

Opal for Cabinet Magazine's Colors column
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I don't believe that opal is a color. Perhaps it can describe a complicated façade, but it does not maintain itself as a homogenous autonomous 'seen in the world' applicable color. Opals are unreliable. They always look different, and are, in fact, colorless. I am not making this up. When I followed through on my skepticism I learned that opal is a colorless, liquefied, water jelly mineral that slips through the cracks of stones. What we refer to as opal—the rainbow sheen and color potpourri—are impurities in the silica content. It has one quality that we can relate to the concept of color: the bent ray/ refracted light-ness of visibility. Other than that I must insist that we acknowledge opal for what it is—a gem, an object.

To drive my point home, I testify that in order to see an opal with my own eyes I had to go to a jewelry re-sale shop on 14th Street. There I witnessed a woman selling her cache of jewels for cash and when she was offered \$300, her head slumped and she was barely able to speak in her own defense. She needed more and she wasn't going to get it. For a moment, we were together in a room full of excess, excess and exploitation. I to rebuke the opal, she to collect on her future.

I want to consider opal beyond the boundaries of its usual signifiers. Lose color, lose gem. What properties does it boast in and of itself? It's slippery and always looks different. It accumulates in the right conditions, and is valued for its purity...that's when I got it! Wealth. An opal is the conceptual substitute place-holding icon of wealth. (Often milky white laced with rainbows...! You see what I am saying...) Like a headlamp in a quarry, the analogy illuminates the face of the miner and the treasure.

Let's take the opal to task. But let's do so with the transparency of the silica that we speak of. What is at risk for each of us to reveal the material conditions of our existence? It is hard to be forthright about what exactly we have in the world, and about how much more we want. How can we transform the dominant vision of wealth and see how our position in the economy is obscured by the myths of class mobility, poverty as a moral failing, and scarcity? I should be speaking in I's. How I persist with a scarcity model even though I have never missed a meal in my whole life. Should I donate more money to organizations that work on behalf of shared politics? Is it enough to be balls-out honest about my financial status? (At this very moment \$2,210.92 in my WaMu Free Checking account, no savings but some form of an inheritance sometime in the future. I own some art and a valuable necklace that was my grandmother's. No real estate, no investments.) What about the environment and how I take great pleasure in flying around the world to do stuff? Well, all this not-so-cathartic disclosure is my way of getting to a point of connection and explication with myself as an imperfect example. Like an opal, my impurities reveal me. The macro on my micro is that it is important that people have a clear understanding of their resources and how their resources are connected to what other people do and don't have. The thrust is to re-imagine a sense

of connection rather than consumption based on isolation, independence and scarcity models. I want to consider how good it would feel to not want so much all the time. To get rid of that neck cramp from always looking up the class pyramid.

Nary a stone would be cracked if not for the glimmer of impurity begging the hammer come down hard.

I have been thinking about this a lot recently, opals and wealth; thinking and talking to a brilliant friend, Dean Spade, about the potential of direct conversations on wealth and redistribution. Conversations to examine complicity, responsibility, and ethical living in capitalism. Feminist consciousness-raising groups came to mind as an apt strategy. This process of building a shared analysis from the knowledge already within the room seemed particularly relevant to address the history of a constituency ripe for this kind of social experiment. Why does it get so uncomfortable when we try to talk about the politics of consumption and capital, real estate and inheritance? Why do we so quickly demur to apathy instead of challenging our habits, desires, and the depth of our needs? Why is shame shackled to both a trust fund and a working class past? What is at risk for us to acknowledge the material conditions of our lives?

My archive accumulates. My material memory. I's of responsibility. I on unemployment, me and my absent father's disability check. I am thirty. What is at risk for me? Where does my desire come from? What are the repercussions of my lifestyle—on myself, on my own sense of justice, on my environment, on ours? What fear, what failure is attached to this reflection? What is enough?

What about opal? How does its ambiguous classification as a color, gem, and object of desire play out? How does the imperfect jelly harden into the myth of meritocracy and upward mobility? How does wealth become so precious and precarious, solidified as a rainbow-hued stone to collect and protect?

Let's transform the "conceptual substitute place-holding icon of wealth" into a more intelligible equation. How can we understand $\text{SiO}_2 - n\text{H}_2\text{O}$?

Stable involved Over-committed twosome - never Hoping to Own

Seeking insurance Overwhelmed too - nastily Hating two Others

I thank Dean Spade for inspiration, extensive comments, and some precise language to articulate these ideas.