

VADEMECUM

77 Minor Terms for Writing Urban Places

edited by

Klaske Havik, Kris Pint, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner

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Further readings

Genpei, A. (2010). *Hyperart: Thomasson*. Kaya Press.

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Trufelman, A. (2014, 26 August). *Thomassons*. 99% Invisible. <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/thomassons/>

Boot scraper

A *boot scraper* is a cast-iron object that can take various shapes. In major world cities such as London and New York in the 18th and 19th centuries, boot scrapers were placed outside some houses to remove excrement and dirt from people's boots. According to historian Christian Loir, boot scrapers are key to urban history, as they are part of the history of walking in the city (AFP 2011). In European cities, until the late 18th century, only the poor walked in the streets. This habit changed when walking became fashionable and the elite discovered the city, thereby granting public space new quality and value. As more people adopted the walking habit, boot scrapers changed social customs: people started to remove their shoes before going indoors, and manuals began to be published to explain how to be civil by not taking off one's shoes. Although boot scrapers can be seen as forerunners of today's doormats, they can also be considered 'Thomassons' (Genpei, 2010), that is, leftovers or vestiges of the past that no longer serve any discernible purpose in the urban fabric but are maintained nonetheless (Trufelman, 2014). Boot scrapers are thus historical traces that 'write' the urban space from social and cultural perspectives.