

# Groundworks



Study from the Broken Path Series with Border Edging, 1986, Boyle Family (Mark Boyle, Joan Hills, Sebastian Boyle, Georgina Boyle)  
Painted fibreglass and mixed media, photographed by Antonia Reeve. © Boyle Family / DACS, London 2021

The architecture of the city lies between the buildings. Too complex in nature, form and design to be understood as a single space, ground has become the network of mobility that defines the contemporary city. Above the surface, life, visibility, architecture. Below, out of sight, waste efficiently removed in exchange for energy effortlessly provided. Between, the impervious membrane designed and constructed to seal and separate. It is described, used, and legislated in fragments; representation, mobility, safety, utility, expensive or cheap, hard or soft. But mostly hard. In Zurich 37% of the city is sealed. A modest proportion compared to many contemporary cities but enough to raise summer temperatures by three degrees compared with the surrounding countryside. Over-heating, or instant flooding from extreme weather is the norm in the sealed city.

But the ground is not a surface. The ground is a space whose natural and constructed metabolism above is determined by the actions of matter below. The city needs porous ground and generous planting to absorb and sweat in equal measure to support human and non-human life.

The urban heat island effect, floods and impoverished biodiversity are not the natural consequences of urbanisation but the result of design and construction. The in-between has been designed with as much care and attention as the architecture that stands

beside it. From Bürkli to Europallee, architecture has constructed the ground.

Breaking down the concrete barrier between air, water and earth, between light and darkness, we will construct a new space where the actions below naturally support those above. Ecology has proved that the richness of life above the ground is determined by the complexity and community below. Ecological thinking, in collaboration with the Crowther Lab at ETH, will offer both literal and metaphorical method for re-imagining how the architecture of ground can enrich and protect the city.

We shall challenge the separation between ecology and architecture. Architecture is ecological. Nolli's foundational notation of public versus private will be (re) turned inside out. It is the white space that needs our attention. Using the Atlas, we shall develop an approach to design based on observation and documentation through sampling. Crossing the Boyle Family's Earth Pieces (1963-present) with Crowther's ecological inoculation, fragments will form a new whole. Construction will determine scale shifts that extend far into contemporary territorial flows and deep into material structure. Starting in the garden and in the ground, earth works will be the primer for a new experimental garden prepared with the Crowther Lab which, will in turn, lead to actions across Zurich's greatest continuous interior.