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Hong Kong, Grounded

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Hong Kong, Grounded

Photographs of the contact zones between the mountain and the multilevel metropolis.

Karl Kullmann

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Hong Kong is relentlessly vertical, a city of towers and skyways, elevators, and ladder streets, built on a mountainside — a city without ground, according to the architects Adam Frampton, Jonathan D. Solomon, and Clara Wong. In their guidebook to the three-dimensional circulatory networks of downtown Hong Kong, they draw a city that has radically abrogated its relationship with the ground plane. [1]

It's a beautiful, insightful book, but its sense of gravity is all wrong. For no matter how deeply you lose yourself in the aerial labyrinth, how many escalators you ascend from sea level, how many building portals you pass through, inevitably the mountainous terrain of Hong Kong Island rises up at a faster rate. The levitating pedestrian bumps into the hillside and is brought back to earth. In Hong Kong, the ground is everywhere.

The photographs in this slideshow examine contact zones between the multilevel metropolis and the mountain. Rocks and soils that in other cities would be buried or obscured here are integral to the setting. The terrain that weaves between streets, under buildings, and through public spaces reminds pedestrians of the tenuous relation between the city and its geology. To guard against landslides,

the most precipitous grades are stabilized by engineers and classified within a government database that contains 60,000 registered slopes.



This is a serious enterprise, with official plates identifying the geotechnical compliance of each slope. Engineering solutions vary

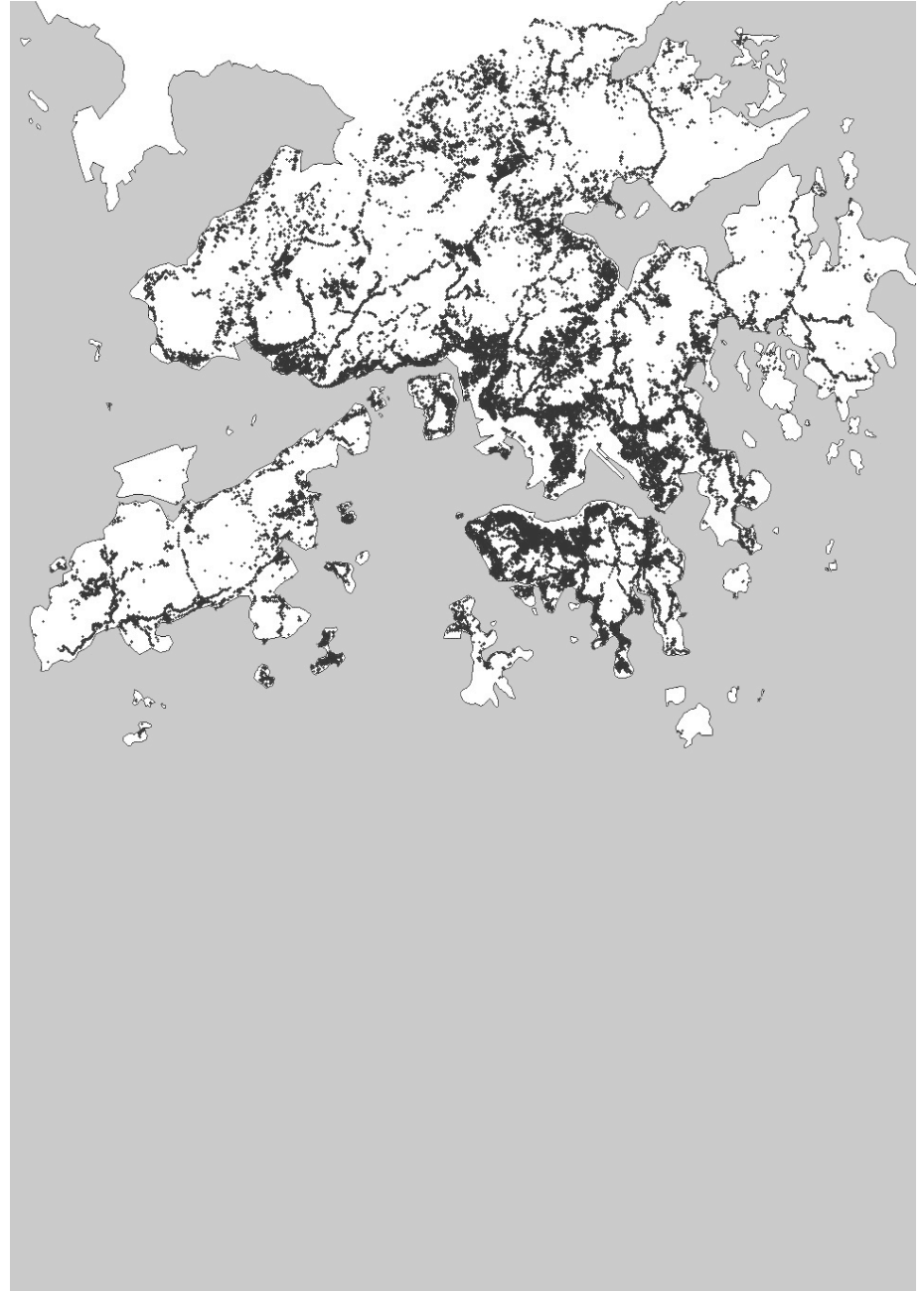


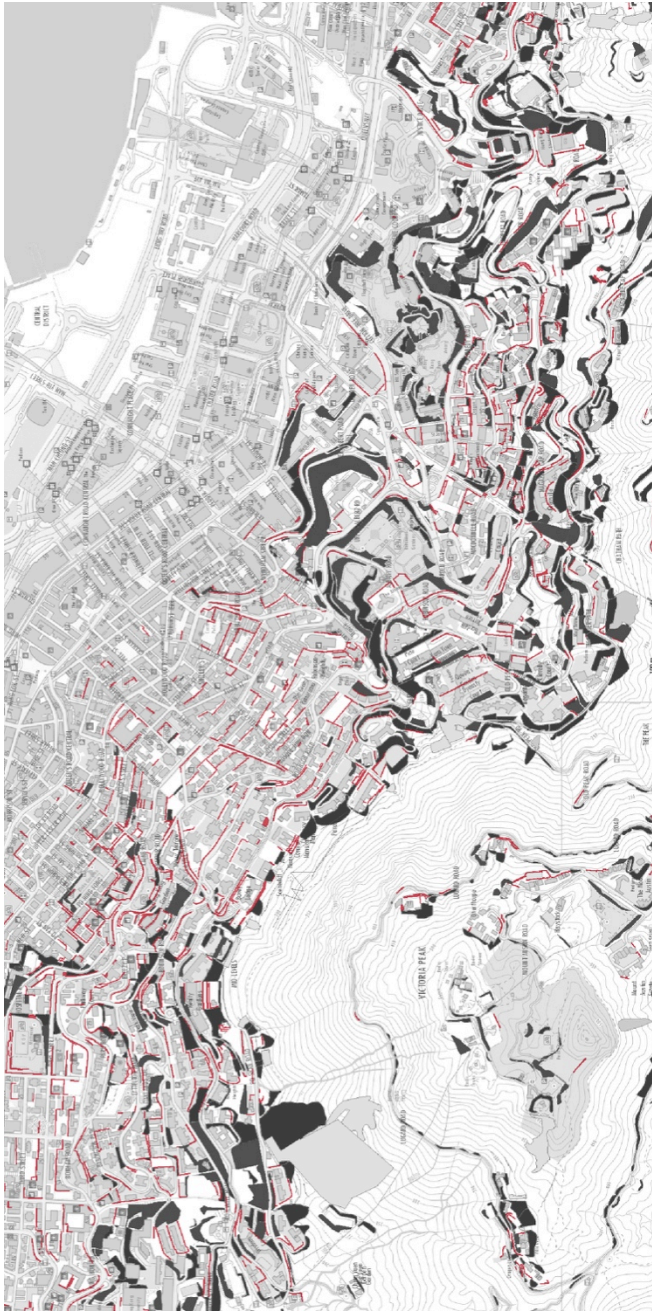
Blocks and scaffolding at the University of Hong Kong. Registered slope 11SW-A / C199. [Karl Kullmann]



Stabilized hillside at the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens. Registered slope 11SW-B / FR202. [Karl Kullmann]

Dot map of the 60,000 registered slopes in Hong Kong. [Hong Kong Geotechnical Engineering Office]





Map of registered slopes in Central Hong Kong. Dark gray indicates engineered slopes and red indicates retaining walls. [Hong Kong Slope System GIS database]



Seating ledge cantilevered over registered slope. [Karl Kullmann]



Public plaza used for temporary storage during maintenance on registered slope 11SW-B / C65. [Karl Kullmann]



Exposed utilities infrastructure. Registered slope 11SW-A / CR19. [Karl Kullmann]



Registered slope 11SW-A / C33. [Karl Kullmann]



Slope registration plaque: 11SW-B / CR617. [Karl Kullmann]