

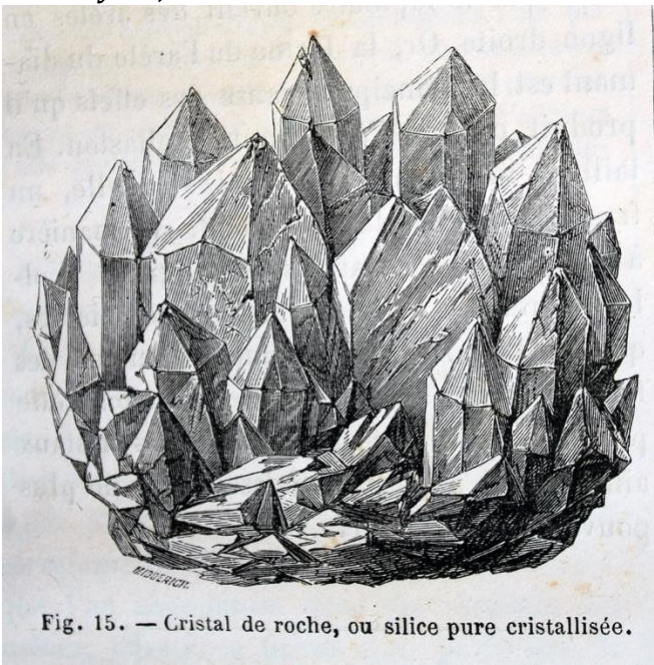
Purchasing Powers

LUXURY HEALING CRYSTALS AND THE PURSUIT OF PLACEBO

DISCUSSED: *The Sacral Chakra, the Pleasure Paradigm, Spencer Pratt, Tulsa's Crystal and Spirit Fair, Cinnamon, Saturn Return, A Deep Sense of Wonder About the Universe, Crystal Mines in Madagascar, Mass Smudgings, Capitalism*

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In a pink-lit room dubbed the Pleasure Paradigm, I stretched out atop an infrared heating pad filled with crushed-up amethyst while a young woman rolled a crystal sphere over my abdomen. Healing crystals have popped up everywhere in the last year, but until that moment, a crystal had never been so close to my vulva. The woman sitting beside me, her hip pressed lightly into mine, was Julia Schoen, co-owner of Glacce, purveyor of the “original crystal-elixir water bottle.” It was Mardi Gras season in New Orleans, and the opening party of Glacce’s headquarters buzzed on the other side of the door. But the vibe in the Pleasure Paradigm was muffled, interior, like a therapist’s office, complete with suggestive tools like a hand-drawn Ouija board and a foraged branch serving as a white-noise machine. In this room, you—and the crystals—are meant to heal yourself.

“Crystals are mirrors,” Schoen said. “The basis of healing is learning to access the special intuition we all possess.”

Glacce hopes to expand on its primary product: an \$80-and-up, cylindrical, glass water bottle with a crystal obelisk inside, sold by GOOP and Free People, and named a “2018 Status Symbol” by *Vanity Fair*. As part of the plan to transition the company into a holistic “luxury-spiritual lifestyle brand,” Schoen demonstrated the crystal massage Glacce offers in partnership with boutique-hotel spas—on me. She described how the infrared rays penetrated six to eight inches into my body. I closed my eyes as she rolled the heavy ball over my rib cage, then down, flattening my stomach. The moment—my tingling back, a stranger’s warm voice in the dark—was compelling enough to suspend my skepticism. Then the sphere edged over my hip, curving slowly along my lower abdomen, pressing against my pubic bone. Suddenly, something was happening in my, ahem, sacral chakra. My eyes popped open.

“Crazy, right?” Schoen’s gaze was like a weighted pillow. She meant the amethyst, the magical power of crystals. I nodded and smiled, fairly certain it was some other combination of charm and pressure at work on my mind and body.

An assistant opened the door and whispered, “Sharon needs the stage smudged with cinnamon again.”

Schoen apologized Zen-ly and left me clutching the ball to my belly. When I reemerged to the party, someone handed me a cocktail with fresh mint and pebbles in the bottom of the glass. I sipped through a Glacce reusable metal straw, retail \$68, and wondered what the witches I knew would think of all this.

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Glacce’s products are representative of the current wave of crystals in the marketplace: high-end, obsessively curated, and a blur of spirituality, health, and consumerism. Created by Schoen and Sharon Leslie in 2015 when they were twenty-five years old, the product design came to Leslie in a dream. The vessel she envisioned is made of thick glass and stainless steel, uses no adhesive, and weighs 1.5 pounds when empty. The crystal inside, which comes in smoky quartz, rose quartz, amethyst or obsidian, looks like a pointy—and admittedly, pretty—three-inch phallus. The idea is that the charged-up crystal infuses the water with “health” benefits ranging from “energy” and “clarity” to support for customers struggling with addiction. Primarily, the crystal-water is infused with the customer’s own intentions, which in turn infuse the customer.

Today’s crystal industry is worth \$1.5 billion, tucked into the \$4.2 trillion wellness industry. As healing crystals have become trendy and ubiquitous, they’ve become increasingly commodified at every price-point: sold as high-priced aspirational products like Glacce bottles, but also as loose stones in any random boutique—a few dollars each, an impulse buy between the tiny succulents and the cash register. Yet unlike other products that could be considered frivolous luxuries or harmless contemporary “snake oil,” the crystal industry raises concerns about traditional appropriation and environmental sustainability. Crystals—usually minerals like quartz or fossilized resins, sometimes semi-precious stones, believed to conduct energy—have been accepted tools in healing and spiritual practices around the world for millennia, and more recently as hallmarks of “alternative medicine.” But now crystals are mined in developing countries at a frantic pace and under unregulated conditions. Then their natural-mystical aesthetic is leveraged for premium pricing in the western wellness market.

In addition, crystal vendors are overtly selling more than an aesthetic object; they’re peddling the promise of mystical healing. In 2017, *TIME* compared crystals with “honest placebos,” in that beneficial effects—while potentially real—result from the user’s perception and the ritual of care. But can there be harm in belief, especially when it’s commodified? GOOP paid a \$145,000 settlement over the notorious vaginal jade egg and its unproven health claims. There are plenty of knockoffs of Glacce’s \$84 crystal-infused bottle, despite the company’s patent, and they frequently contain substances like fluorite and selenite, which are toxic when degraded in water. Glacce is careful not to make scientific claims about its products, yet in the next breath Schoen and Leslie insist that the magic is real.

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