

Swiss Psychotropic Gold - a fragment / critical fabulation

an ongoing artistic research on the derivative, psychotropic and molecular dimensions of gold and the question of the “how”, how to engage with these different discursive materialities that come together.

It is a collage of different discursive materialities in which four positions/persons are articulated: Nina Bandi, Anna Frei (who is not here) and knowbotiq (Christian Huebler and Yvonne Wilhelm).

Background

For more than three centuries, Swiss commodity trade has been caught up in colonial, and later in postcolonial and neoliberal entanglements. Having fuelled early modern industrialisation, as well as contemporary finance, Swiss trading activities have influenced vivid cultural, affective and moral economies. They have contributed to Swiss wealth¹, but also to national narratives of independence, safety and white supremacy. An artistic and ethnographic project, Swiss Psychotropic Gold re-narrates global gold trade— from mining in former colonies to its refining and re-diverting in and out of Switzerland—as a series of transformative immediations of primary materials, values and affects. The story concerning gold that has been researched and worked upon more widely – albeit only in recent years with regard to Switzerland - is the story of bullion making and bullion storage as well as of jewellery, both of which are characterized by a specific material visibility. However, our focus lies more on the moment when gold loses its stable form, in the moment of dissipation and dispersion, when its materiality is transformed into other states, what we subsume under its derivative, psychotropic and molecular dimensions.

the derivative line of gold

We aim at interlacing the material and the materiality of that which we negotiate as the “precious metal” gold. This “precious metal” contains bodies and bodily processes involved in gold production and usage - from exploitative labour to gold as object of desire - as well as the different ways of movement, transformation and exchange of the commodity and of the bodies that are part of gold production [That is why in German we use the term (Rohstoffwechsel / commodity metabolism)].

In order to go beyond the material gold and to trace its different materialities, we propose to follow its derivative line. The derivative is that which leaves the riverbed and overflows its shores - this is the etymological root of the word: de-river. It is an exceeding of the banks of the river, the

¹ Yet, public debate on colonial involvement is almost absent. The Swiss mythology of neutrality transforms the often violent and “dirty” material complexities of mining and trading into an opaque and orderly form of technocracy, discretion and virtual finance.

water spills over in different directions, in uncontrollable flows and streams.

With regard to gold, we ask more specifically: what is it that spills over from gold that is transported to Switzerland – which amounts to up to 70% of the global gold production. This gold stemming from mines in Togo e.g. extracted in processes of exploitation and destruction as well as from jewellery not deemed to be kept any longer is fuelled into one of the five refineries placed on Swiss territory, where it is mixed, melted, cleaned to the extent that these different origins are not traceable anymore.

We ask: are these dissipational and dispersional transformations a kind of migrational movement? What kind of bodies, of affects, of power and domination are involved in this process from the moment when different routes, trajectories of visibility and invisibility, perceptibility and imperceptibility, of materiality, of affectability are taken?

To look at the derivative line of gold gives way to the dimension of the social, however of a different sociality. In Randy Martin's terms², the derivative can be seen as a social logic, inasmuch as it inverts the question of the exchange of what can be seen but not acted upon and what cannot be perceived easily but which enables activity. For him, it is an expansion of the horizon of desire and possibilities beyond what currently exists, which gives rise to a decolonization of the body and a deterritorialisation of space.

As a consequence we search for different aesthetic configurations that bring these derivative states of gold to the fore. The question becomes how gold in its different states and processes of exploitation and transformation intervenes in the distribution of the sensible; how in violent acts of extraction and dispersion as well as in its cultural and aesthetic dimensions of cleanliness, moral superiority, and desire, gold acts as a violent dividing and transformative force of dis- and enclosure?

the psychotropic dimension of gold

Paul B. Preciado argues that we find ourselves in a new type of governmentality of the living. A bio-molecular and a semiotic-technical government coincide in governing sexual subjectivity. To this specific mode of production and consumption belong a „masturbatory temporization of life, a virtual and hallucinogenic aesthetic of the body, a particular way of transforming the inner in outer space and the city in a private junkspace by means of self-surveillance devices and ultra fast information distribution, resulting in continuous and uninterrupted loops of desire and resistance, of consumption and destruction, of evolution and self-extinction.”³

Gold as a material-discursive practice involves not only the material gold but bodies, technology,

² Martin, Randy (2015), *Knowledge LTD. Toward a Social Logic of the Derivative*. TEMPLE UNIVERSITY PRESS. Philadelphia.

³ Preciado, Paul (2008), *Pharmaco-pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology*. Article in *Parallax* 14(1):105-117. P. 108.

aesthetics, psychotropic substances, hormones, and molecules, that fuel into the affective assemblage that surround and permeate gold. In the trajectory and genealogy of Swiss gold, these have produced this gold and brought it to its distribution: from drugged miners to the matrilinear handing-over of crafted and chasing gold, to a generalized desire for stability and safety tied to gold. Processes of dispersion follow that permeate bodies and the soil. In a somatico-political consciousness, gold becomes an affective state, an investment, a stabilizer and tranquilizer, a security, an energizer, a golden needle.

**transformations:
molecules, matter, quants: or queer/ing gold?**

The “psychotropisation” of the governing mode of society is tied to the molecularization of gold. The techno-sexual body today has become a metabolic body through which substances, desires, affects enter and disperse.

The molecular implies taking into account different trajectories of knots, transversal relations, coming-together, assemblages that allow for div/isions and re-aggregations that run counter to political and moral categories of gender, race, hierarchy, domination. For Karen Barad it is about queered and queering matter and atoms. To question and counter the physics of gold means questioning established categories of causality, agency, space, time, and matter and how these are tied to moral and political assumptions (from Swiss humanitarianism to Swissness’ clean superficiality...).

Matter and molecules are not political per se. It is not their pure existence, the contraction of systems, hierarchies, totalities to the molecular level that we arrive at its political meaning. This becoming molecular, becoming queer involves a deterritorialization in which the properties of the constituent elements disperse and are rearranged. Molecules, however, are also drawn into assemblages of the historical and the social that persist within relations of domination and power.

Taking into account the different discursive materialities laid out here, it is an aesthetic part-taking, a being affected, and affecting others, that takes place on derivative, psychotropic and molecular levels. To go back to the derivative sociality mentioned earlier, the emanating sociality we look for is thus **a sociality of mutual indebtedness, dispersion in space and time, and of a different aesthetics.**