



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

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From a designer's background with a performative approach in a mountain environment, what could mountains want to tell us about life and death, within the context of (future) ecological grief?



🎥 zipped open, ripped apart" hochvogel, all over print jacket, stĚfΔ/V schäfer, 2024.
Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1060526333>

Introduction

The last few years, the so-called “glacier funerals” phenomenon has appeared and spread globally with the most famous one happening in Iceland (Ok-glacier) in August 2019, followed by, amongst others, funerals in Switzerland (Piezol glacier), Mexico (Ayoloco glacier) and the United States (Clark glacier). The funeral is one way to cope with ecological grief, an emotional response to the (future) impact of so-called anthropogenic climate change. The funerals differ in execution, but they remain rituals usually performed for humans and are “projected” onto glacial beings. This works powerfully for creating awareness of glacier loss and climate change as such. The declared deaths of the glaciers are defined as the loss of the status as a glacier by scientists and are measurable. In this article, I am in search of a way to merge rituals *with* mountains and glaciers as collaborators, motivated by a rather personal, partly autobiographic, artistic, and poetic approach, which leads to a better understanding of caring for a mountain and a glacier while also bridging the gap between abstract measurable knowledge and a public so as to make the impact of anthropogenic climate collapse sensible. I am interested in how rituals can emerge in collaboration *with* the mountain or glacier by spending time with them, attending to them in a way not measured by human/general Western standards of seeing, but, rather, to sense them as glacial mountain beings, living beings, moving beings. Towards the end of this article, I will put emphasis on “rituals which operate at a subjective level of transformation” (Pitches 2020) based on my own personal (future) mountain hikes. This article operates then as a soft guideline for how to approach a mountain in order to let emerge (a) ritual(s) together with, in my case, the slowly breaking apart Hochvogel mountain, which I visited in the Summer of 2024. The action take(s) into account that mountain rituals “contribute to and are provoked by the characteristics of mountainscapes: remoteness, danger, prominence, sacredness, local devotion” (Pitches 2020).

Pre-views on mountains

When you ascend a mountain, your view on them changes constantly: from the moment of first sight in the distance, when they slowly step out of the horizon, unmerging; then nearing, until you arrive at their foot. Then, with every altitude difference, until you reach the summit, your view keeps on changing. You move your own body on, in, through, and with the body of the mountain. While standing still, you can zoom in on details or zoom out to view the surroundings, perhaps sharing the view with the mountain for a bit. The same applies when you are at the summit. Then, descent, back to their foot, and finally leaving the mountain behind until it merges back into the horizon from your perspective, or until you merge back into the horizon from the mountain’s perspective.

Since I started my Professional Doctorate² on working with dying mountains and dead glaciers in relation to anthropogenic climate change in May 2023, my views on mountains and glaciers have changed constantly. But it has also changed, and added to my views on, life, death, (ecological) grief, mourning, end-of-life care, and what mountains and glaciers could mean in relation to them. In addition, ideas of relationality, co-existence, interdependency, ritual, speculative design, the so-

called Anthropocene, and anthropogenic climate change³ appear differently at this point, at various distances. It feels like hiking towards and through mountainous and glacial bodies, zooming in and out. In this text I will use this idea of hiking as a format and a method for writing with, (literally) on, in, and through mountainous and glacial bodies.

My research started from a fascination and admiration for mountains and glaciers, and a curiosity of what “death” and “dying” could mean in relation to them. I quickly recognized that my perspective and thinking in relation of the two terms has been quite Western and even taken for granted in terms of “they are dying, thus disappearing,” “dead, thus gone.” But who declares a glacier or a mountain dying or dead? Is it losing a status of being a mountain that is defined by a certain height?

Hochvogel



View of the gap, from the gap, at the top of the Hochvogel Mountain, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2019.

In the summer of 2019, I visited the dying Hochvogel mountain for a field trip. This mountain is breaking apart due to its type of rock combined with an increasing amount of heavy rain events caused by anthropogenic climate change. A growing crack is splitting it in half at the border between Austria and Germany. The peak was and is still held together by wires and monitored by several measuring devices. The scene resembled a palliative care setting. This perception might have been inspired by a documentary on this mountain on German TV in 2018. One person working on and around the Hochvogel described her work as “end of life care for the mountain.” This was the starting point for my trip.



Trying to catch the heartbeat of a dying mountain, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2019.

Now I know that the devices belong to the Technische Universität München, Lehrstuhl für Hangbewegungen (TUM School of Engineering and Design, chair of hillside movement) and are measuring the mountain's movement. The increasing crack moves at this point 1mm per week, according to geologist and leading professor Michael Krautblatter. Measurements include seismic measurements, UAV-surveys, dGNSS, Ultracam, Sentinel automatic geotechnical, geodesy, and photogrammetry and are now part of

a three year test project called AlpSenseRely, a three-year reliability and potential study in 4 Alpine regions (Bavaria, Tyrol, Salzburg and South Tyrol) on highly available remote sensing-based early warning systems for natural hazards in Alpine areas that are particularly sensitive to climate change. AlpSense makes an important contribution to risk reduction and, due to its preventive nature, to reducing the costs of climate-related natural hazards. (Lehrstuhl für Hangbewegungen, n.d.)

The purpose is clear: safety for the people in the community of Hinterhornbach, on the Austrian side of the border, to ensure they can be evacuated in time. Data-driven control about the mountain foresees its moment of breakage. The dying mountain is a case study. This all sounds very clinical and distant; and, of course, this is scientific knowledge, analysis, calculation. But is the “most iconic” mountain in this region not also more than this? The Hochvogel appears to be seen as merely inanimate matter. There is a sort of maintenance of the mountains, being held together by wires to slow down the landslide, from a scientific point of view.⁴ What about the mountain itself? The vegetation? Animals?



Warning sign at the Hochvogel Mountain, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2019

Care can be seen as an expression of reverence, gratitude and “love” of the mountain. These ideas derive from Indigenous ways of life and thinking that I encountered through a conversation between performance artist Amanda Piña and ethnologist Alessandro Questa about the Chignamazatl,

located in the Northern Highlands of Puebla, Mexico. The Chignamazatl Mountain has been revered and embodied by Masewal populations, Nahuatl speaking, for 4.000 years. [...] We are there benefiting from the rain, from the earth, of animals and plants, but we are not the lords and masters nor the divine heirs of any place. We are simply the ones who benefit a little from it all, as long as we keep offering

and giving them maintenance, thanking them, asking them, and making visible all these forms of interdependence. So it's a model of humanity and environmental relationship model. That takes thousands of years of success that is not gratuitous. And we have to learn from it. (Piña and Questa 2021)

The Masewal populations live in and with the mountains in close relation on a daily basis. The Hochvogel by contrast is rather isolated. The closest community is Hinterhornbach with around 87 inhabitants, none who live on the mountain but close to it. They are apparently far enough away to not suffer from landslides directly, although depending on certain weather circumstances, the rocks might actually reach the village, according to Hochblatter.

On the German side, there is the mountain shelter Prinz-Luitpold-Haus (1846 m altitude 2,8 km away from the Hochvogel with 2592m altitude): a hut and a hub, where mountaineers and hikers can rent a bed in a shared group room and get food. The ice-cold water comes directly from the inflow of the lake behind the hut. Usually, people stay for a night to continue a bigger tour through the Allgäu that can take several days. The hut operates as a hub for short time stays. Most of the people I spoke to there when I arrived in the evening planned their visits to the Hochvogel very early the next morning, as did I. Their relations with the Hochvogel were of course different from somebody living with the mountain daily. But nobody described the mountain merely as inanimate "material," rather as a friend or companion. A sportive couple who almost ran to the top described a feeling of security when they arrived. This feeling came through a combination of the view towards the mountain's upper shape from below: shoulders and arms opening for a gentle beckoning or an invitation for a hug. Its top appearing as if it is bowing for a greeting, welcoming, and when arriving at the top itself, the mountain shows you a 360-degree panorama view of surrounding mountains and valleys. A group of young people in their mid-twenties enthusiastically held a picnic close to the crack, each pouring a bit of the white wine they brought up there, to greet the mountain. Apparently, they come here often, to visit and say "hello", as they said, and they mentioned small changes like traces in the ice, shrinking of the ice, newly arranged stone-piles on their way up. One person I met said he wanted to "meet the mountain in real life, as it breaks apart and he had seen it on photos only" (author's fieldnotes). The general visitors are there temporarily, but they are devoted to the mountain even when the mountain itself is remote and quite dangerous due to its condition. The temporality and devotion of the visitor, and the remoteness and danger of the mountain, are aspects to take into account for the emerging mountain ritual at the Hochvogel.

When I came back from my Hochvogel visit, I met a friend, Icelandic artist Styrmir Örn Guðmundsson who knew about my trip. He told me in Iceland they just held a funeral for their deceased glacier Ok, which I might find interesting, and I sure did. News about this funeral had spread across the globe. What I mostly came across was the "before-after" slider, "an easy (online) tool to compare two frames" called juxtaposeJS by Knight Lab, a community of designers, developers, students and educators of the Northwestern University in Illinois, US (Knight Lab n.d.; Duner 2014). The slider works as follows: Two images are layered on top of each other. A vertical bar with arrowpoints directing left and right is placed on top. With your cursor you can drag this

bar left and right and it reveals the image atop/below. In the case of Ok-glacier, one image was a satellite image of the glacier taken in 1986 and the other one in 2019. By moving the cursor and thus the bar left and right, you could see the glacier's shrinking in this period. In relation to (a Western view of) death's representation, this movement from right to left reminded me of the movement of death as the grim reaper, swinging its scythe, mowing down the living, with the difference that the juxtaposed movement could be done back and forth on the same image/position, a loop. Although I had never been to Iceland, I felt sorry for the glacier. A similar feeling to when I visited the Hochvogel mountain. I decided to make a memorial shirt for the glacier including the idea of the juxtapose tool. I found this medium suitable, as memorial shirts "have the ability to act as conversation pieces, which is one of the essential functions of the memorial T-Shirt—to allow death to enter the conversation" (Cann 2014). In addition, this shirt lets death enter the conversation on climate collapse. The conversation piece is a medium typical for speculative design, which "anticipates a reality, and uses that as a critical device" (van der Velden 2010). In addition, and contrary to the common idea of the designer as problem solver providing short-term solutions, speculative designers "imagine and visualize future scenarios that do not produce new products [...], but act as discussion pieces to help long-term strategic decision-making" (Pater 2021).



Okjökull Memorial Shirt, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2019

The shirts are self-initiated and without any funding, but I got the chance to exhibit them at Museum de Fundatie in Zwolle during the group exhibition “Van Wie is de Wereld?” (Whose is the World?) in 2021. Instead of having the shirts as conversation pieces, hanging on the wall, we agreed that they would be worn by the museum staff who wanted to, in order to start a discussion with the audience. The staff had been given some information, but mainly it was about their personal relation to the topic. In the end there was a fruitful exchange on climate collapse, death, and disappearing glaciers, as I was told after the exhibition ended.



Ok<|>jökull Memorial Shirt worn by two staff members at Museum de Fundatie Zwolle, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2019.

I figured out the feeling I had when visiting the Hochvogel mountain and hearing about the glacier, and apparently others had this feeling as well, which is coined as ecological grief, and glacier funerals are one way to cope with it.

Ecological grief

Ecological grief is an emotional response to the devastating impact of human-caused climate change, “including the loss of species, ecosystems, and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change” (Cunsolo and Ellis 2018). Grief here is associated with physical, ecological loss (species, landscapes), with the loss of environmental knowledge (farmers’ local seasonal knowledge), or with anticipated future losses (future culture, livelihood, way of life) (Ibid.). Generally, grief and loss is associated with human losses, while more-than-human “losses are traditionally seen as outside the realm of the grievable” (Craps 2020). Instead, the circle of the grievable should be expanded and include more-than-human beings in order to “disrupt the dominance of human bodies as the only mournable subjects” (Cunsolo and Landman 2017). While Judith Butler wrote that some lives are more “grievable” than others, ‘grievability’ remains predominantly a privilege for humans. One reason might be that Western cultures are mainly “treating the planet and nonhuman beings as inanimate matter” (Craps 2023). As Lisa Sideris observes, there is “a kind of defensive humanist posture that privileges human civilization and seeks to insulate it, to fortify it, against the shocks of climate change and related disasters. Wittingly or not, this defensive stance implicitly renders Earth and nonhuman beings as something less than animate and living, and in doing so, disavows nonhuman nature as truly mournable” (Sideris 2020). It is about ways of care. We mourn what we care about: other humans, pets, flora, fauna and mountains and glaciers. An example is given in an interview between artist Amanda Piña and feminist glaciologist M. Jackson:

One person I worked with [...] would drive hours and hours twice a year to visit their glacier, update the glacier, how is he doing? Update the glacier about what was happening in their lives. Found the sense of livingness, mentality that ice could have a relationship with you and vice versa. Brought a sense of care, when we know each other, we care for one another. When we make friends, when we marry [...] we extend our circle of care. (Piña and Jackson 2021)

Having a relation with means to care.

Glacier Funerals

Glacier funerals provide one way to counter views of mountains as nonliving and even encourage action. “Glacier funerals expose and counter this striking omission, calling on us to go beyond approaches to mourning that privilege human bodies. They dramatically scale up the magnitude of the kinds of losses to be mourned, both spatially and temporally” (Craps 2023). The phenomenon became increasingly global since August 2019 when **Iceland’s funeral** for OK(jökull) took place. This was followed by a funeral march in Switzerland for the deceased **Piezol glacier** (2019), and then another in the Pyrenees for the **glacier d’Arriel**, and the **Ayoloco glacier** in Mexico, and on and on.

On Sunday, 18 August 2019, Iceland held an official memorial ceremony for their glacier called Ok, formerly known as Okjökull, which means Ok-glacier in Icelandic. Ok had been declared dead in 2014, as according to glaciologist Oddur Sigurðsson: “we made the decision that this was no longer a living glacier, it was only dead ice, it was not moving.”⁵ During the ceremony a plaque was revealed, saying

A letter to the future—Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it.

The plaque also exposes the record level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere measured in May 2019: 415ppm CO₂. Scientists call Ok the first glacier that died because of climate change.



Image taken from the official website of the Not OK movie. The documentary is made by anthropologists of Rice University, Cymene Howe and Dominic Boyer, and premiered in 2018. <https://vimeo.com/269936225>

While in the dominant Western view, grief and mourning are still mainly related to human losses (Cunsolo and Landman 2017), “the funeral for Okjökull undid this separation between entities that can and cannot be mourned, which appears to be taken for granted by famous theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Judith Butler” (Craps 2023). Freud’s theory of mourning “propounds an anthropocentric mode of responding to loss” that “constrains the emergence of environmental mourning based in connectivity and interdependence” (Ryan 2017). Butler’s work *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* question how some lives are “grievable” while others are not, but it does so exclusively for humans and thus “fails to transcend human parochialism” (Craps 2023). Glacier funerals are one way to overcome this. But how? In the case of Ok, anthropomorphism is the key. In the movie *Not OK*, the mountain got the voice of former mayor of Reykjavík and now comedian, Jón Gnarr, speaking English and being humorous. The mountain Ok was given human features. This in combination with comic elements made it powerful to mediate through “10.000 news

outlets worldwide" (Boyer and Howes 2018). People commonly relate more with humans than mountain beings or glacial bodies and that is why humanizing works, or as anthropologist and death scholar Sigurjón B. Hafsteinsson puts it "The possibility of mourning Ok involves [...] the personification, the humanisation of the glacier" (Hafsteinsson and Árnason 2020). In terms of speaking to a large global audience, this works very well. But it remains human-centered, as well as the idea of the funeral, a ritual done for and by humans.

This is even mentioned in a humorous note by the glacier himself in the trailer: "... you know, with humans, even, when they're talking about glaciers, it's still all about them." In an interview in the documentary, Cymene Howe asks geologist and glacial expert at the Icelandic Meteorological Office, Oddur Sigurðsson, "How do you think Ok mountain feels about all this?" and he replies, "Hehe, it couldn't care less." Glaciers and mountains change all the time. At another moment in the movie, Howe asks Sigurður Árni Þórðarson, pastor of the Hallgríms Church in Reykjavík, if he was "to create a ritual or memorial for a glacier that has passed, that we might say is dead, what sort of memorial would you imagine, or is that something that we would even want to do, is that even appropriate?" He replies:

Ja, I think it is very important that we start to attempt to understand that everything is connected, and life is interconnected. It is also the question who attends a ritual like this? Is it just for the sky, for God? Or is it for the ground, or nature, or is it for the memory of the glacier? I think it's very important that it should be also for humans who think the loss of a glacier is a real loss and people who kind of have deep understanding and awareness interconnectedness of life, really feel the necessity of expressing the grief. And it is very important to remember that funerals and rituals of grief are not for the dead ones specifically, they are for the living.

Ok mountain also replies: "Wait a minute, I just want to point out, because everybody keeps talking about death and funerals, that I'm still here. I guess because you humans don't live very long, you are always worrying about death and making a big deal out of it. Just saying." A mountain's timescale is larger than the human one. Slowness of mountains lets people, just like myself for a long time, describe them incorrectly as "rigid, still, immobile" (Denny 2022), while they are "shuddering, shaking and swinging" (Moore 2022). Jeff Moore, associate professor of geology and geophysics at the University of Utah, did research on the movement of the Matterhorn in Switzerland and "scaled the mountain's timeline down to a human timescale" by speeding up. Movements became visible: the Matterhorn is constantly moving. Describing the mountain as being alive and vibrant, their findings "also provide important research implications for tracking and monitoring rockfalls and landslides during earthquakes." Rituals must take into account the fact that mountains constantly move, that they live on different timescale, and that we arrive at them at a specific moment in order to mourn.⁶



Miniature sound experiment of two stones hitting each other original speed, stëfan schäfer 2024

Performance Philosophy



<https://soundcloud.com/performancephilosophy/schaefer-sound-experiment-original-speed>



Miniature sound experiment of two stones hitting each other 80 times slower, stëfan schäfer 2024

Performance Philosophy



<https://soundcloud.com/performancephilosophy/schaefer-sound-experiment-80-times-slower>

As described by place name specialist of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, Halgrímur J. in the Ok documentary, Ok mountain has the shape of an “O” with a “C” in its center, which is the old manner of writing its name: “OC.” OK wrote its own name. Ámundason also mentions it resembles the copyright logo. In the documentary, Ok adds, “This shows you once again what mountains are capable of.” They have something to say, and any ritual must take this into account as well, whatever it might want to tell.



*Detail of a NASA satellite image of Ok, August 1, 2019.
https://eoimages.gsfc.nasa.gov/images/imagerecords/145000/145439/okjokull_oli_2019213_lrg.jpg*



Copyright symbol via Vecteezy.com

Descent

Being a designer I am only too familiar with what a deadline is: a fixed moment between at least two (human) parties that is agreed on to deliver something. For the fixation it is relevant that all parties are on the same timescale.

What could the mountain want to tell us? The Hochvogel's crack resembles a black line that grows continuously. This line will transform into a gap, into a void. By measurements and speculations scientists try to predict the moment that will happen, but it remains impossible. This deadline is not fixed. Maybe the Hochvogel also wants to tell us in its own language to slow down, with its crack being a "designed void rather than an absence, an invisible correlative to the visible sounded letter" (Hill 2023). Ok mentions that mountains even write a lot of poetry, then it was writing poetry *about* glaciers and mountains, but what if the mountain writes itself? From a typographical view, it can be seen as "a 'non-visible symbol', denoting a period of silence or 'non-sound', just as a letter denotes a sound. This becomes particularly significant for the poet or playwright, as these spaces can be multiplied [...] to typographically represent controlled measures of silence" (Ibid). This silence can mean different things. It could indeed mean that the Hochvogel is in its end-of-life, breaking apart, transforming into a different shape. But it could also be seen as an invitation to mourn. When in 2023 the Fluchthorn broke apart, it left behind piles of rocks that had been a solid summit before. The Fluchthorn (Escapehorn) got its name because chamois were hiding there from hunters. This result of a land- or rockslide resembles the ritual of cairn building. "Cairn making is a performative physical process, individual stone placed on individual stone, its overall shape a negotiation between the interaction of people, animals, slope processes, weather and weathering" (Maddrell 2009). The rockslide could be seen as an act of mourning, a ritual by a mountain, as "the deaths of prominent climbers are also marked by cairns" (Pitches 2020) and thus have a "commemorative function" (Ibid). But what about when the cairn is not built by a human but by the mountain itself? What deaths would then be mourned? And to or with whom? Cairns "communicate in a timeless language. Their layered meanings may not be transparent to people who aren't local, but they still tell the visitor, you are here, you are not alone" (Williams 2012). And a rockslide might just be a way of one mountain to tell other mountains, its surrounding fauna and flora, humans they are not along with their mourning and grief.

Next Ascent

In *Performing Mountains*, Jonathan Pitches states that mountain rituals "contribute to and are provoked by the characteristics of mountainscapes: remoteness, danger, prominence, sacredness, local devotion" (2020). In the case of the Hochvogel mountain, remoteness and danger are present as it is far from human communities and its condition of slowly breaking apart. Its prominence becomes clear already from far away due to its height and shape. Sacredness and local devotion are less present, as I found out when emailing municipalities, Alpine societies, and tourist centers closest to the mountain. There is apparently no ownership of the Hochvogel, neither from the Austrian, nor the German side. There is no ritual considered when the mountain breaks apart.⁷

What is more present is visitors ascending the mountain in temporary, short visits, some only once, others repeatedly. The largest part of this visiting community will never see each other, especially not at the top of the mountain. It is a rather a scattered community, with everybody having their own reason to visit the mountain. Maybe this requests also a more subjective approach for a ritual with the Hochvogel, more individual in the beginning but emerging overlaps after time when being shared and exchanged. 'Mountainness,' or what makes a mountain a mountain, is "in the eye of the beholder" (Pitches 2020) and it might thus differ from the eye of people living close to a mountain as opposed to the eye of a temporary visitor. But both then might also define their grief, and what to mourn, differently in a way that is appropriate to the one mourning. In addition, a mountain's death then might as well be in the eye of the beholder. What somebody defines as a dying or dead mountain might be just as diverse. This links to what is called lyrical design "What is it you really want to have said? What is it that you would like to tell, express, maybe even to an audience of one?" (van der Velden 2020). Maybe even to an audience of one being a mountain or a glacier?

What is it that makes your heart beat faster? Lyrical design seizes the day like it's its last. Lyrical design forgets about looking good or cool. [...] it does not care about winning debate. [...] It has in common with care that 'believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things'. No rationalized, strategic, or aestheticized design proposition can make one forget lyrical design's disarming, heartbreakingly simple tunes; sincerity is what remains truly unforgettable. (Ibid.)



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1036385284>



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1036385417>



Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1036385490>

For my next visit to the Hochvogel in July 2024 I spent my time at Prinz Luitpold Haus, the closest Alpine hut to the Hochvogel.. It takes approximately 2,5 – 3,5 hours from the hut to the top, which gives me the opportunity to visit the summit often in a short period. There are many ways to approach a mountain repeatedly and be prepared for emerging rituals *with* a mountain, “by repetition of a few simple acts [...] performing actions that [...] finally become rituals” (Pitches 2020).

One way is to investigate spontaneity in relation to ritual, as it happened during the Ok funeral: “Somebody just started singing a song, and others joined. Spontaneity is an aspect of ritual that people don’t always talk about. People find what is important about the moment and they perform it” (from an online conversation with Dominic Boyer in September 2023). Spontaneity lets work emerge in the very moment.

Levels of transformation

In the chapter “Eine Nacht auf dem Hochvogel” by mountaineer Hermann von Barth from his book *Aus den nördlichen Kalkalpen*, he beautifully describes his ascent to the Hochvogel mountain: a poetic orchestra by the wind through and with the mountain. He is listening to the collaboration of wind and mountain. He also describes staying in a crack to avoid the harshness of the cold wind, a feeling of security. The orchestra and the feeling of security occurred spontaneously. Written down, it describes an appreciation for the mountain, as will the time that I aim to spend there plus the record of the event in several forms: visual, audio, image, text, ritual. Partly, my ritual can be described as an adapted re-enactment of van Barn’s visit in various aspect.

The visit included a future memorial hand poke tattoo. The tattoo was done in in the Hochvogel’s crack. The motive is not a complex one but rather symbolic: the shape of this crack and summit at the moment I was there. Its crack is held together by wires and measurement devices to slow down its collapse. The tattoo has been done by myself in the depth of the mountain and operates as a (future) memorial tattoo. Hand poke is a traditional way of tattooing before electric machines were invented. A repetitive poking with the needle in the body following a path, forming a line. The intervals between the single pokes are short. On a scale, the intervals expand to a yearly event by annually visiting the mountain and do the tattoo over again, in the crack that then will have increased and its form shifted, until the inevitable rockslide will happen. The tattoo is a permanent wearable that will probably slowly fade away, being refreshed in a slightly different line. It is a very intimate ritual between the mountain and me. Ultimately, it will start discussions about this relationship and in the bigger picture about caring for mountains and glaciers and their lives and deaths. The act of hand poke self-tattooing, piercing my skin with a needle and ink, leaves a trace on my body, on my left forefinger to be precise. I found traces of poking the mountain on my daily visits in the rocks and stones: left by hiking sticks with metal points, crushing rocks and stones. I decided to leave my hiking sticks at home after I observed that.



A rock at the Hochvogel mountain with traces of hiking stick poking, stëfA/V schäfer, 2024.



Hand poke tattoo Hochvogel, gap view. Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1036399178>



Hand poke tattoo Hochvogel, close-up view. Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1036399308>

I took this idea with me to Iceland, where I visited the dead glacier Ok. This memorial tattoo is placed on my left middle finger, next to the Hochvogel tattoo.



Hand poke tattoo Ok-glacier, overview. Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1036390678>



Hand poke tattoo Ok-glacier, close-up view. Watch: <https://vimeo.com/1036401248>



Hand poke memorial tattoos of the Hochvogel and Ok-glacier. From the perspective I set the tattoo, the highest point of Ok, its shape rather resembles a copyleft symbol (see clip above), which resonates more with me on a personal note and comes back in the tattoo. stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2024.

Discussion pieces have been a crucial part of my practice as a designer.



Every Day is Earth Day when — You're Dead, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2022.



Every Day is Earth Day when — You're Dead, Hochvogel version 1, stëfΔ/V Schafer, 2024.



Every Day is Earth Day when — You're Dead, Ok version, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2024.



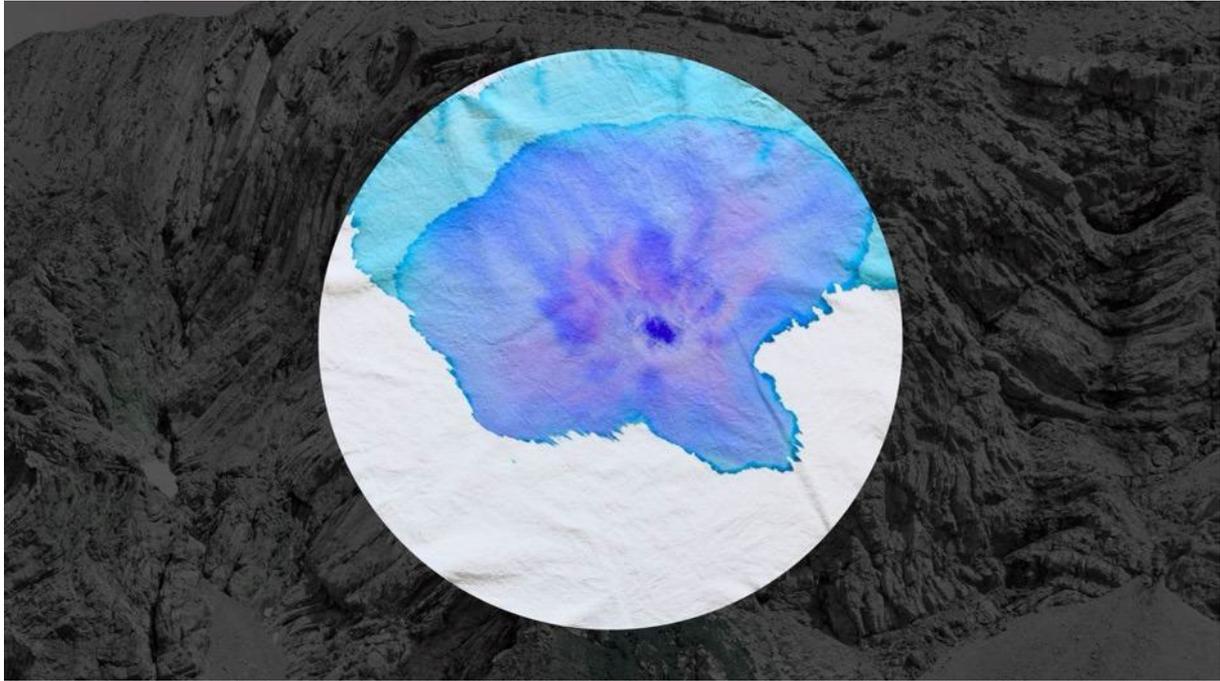
Beheaded Kronplatz mountain, MessnerMountainMuseum. Form and Counterform wearable, stëfΔn schäfer, 2024.



Beheaded Kronplatz mountain, MessnerMountainMuseum. Form and Counterform graphic, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2024.



Beheaded Kronplatz mountain, "dear MessnerMountainMuseum, what happened to the 4000 m³ of rock after beheading the mountain." Form and Counterform graphic and cairn miniature, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2024.

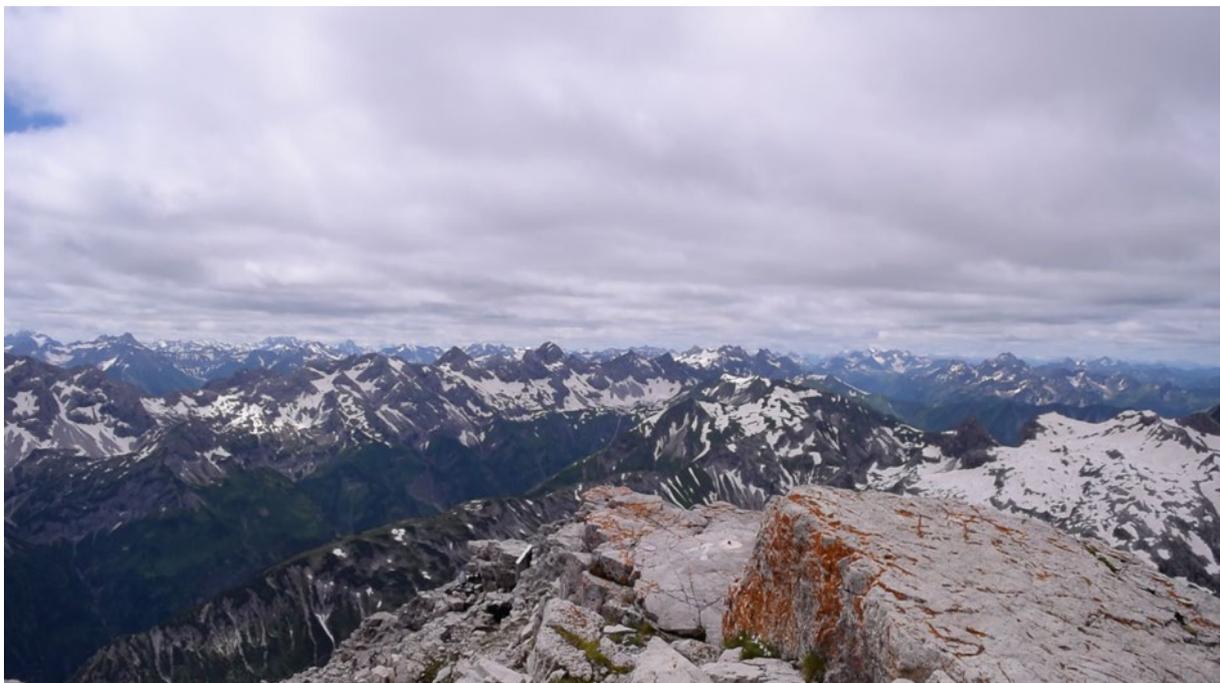


What if glaciers talk view back: Humboldt glacier, La Corona glacier I Venezuela (R.i.p.) 1, miniature glacial melting, stěfAN schäfer, 2024. Maybe the glacier died already when it was named after a German explorer, or when its original name got replaced by a Spanish one?

My latest visit included the design of discussion pieces with the mountain on location. This can be seen as an adaption of both, “contextually (as places for training to occur), or formally (as inspiring shapes, figures and metaphors)” (Pitches 2020). By making the pieces on location, dust, water and other particles will become part of the pieces. As wearables, the pieces provide a transformation to become the mountain for a certain time. This idea links to what Johannes Neurath: “to transform, one simply has to put on a skin, a fur, feathers leaves, clothing, masks that correspond to a specific species or ethnicity” (Neurath 2021). I am aware of the fact that Neurath describes a complex concept of multinaturalism based on traditional shamanist exercises with a long history of the Wixárika people. In my case, the wearing of something designed on location and together with the mountain makes me (or whoever else is wearing it) part of the mountain and vice versa. The image becomes participative, ritual, performative, alive and steps beyond a representation. In the case of the Hochvogel mountain, the increasing crack is an interesting one to investigate and become, or be part of. Therefore, my clothes will only be made of cotton, canvas, felt, and linen that transform by wearing them during the hike. At the same time the material is convenient for working with threat, environmentally beneficial paint, to draw on, folding it, layering, and more. These are, amongst others, parameters to work with spontaneity in a mountain surrounding.

Ghost Mountains

In the book *Allgäuer Bergnamen*, a collection of the history of mountain names in the Allgäu region where the Hochvogel resides, there are names that have a “t” behind them. In some of the cases it remains unclear which mountain is meant. There are historical documents that hint at a region or a small selection of which of the mountains is spoken about. But it remains unclear. They are there, but not in a physical shape. Also, the re-naming of the mountain can be seen as a transformation, maybe even a rite de passage, declared dead with the end of one name, brought to a new life after being renamed. Calling names of the deceased is an act of remembrance and mourning and can either be done singly or collectively. In both cases it is about showing respect and remembering and keeping the deceased among the living in a non-material form.

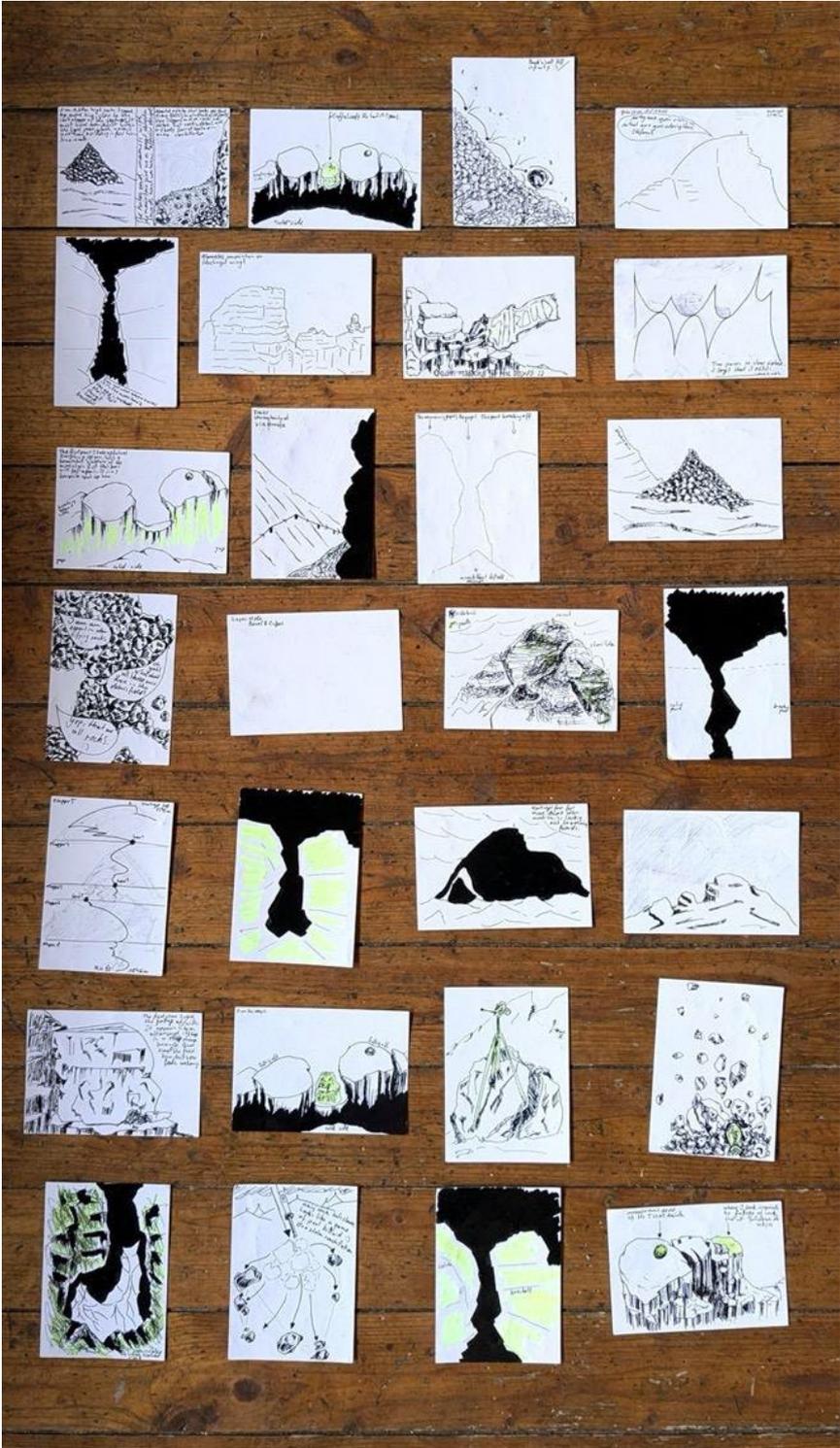


🎥 *Calling their names, one out of a series of five. stëfΔV schäfer, 2024. <https://vimeo.com/1036401207>*

Slowing down

Desolation and slowness are mountain characteristics that I translated into a mode of communication. For example, sharing personal experiences and research in written and visual form in opposition to real-life sharing of images and text on social media for a large, random audience. Creating images and texts for postcards while being on the mountain, and partly with the mountain (by frottage), to be sent to selected audiences, each consisting of one person or family. The postcard's front usually has a picture perfect view of, in this case, a mountain, mostly a single view or a small selection of different ones. The backside bears handwritten greetings, wishes, experiences or other personal notes, sent to family and friends. The act of writing, going to the

post office to get a stamp and sending it takes time and effort. In my case, selecting a card had been replaced by making the card on location with the mountain. Facing the end of a glacier or mountain, the postcard transforms into a card announcing their deaths. The postcard has an autobiographical aspect, as I used to write and send them every time when visiting the mountains. Also pen-pals relationships started there.



Set of 28 postcards designed at the Hochvogel mountain (front sides). Each of them has a text on the back that relates to the research of the addressees, stëfΔ/V schäfer, 2024.

The examples mentioned above are a selection of how to develop and perform rituals accompanied by participative images when ascending and spending time with a mountain, considering hiking as a performance already and related movements and objects being already part of it. Grounded partly in personal and autobiographical experiences, I share my personal relationship with the mountain as an ethnographic approach in addition to scientific definitions of a glacier's and mountain's life and (future) death, in order to exchange my experiences with others to generate a multifocal view on care and love for mountains and glaciers.

Notes

¹ The acronym D.E.A.D. started some years ago to help me position my own design research practice and then stood for Death. Environment. Anthropocene. Design. While now, I see it more interchangeable. This started with the term Anthropocene, which I find problematic, as it is not clear or fair who is meant by the "anthropos" in relation to climate collapse. For now, A. could also be "affective". Or: Dying. Environmental. Affective. Design. It is a transforming acronym.

² "PD stands for Professional Doctorate and it is the equivalent of the PhD for the Dutch Universities of the Applied Sciences. The difference is that a PhD programme at a university trains a professional researcher, while the PD programme at the Universities of Applied Sciences trains an investigative professional". <https://pd-arts-creative.nl/about-pd/>

³ From conversations with Chilean-Mexican artist Amanda Piña and her work on mountains and water, bodies, I learned that a lot of mountain mining and drilling is caused by capitalist interests and transnational corporations. According to Oxfam, the world's richest 1% pollute more than the poorest two thirds (Oxfam 2023). This changed my view on the concept of the Anthropocene; treating all human beings equally responsible for anthropogenic climate change is not suitable.

⁴ At least that is how it appears. Up to this point I got no reply from Mr. Krautblatter or the team. In interviews he and his team speak from a scientific view only. I am curious if there is another view of him or his team. In the documentary *Not OK (A little movie about a small glacier at the end of the world)* (Boyer and Howe 2018), geologist and glacial expert at the Icelandic Meteorological Office, Oddur Sigurðsson, who declared Ok-glacier dead in 2014, says, "it felt like a good friend has left us. And I did care about it. [...] It has some feeling. [...] It is sad, yes. But as glaciers as a scientist, I really cannot be sad. There has been enormous change of course through geological rimes in the earth. There was no Atlantic Ocean hundred million years ago, but we, mankind can affect these changes for some time".

⁵ Requirements for holding the title being a glacier are described by Sigurðsson as follows: being thick enough to collapse under their own weight. This requires a minimal thickness of 40 to 50 metres. Then it starts crawling and overtaking the earth underneath (Boyer and Howe 2018).

⁶ If one is mourning a certain moment within a long process of transformation, this moment might be seen as the "normal" condition. Each generation has their own "normals" and only the view on this certain "norm". A shift occurs with each generation and a new "norm" appears., This is coined by marine biologist Daniel Pauly (1995) as "Shifting Baseline Syndrome".

⁷ This I got from an email conversation with the German Alpine Society. "There is no ritual, but we could develop something and discuss it, on the top of the Hochvogel" (November 2023).

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Biography

stëfΔ/V schäfer is an Amsterdam-based designer and researcher investigating the power of death and commemorative ritual in relation to environmental devastation. All projects result in various media and are declared D.E.A.D. (Death. Environment. Anthropocene. Design). They have been internationally exhibited and are close collaborations with people and institutions of different fields: for instance anthropology, poetry, music, hacking, dance, theatre, music-theatre artists, end-of-life care, funeral industry, green funeral activism.

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