

Preface

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cognitive resonance
artistic research
crude oil
alchemy

First let me introduce the concept of cognitive resonance,¹ it is about understanding that emerges when incompatibilities are reconciled, and my belief is, that artistic research is an important key practice for its fruition—and the *Reflecting Oil* project is an outstanding example.

Indeed, in our imaginations, it was once possible to turn water into wine and iron into gold, and to even turn research into art and art into research, with the welcome fact that the latter metamorphosis actually works. It is always interesting to ask how such a material and conceptual transformation manifests concretely, and what remains, with a dash of fantasy, of the so-called trans-substantive hope? One example is Ernst Logar's artistic research, which epitomizes such a capacity for change, its deployment and critique. He and his team have succeeded by emphatically directing our attention to a very specific and extremely bitter substance: crude oil.

Artistic research is framed here as a modern variant of alchemy, and new materialism also comes into play, whereby art is tuned, as it were, as a vessel for the intangible and as an instrument for the elusive with no small responsibility and potential. In the history of science and epistemology, both are original and valid, and both resonate vibrantly in *Reflecting Oil*. It is wonderful that Ernst Logar and his team come quite close to us in their joint research—and this is precisely where the special appeal of the project lies. It is their approach to the found material, but also how they handle the very artistic results. The project space is at once a studio and a laboratory, working on reality, models, and ideas, alternative perspectives and idiosyncrasies. These are results unfolding within each individual dedicated to this and similar research. Once more, it is the viewers who are transformed; in this sense, too, this research comes very close, confronting us with its relevance: the project demonstrates that thinking oil can be turned into gold is a short-sighted misconception. When some believed this to be the case, things went wrong—especially when organic material once alive simply goes up in smoke, burns away. Many a dream shattered in its fulfillment. This is what we are currently experiencing, sinking deeper and deeper into the mess; what remains is evidence of failure and our fundamental responsibility.

“The materiality of oil as a substance,” reads the project description, “is the basis of our research project *Reflecting Oil*,” which investigates “the role of oil in geopolitical conflicts, as a cause of environmental pollution, and also as a socio-cultural

object of desire,” making it visible in a new way. This formulation alone encapsulates the tangents between the dirty, the raw, and the dangers of what is valuable to us. Should we speak of the danger of valuable things or of the value of danger, or even both? How was it again with water and wine, iron and gold? How can it be continued with oil...?

This book is a new attempt to explore such relationships with the means of art and to unearth perspectives that have gone undiscovered until now. Once again, art transforms the everyday—iron, water, stone, or in this case, oil—and helps us to see the unexpected in a way that no one has ever seen before, scrutinizing our perception.

Sustainability entails envisioning and cultivating what is essential, and then being prepared to give up what once seemed possible but was not really essential. *Reflecting Oil* teaches us anew that we are well advised to not only feel but also perceive and reflect with all our senses. To allow the connections to come close, to grasp them in a cognitively resonant way. It is not enough to simply say “hindsight is always wiser.” It is crucial to recognize that being wise also means, as Ernst Logar and his team do, to enthusiastically and ingeniously wrest new aspects from the dirt that previously went unrecognized. Perhaps this also gives rise to something like hope—we will read about it. Because, as we all know, hope dies last... Let’s embrace our responsibility, and this research is an excellent source of inspiration.

In short: let’s start taking our cognitive resonance seriously.

1 Cognitive resonance refers to the dynamic process of the continuously evolving combination of perception, understanding, reflection, and creation in a constant state of critical openness and transformation towards an interest (object) as well as the interest (subject) itself.

