of this: What other exercises could we imagine to enter into alternative urban configurations with these liberated pavements?



Here, expand this issue and find related information

<https://tarde.info/landscaping-pavements>



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Issue 05

Urban haikus

I take a Sunday stroll with the camera.

I could've done this when the streets were busier, but that's precisely what I don't want. A not so busy street is good to be able to listen to the deafening sound coming from pavements.

Let's walk and listen...

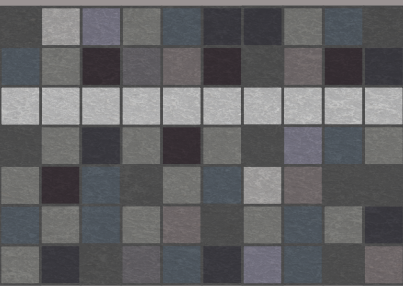


Pavement walls

Only by looking closely at pavements can we start discovering how modernist urbanism is not just a project of zoning, enclosure, and demarcation for above-the-ground users. Pavements, too, are often jailed, enclosed, and not allowed to mingle!

Metal and stone walls separate one material from the other on the ground. This is done so they can perform better. But staring at them down beneath, exercising my gaze to look beyond these cages on the ground, I dream of a material revolution: a city morphing into a changing landscape where many more actors are allowed to partake in its planning.

Beneath the street, the sea?!



alist sense: thinking from their complex temporal and spatial material interconnectedness, their ongoing, engendering process. All of a sudden, the streets we walk cease being the same. What appeared static, indeed, moves!

Far from being the dirt beneath our shoes, in geography, anthropology, and environmental humanities, the very soils we used to tread on are increasingly becoming a matter of relational engendering with different beings, animating newer forms of social theory and eco-political practice. The world beneath our feet is a moving territory. Perhaps there would be no better way to re-enliven pavements and their politics than to treat them as landscapes in a new material-

become everyday, more highly technical endeavors. Even if this fixation is relevant for many purposes—like urban accessibility—it's also highly problematic ecologically speaking. Sealed pavements are related to heat island effects and soil degradation. Consequently, environmentalists mindedly architects and urban planners have started to uncover the beach beneath the street: departing the streets or creating porous sidewalks materials to foster the important underground soil relations essential to life on Earth.

Nonmodern planners

Euro-American modernist dwellers have been trained to see plants and trees as 'green infrastructure.'

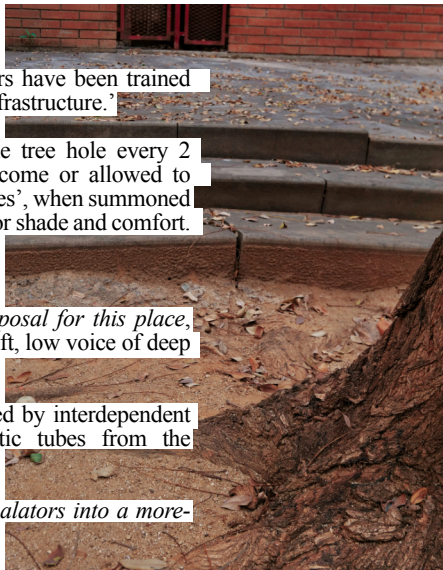
Placed in an orderly fashion, one tree hole every 2 metres, weeded out when unwelcome or allowed to grow to provide 'ecosystem services', when summoned to act as 'nature-based solutions' for shade and comfort.

But listen carefully:

Allow us to share a different proposal for this place, they can be heard saying, in the soft, low voice of deep time.

Here it is. A landscape terraformed by interdependent roots, made of resurfaced plastic tubes from the underground.

Say, what about turning these escalators into a more-than-human amphitheatre?



Urban geology

In Spain, watching urban works is derogatorily regarded as a pensioner's activity.

I also do, and am regularly laughed at, because it feels like a strange form of fetish. To calm my interlocutors, I often joke or change topics.

But I can't anymore. I'm coming out of the closet. We have so much to learn from those who watch the works. They take time!

In fact, open-air urban works are one of the very few ways in which we can see the urban as what it is...

- an interpenetrated landscape of plastic and sands.
- a vertical layering of strata.
- a world of underground metal mountains.
- a mixed ensemble of extracted, anonymous, anomic rocks and sands.
- a geo-political project in perpetual remaking!



Cracks

Pavements are deeply anarchist projects.

Their contact zone is a hivemind of constant unruly transformations. Even the sturdiest stone, the most stainless steel won't be able to make it as is.

Moving earths in the subsoil, the brutal sunlight of the sun, weeds, atmospheric saltpetre from the sea not so far away are true nonhuman kin of Buenaventura Durruti.

Erosion and cracking, not just sabotage, is their struggle.

And indeed, they carry a new urban world in their hearts!



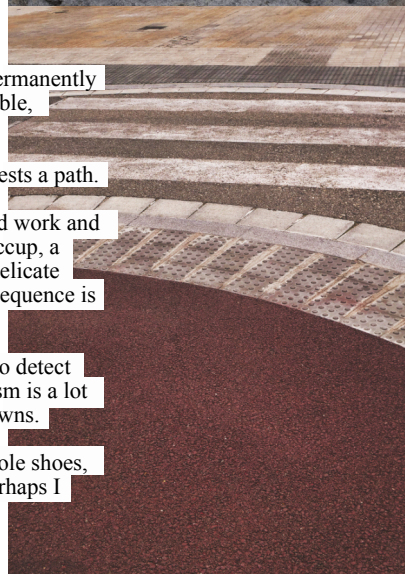
A story on the ground

Accessible city-making is a project of permanently making urban surfaces standard and legible, creating safe walkable crossing paths.

Dots mean danger. A corduroy line suggests a path.

Rendering the street legible requires hard work and training, because it just takes a minor hiccup, a minor reordering of the street, and this delicate system of patterns enabling a walkable sequence is lost forever.

- Blind people are regularly trained to detect these patterns and their activism is a lot about exploring their breakdowns.
- Not having a cane, and with hard-sole shoes, all I can sadly do is watch. Perhaps I should try barefoot?

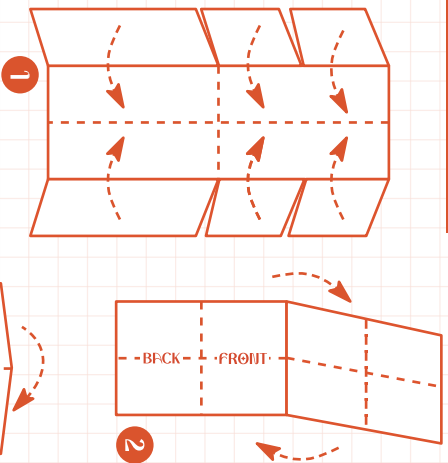


the Earth to their bulldozed modes of construction as perfectly sealed soils. This is their secret engine, their unrevealed truth, the machinery they conceal, so we don't think much of them. Their construction not only has brought the modern city as we know it, but has also assembled its quintessential walkers, from the need to wear shoes to the compacted ground on which we walk. So much so that the beloved *flaneur* of Walter Benjamin cannot be thought of but as an infrastructural being, the result of Hausmann's spatial reordering: nature below, what only experts can access to, culture above, for us to window-shop into eternity. The academic and political centrality of a white, able-bodied male figure standing out for the profound oblivion of the material world that bore its creation is also a symbol of many things that cannot go on, damn urban studies!

Wites, tend to have a modernist urban-very strange relation to the streets we tread on as if walking was an act of material oblivion. Indeed, every step seems to be pushing us further and further away instead of bringing us closer to the ground. It's as if the pavements we tread on permanently disappear: their silent permanence, stubborn smoothness, and standardized stiffness becoming almost unthinkable. As if they were just there, supporting, without mattering much, our contemporary agora. So much so that only children dare to ask: who laid the streets overnight for us to walk on them?

The streets and the sidewalks as we know them needed to be conceived, invented, and installed, and are permanently under maintenance. Pavement, not just pedestrians, also deserve a genealogy! In fact, they bear in them the imprint of the clean state of progress and modernity: from their durable materials – far-mac or granite, you name it – extracted from the belly of

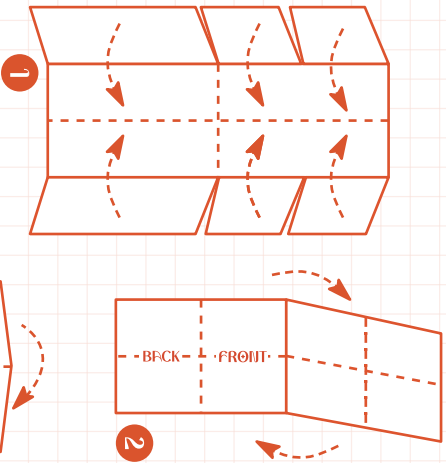
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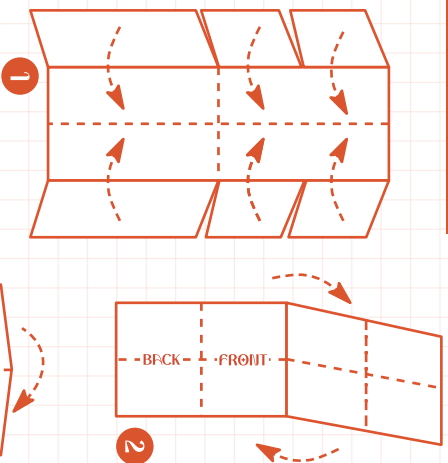
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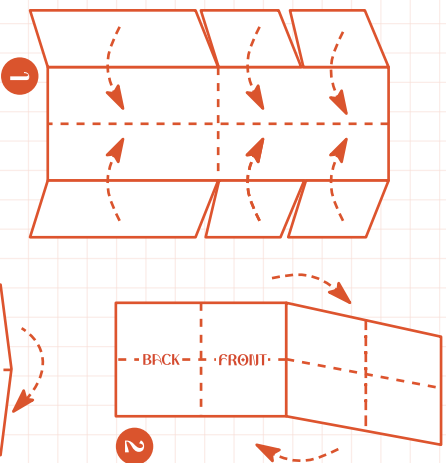
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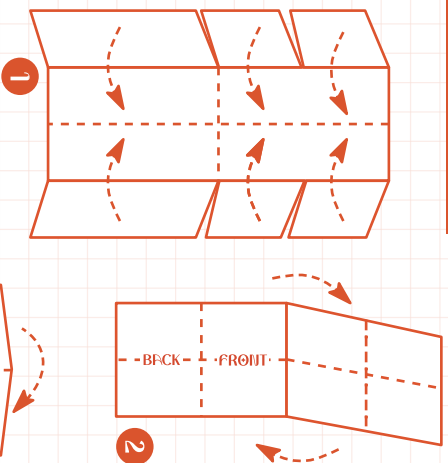
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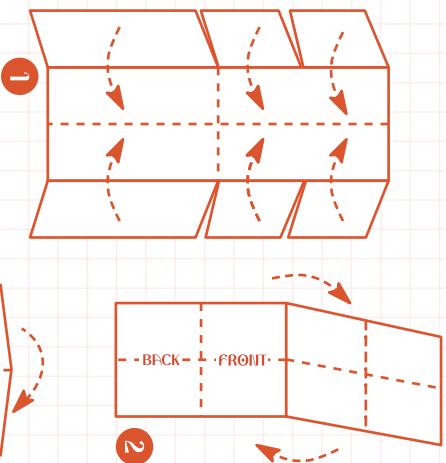
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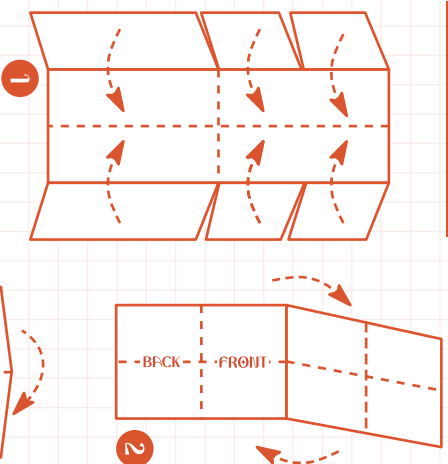
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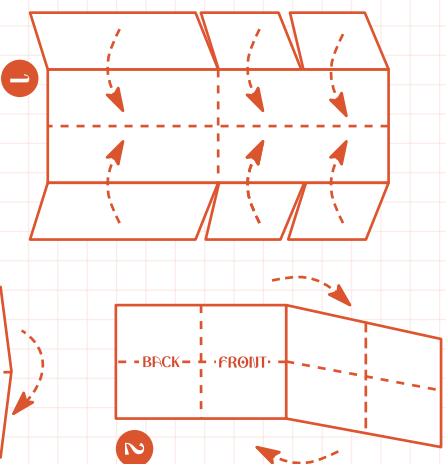
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