

Jamie's Iteration #1

Invisible Stupidities

Mel Chin's Invisible Aesthetics

<https://vimeo.com/43795366>

Revival Field is a project that Chin developed with a scientist from the US Department of Agriculture that would purposefully cultivate hyper-accumulator plants in polluted landscapes to repair and replenish them. The hyperaccumulators were plants known to be good at drawing heavy metals from soil, metals that were the by-product of ore smelting processes. The plants would absorb the metals, be harvested, and could even be processed to produce metal ore at a higher efficiency than factory methods.

Chin received an NEA grant to pursue the project, but it was rejected by a Republican senator because he couldn't understand how it was "art." So Mel Chin met with the senator and explained to him the concept of "invisible aesthetics": that there are things happening that we cannot see but that we nonetheless appreciate as harmonious (the growing of plants and bodies, for example, or the complex apparatus of ecologies). He was awarded the grant, and found a site to install the work in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Since then, the process of using plants to recuperate toxic landscapes has spread internationally, and the US DoA continues to participate in the program. It's an example of how art can contribute to science, and vice versa. The work has moved beyond the initial "sculpture" and is no longer art in the same way.

Situationist International's Dérive

Thinking about the invisible forces of the city, and how our navigation of urban spaces often is guided by the same invisible hand of the market that neoliberal and Austrian school economists rely on, I was reminded of the Situationist International's performative process of the *dérive*. As a group, the SI rejected the concentration of creative energy in museums and the select few who could earn a living as artists, and attempted to emancipate art by attaching it to the everyday. *Dérives* were the act of giving one's self over to the forces of the city, instead of navigating it simply for commercial or institutional purposes. It is counter-efficiency, time-based, and pleasure seeking. Wondering how to think through exhibiting work based on invisible forces, and taking inspiration from Barbara's projects and our discussion of memory and the ghosts of cities, we might consider a kind of performance (or a kind of counter-efficient openness) as a possibility for our final work.

Rooting Stupidities

I have a collection of stupidities I can draw on, but there are two examples that I continue to think about. The first is a moment in which I caught myself looking at a photo of my grandmother when she was a child, and feeling sadness that she lived in a world that was black and white. And when I say this, I don't mean I felt sad that she didn't have access to color

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television and film, but that I assumed that she, as a child; the photo studio she was in; the trees on the street outside; her entire world, was black and white. I caught myself after a second and was initially surprised by how stupid the thought was, but have since used it as a way to think through our mediated subjectivities, and how our historical imagination has been limited by the tyranny of the visual.

The second stupidity I'm thinking of is an experience I had in Long and McQuade, a music store in Vancouver. One of my early artworks was turning famous speeches into karaoke, and I wanted to install the work on monitors that would sit on top of big PA speakers. When I explained what I wanted to use the speakers for, the Long & McQuade employee told me how dumb an idea it was. Speakers contain magnets, and a speaker the size I was imagining would destroy the television. I can remember walking away from the rental counter and seeing him talk to his co-worker, gesturing towards me while he explained how absurd my request was. It was a moment of shame, but also one of recognizing that there are people who know things that can help me, spurring me towards an expanded, humbled curiosity that lends itself well to interdisciplinary collaboration.

Abstraction

I've been thinking about what abstraction offers (the visualizability of the unvisualizable). My go-to examples of abstraction in a visual realm are Malevich's *Black Square*, Mondrian's theosophic geometric abstraction, and the politicized, individualizing work of the American Abstract Expressionists. In a literary realm, I rely on the Dadaists, Gertrude Stein's cubism, and Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*. But I'm interested in thinking more about how abstraction works both artistically and scientifically (the *ceteris paribus*, the abstraction of material into the experiment), and this question of how abstraction can link to extraction, especially in the examples of the legibility of refugee lives that Francisco raised, as well.