

oscar dierker's

## **cityecology.forsale**

***suggested: a cognitive dissonance to carcinogens***

I was driving west down i-84,  
have you noticed the hillsides north and south  
it feels like your in a valley, foliage covering all but the roads and buildings and smoggy sky  
I say that it's like a valley because it's beautiful.  
have you noticed how many great views there are while driving?  
if you're like me and enjoy taking photos then it might have clicked,  
these are views you can't exactly photograph, you can't always walk into the middle of the  
street, especially not an interstate highway...  
sucks how much is built for cars

anyways

thank you all for coming to **cityecolgy.forsale**  
hopefully you buy something today... [or at least buy what I'm saying]

let's start with the title,  
**cityecology.forsale**

I'll give you an all encompassing definition of the first part; **city ecology**

it's everything (in a city),  
more seriously  
it's everything and their connections all within the city  
more in depth, it's the connections and interactions of all living things with each other and the  
world around them, inorganic and organic.  
it's infrastructure and governance  
land-use public and private  
planting trees and pulling weeds  
it's the sand in the gutters  
the potholes that fill with water

its large, expansive, and interwoven  
but most importantly it's holistic,  
when i set out to study city ecology, it was in response to the understanding that nature is a term  
that includes humans,  
I am fully against the binary of humans and nature,  
everything we do— for better or worse— is a part of nature,  
this is a point that i find best brought up in jason w. moore's *capitalism in the web of life*, a text  
with furthering connections around how capitalism shapes the natural world

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I won't talk about the second part of the the title yet,  
but maybe you can get there before me

so

### **————mini-golf as a way of engaging with city ecology**

harkening back to 7 months ago,  
if you were at my thesis proposal you might be sitting here wondering where the hell is the  
mini-golf?  
maybe you're even a little bummed... not because of what you see but what you hoped for

for those not in the know, I have this ongoing desire to run a mini-golf course,  
in order to make it fit in to the thesis project  
I had devised the question:

*how can mini-golf be used as a way to engage in a city ecosystem?*

I didn't realize it then, but it turns out the meat of the question is in the latter;  
a city ecosystem  
and the question, perfectly worded too: how can mini-golf be used as a way to engage in a city  
ecosystem?  
mini-golf is just one of countless ways to learn about the functionings of urban life  
I'll be going over 5 of methods of engagement i explored in my study of city-ecology  
starting with mini-golf

I continue to be attracted to the idea of mini golf, because of the strength of the metaphors it  
provides,  
the amount of parallels to larger aspects of city ecology are quite strong

its a parody of golf...  
the most egregious...or at least obvious...example of a built environment  
it also provides an opportunity for community engagement through fun  
it has strong enough links to capitalism in order to study it  
while also being able to comfortably exist outside of capitalism (it's not a form that requires  
heavy expenses... in fact a mini-golf business is a good way to launder money, but that's a  
conversation for another day.)

so how was I actually using mini-golf,  
was it purely conceptual?  
did it ever make it out of the proposal phase?  
was I able to use it as a way to engage with a city ecosystem?

well, I actually started making a course,

the aim was/is (I'm still going to do this... eventually)  
to create a free public mini-golf course along sidewalk strips in portland,  
spoiler alert, I put it on hold  
a great idea, believe me I know... in fact the worst part about all this is that the mini-golf was  
such a good selling point, a great thing to start a conversation when I'd be at a party...  
explaining my project now would take... gosh like 30 minutes  
but back on course,  
turns out it's hard to start ethically landscaping when you don't even have any gardening  
knowledge  
but as you can imagine a landscaping project that is centered around human-use (for fun I might  
add) would be a great way to engage in a city ecosystem

the real mileage I got through mini-golf was my fieldwork of putting in parking lots, sidewalks,  
and streets.

I see the act of putting as an act of meditation and embodiment,  
I mean this in a fairly simple way  
when you putt you have to look down  
changing your perspective  
you need to take time  
the longer the better, study the ground and understand how the ball will behave  
what do you see?

I'll spoil this, the fifth way of engagement in city ecology is performance as research... but this  
method seems to permeate through all the methods I'm mentioning here...so it doesn't get its  
own section, everything is art and everything is performance,  
shit I'm performing for you right now

putting where you shouldn't be (out in the streets)  
creates moments of discovery,  
the ball lands in a storm drain, or a pothole, you're forced to reckon with it  
the ball rests leaning on the very edge of someone's lawn yet still touching the sidewalk  
a conversation about public and private land  
the roots of a tree have lifted up the sidewalk creating a ramp for the ball  
or an impasse for someone less mobile than I  
opportunities to engage in city ecology  
opportunities to ask larger questions  
things to reckon with  
things to notice

part 2

———**documentation as a way of engaging with city ecology**

putting with a camera,  
or point and shoot instead of stop and play

actually i initially connected putting and photography to embarrassment  
I used to be embarrassed to take film photos in public,  
and believe it or not, carrying a putter and golfing down the street, also kinda embarrassing  
at least for me at the time,  
well, not anymore,  
have I talked about my outfit? i'm usually wearing one of two kinds of outfits when working on  
this project, workwear so i can seem responsible enough to be dealing with cement, especially if  
I'm buying something and want the privilege of being a guy that obviously knows what he's  
doing [muscle flex]  
but this kind of outfit... a golfing outfit  
this is what ended my embarrassment, by donning a costume and really playing the part, I was  
able to be confidently putt my stuff in public

maybe that's what made me also comfortable taking photos in public...  
or maybe it was the 750 film photos I took

I started this practice in order to document and try to understand city ecology  
(at this point still as a means toward mini-golf)  
textures, undulations, flora and sometimes fauna  
with putting being a ground game, I got into geography  
experimental geography as laid out by nato thompson and trevor paglen  
studying what may be mundane but is inextricably linked to us and our being,  
anything that looked interesting became a moment to ask a question

these photos began to find a home on a blog i created to record such questions,  
many are left unanswered, simply prose and meditations on curiosities of city ecology,  
I think the first question I asked was if we'll ever degender the term man-hole, or if it's funny  
enough to stay.

some questions are meant to be answered. I'll dive into the required research to figure it out, the  
one that comes to mind is regarding hummingbird feeders and if they are harmful to nectar  
producing flowers... the answer is something along the lines of, kinda but not really, the best  
practice is and always will be planting native species of flowers... not the most satisfying of  
answers but still a fascinating question... more interesting would be to talk about the coffee  
trade, and how julia louis dreyfus of seinfeld and veep comes from a french dynasty of  
agriculture traders... that was the wikipedia page that just kept on giving.. you can read about it  
on the blog ([www.cityecology.forsale](http://www.cityecology.forsale))

more in terms of performance as research and a further consideration of experimental  
geography,, was the parking lot play me and my classmate lottie engaged in, creating a game  
in a space not meant for it... a parking lot. very situationist of me... more on that later. learning  
new things about how space is used and our impact within it... coming out with more questions,  
a lot of noticing.

it's true, many noticings just lead to possible essays  
I'd link trimming hedges to square watermelons and grid layouts of cities if I had the time  
probably tossing in Gordon Matta-Clark's conical intersect as well as roundabouts for points of  
comparison

the blog has become a landing for all the activities I do as they relate to city ecology  
a reason to keep engaging, taking photos, and asking questions  
if you haven't looked at my blog yet you really should  
I don't care if you pull out your phone (though it is better on a computer)  
or you can wait, I'll keep updating it after this, thesis is not the most important event for this  
project

but these possible essays do eventually find their way off my list and into the blog,  
a blog of prose? micro essays, or maybe just leaning into the annotated bibliography of it all,  
somebody ask me about the strengths (and not-weaknesses) of a blog during the question  
phase and also ask about my list of website pages

again noticings, and now recordings  
writing down what I see

part 3

—————**extraction as a way of engaging with city ecology**

the allowance,

I was pumping gas, I do that now  
and noticed the pumps are certified by the department of agriculture,  
I checked it out and the agency exists for economic purposes,  
commerce and private ownership are cornerstones of the dept. of agriculture,  
makes ya think,  
is agriculture one of those words that denotes a form specific to human interaction/needs?  
...pork and poultry?

I guess the department covers a lot, has agencies within it that feel like they should be  
elsewhere...

is that big government or small government?  
what are governments for?  
unleaded gasoline and diesel,  
a part of our agriculture

the more you study this subject of city ecology the more you see that it's already in the language  
of governance

disheartening for me a pioneer [wide eyes]—of this subject  
disheartening to see the words "urban forest" on a flyer advertising street sweep leaf pick-up

it's my thing,  
I should own it  
funnily enough there's a proposal after this at 11  
"exploring the intersection of urban abstractions and natural landscapes"  
I don't know how much it has in common with anything i've been speaking of  
nor do I think I've met the artist keanu  
not that it matters I don't own these ideas...

who owns what?  
to pull a quote from the song "tonight the streets are ours" by richard hawley  
"the streets are ours"

stealing?  
is it really stealing if it's just on the sidewalk?

if it's on the street is it up for grabs \*see free box  
is there a threshold as to what is up for grabs  
does it relate at all to economic value?                      one person's trash is another's treasure  
a candy bowl doesn't need to be labeled for people to know to take one  
maybe in an art institution that's not the case, I have to tell you to touch  
I haven't seen it, maybe you can answer  
did felix gonzales torres have text encouraging people to take one?  
or is it within the shared knowledge of art goers, and or a ...'well if others are might as well'  
one person setting precedent

so I started harvesting sand  
in another instance of performance as research I took my  
utilizing francis alys' *when faith moves mountains* as a point of comparison  
or better yet a point of juxtaposition,  
different sand different place on the globe

I went down the streets of portland with a handheld cordless dyson vacuum  
utilizing the skills of noticing that I'd been honing all thesis  
I had a list in my head of cars and curbs with significant enough collections of sand

my audience was the public, most all of whom kept moving past me,  
who knows,  
they probably talked about it to someone later  
here I go again setting precedent (see lou watsons old thesis project (2015? 2020?) suite sandy  
which asks the question "how sandy is sandy boulevard")

strangers cared or didn't

I did get an answer for a dating app prompt out of it

*describe oscar in 3 words:*

**funny, charming, and sisyphian**

words people physically close to me have said.  
friends who saw me vacuuming (or sweeping)

I was doing this because sand is a valuable resource,  
it started when (again for minigolf) I wanted to experiment with cob  
a material made by mixing sub-soil, water, straw, and sand... a surprising amount of it,  
turns out sand is in everything  
it's the world's most extracted resource  
and its non-renewable, the demand currently outpaces the supply  
rivers are dredged and beaches have disappeared  
future oriented me, mining for the gold underneath our noses  
did you know there's a black market for sand...  
not here necessarily.

other extractions of mine have included foraging for plants in gutters and storm drains,  
pulling out the tree-of-heaven,,, ask me about it during the question phase,  
I'd like to bring up its relationship to money

locating broken wheel stops/from parking lots  
attempting to find bark chip bags for possible tax breaks

but sand was the most tied to economic value (despite being maybe the cheapest of what I've  
shown... probably because it itself is raw material (if you choose to ignore the beauty that is the  
collage composite of true street sand)

I wanted more sand, but the days have gotten darker and wetter  
the gutters are no longer just sand gravel and dandelions  
fall had come and sand has been contaminated by an excess of decomposing organic matter.  
the solution became going to more industrial areas of portland, places where there aren't a lot of  
trees... this can be substituted by going to historically underfunded neighborhoods that have a  
lack of adult trees. both locations also have construction near them,, a breeding ground for sand  
this is an unexpected moment to engage in city ecology, to start to ask questions and make  
considerations i wouldn't have otherwise

In my latest round of sand extraction I found myself with a broom, dustpan, and 5 gallon bucket.  
I was brushing away the fallen leaves, I was at the bottom of the hill, standing in the street but  
facing someone's house. i hoped no one would come out, and I didn't know what to do when  
pedestrians walked by

I was even more aware of my presence, maybe because I was closer to a house,, and cause it seemed like they could be home... regardless, I was afraid of getting in trouble... it felt more like theft than before.

what quelled this feeling was the thought that passers by would assume that i had lost a piece of jewelry and was looking for it...

something about the idea that there was something more valuable, or that something that was "my property" justified me scraping through gravel in a gutter,

that monetary value of an object in relation to justifiable behavior

it makes me think about people who go to parks with a metal detector.

they are often looking for something that was lost by someone else... why is that more okay?

of course this is all perceived... assumptions, since no one has actually hassled me about any of this.

off the record, at one point i wanted to get in trouble, I wanted someone to care enough to put a price tag on what I had taken, to take me to small claims court and to have it in writing to have it on the record...

money, it all goes back to money

part 4. finally,

———**commerce as a way of engaging with city ecology**

commercial tensions and complexities

this is what we're looking at today, or at least a big part of it

linking economic-value and use-value

when something has economic value it raises its (perceived) use value

can I promote considerations for use of these materials by turning them into product, by adding a true price tag

whether the use is proposed for the future,

or an opportunity to analyze the past economic path it was a part of

commerce is a way to engage in a city ecosystem

if you haven't gotten it yet

these are all just different frameworks for viewing and understanding

maybe some light engagement with the situationists project of **détournement**

utilizing the language (visual and written) of capitalism to critique it,

rerouting and hijacking

providing something that pokes fun and grabs the viewer's mental attention for the just small moment needed

I'm trying to sell you sand and broken asphalt don't forget now...

buy my stuff i'll keep whispering

so I feel like I'm selling out,

or that maybe that I've fallen into the inevitable

all roads lead to money, it all circles back to capitalism  
and I've got to get a piece of the action no?

no.

I'm not selling out, listen to me

I'm leaning into the fact that this is a school assignment

a school that I pay to attend

maybe I'm just getting back what I put in,

tens of thousands of dollars

or more accurately I'm selling it for my degree, I've got to pass this thesis to move on with my  
life... also

I'm set up here in an art gallery in an art institution,

have you seen the white walls

there's no getting around it, if you can't beat em join em no?

no.

I'm embracing the space and utilizing it as a way to engage in a city ecosystem

what can I get you in today?

let's look at some of these projects in the room

maybe we can explore some of the commercial tensions and complexities I alluded to?

well the tension is pretty apparent, selling city ecology,

materials that **are of**—and or—for the public

yeah, let's skip that and just talk about the complexities... keep it simple

starting with the sand that I'm pricing at just \$10 a bag,

it was hard to estimate this as the sand is of unclear origin,

and on top of that sand prices vary,

there isn't a set price like oil barrels c'mon

my math calculated sand as one to ten cents per pound

moving clockwise to the asphalt, also marketed \$10 a piece

but free to any card carrying anarchist

wait, why am I even selling asphalt?

that expression "all roads lead to rome" it's in relation to roman road technology, all roads are a  
byproduct of their ancient roads... whatever

anyways cobblestone as you can imagine is a collection of stones layed out to make a road,

I always imagined cobblestone as just the river rock kind circular and all,

turns out cobble is a measurement of rock size, a classification

a cubic rock the size of a fist would be a cobble,

lay out enough you've got yourself a road.

so in france

there is a long history of protest, good for them

and a common tactic was to pull out the cobblestones helping to barricade small old parisian streets.

another use was simply throwing the stones at military or police,  
so how did the government in paris respond?

well by widening the streets,

and with widened streets (demolishing housing of the opposition)

paris had the opportunity to lay new roads,

they choose macadam roads (made by a series of small rocks layered and layered and sometimes held together by a binding agent, (it's like the inbetween of a gravel road and asphalt in fact macadam is very easily the precursor to the dominant asphalt streets we are so familiar with today (it's only competition is concrete roads (cheaper more durable, yet harder to care for) so with a broken chunk of asphalt you have a few options (at least according to reddit) you throw it away and forget it, or throw it through a window (ideally a large bank... or something else governing and evil)

what these online jokers probably didn't connect was the rich history of throwing the pieces of road as protest, only stopped by changing road technology and a love of petroleum (main component of asphalt)

turns out there is a use value, so what's the economic value? how do I sell it

I ended up with some calculations leading to \$4 for half and square foot or 20 cents a year for 20 years,

I got that by using a conservative estimate from 2012, a part of a design approved by the city council

did you know the reason why there are unimproved roadways in portland? it's because the city made a rule for itself saying that it's the responsibility of the developers (or in this case 100+ years later, the homeowners) its the responsibility of the owners adjacent to the road to pay for the street to be paved... also the entire block has to agree

this 2012 design became the cheapest option as it had no sidewalks, just asphalt with gravel shoulders around \$65 a month for 20 years (down from the previous \$300 a month for 20 years).. who knows how much it would cost now... I don't and I tried looking

so to reanswer my question, why am I selling asphalt?

as a way to engage in city ecology.

the complexity of this price lies in the fact that a street costs that much, but broken asphalt that is going to be recycled (ask me about that... recycling harmful materials) is so cheap it's barely considered.

above the asphalt is a sidewalk panel priced at \$3,600

this is a wall art piece

it's faux sidewalk, all the best parts of a sidewalk without the functionality... or weight

all wrapped in a piece of plastic to keep the carcinogens in.. or radon (square and rectangle moment?)

a sidewalk panel costs around \$36 to replace... surely that isn't including labor

lastly at \$2,600 a raised garden bed  
pre-tilled

well pre-tilled would be wrong to say it's more perma-tilled  
perma as in permanent, but hopefully there's a greenwashed sucker who connects it to  
permaculture instead

what your looking at is a 5-row perma-tilled raised garden bed  
thats 54 feet of concrete, all american wheel stoppage  
professionally estimated at \$200 per 6 foot wheel stop

I don't know how good your mental arithmetic is but

beware those who try to sell you proverbs [insert proverb earlier]  
[don't] trust me,  
remember  
there's no such thing as a free continental breakfast