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On doodling and other modes of engagement in meltdown

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Abstract

This essay considers modes of engagement in contemporary times of ‘meltdown’. Written in 2022, prior to the recent escalation of Israel-Palestine-Lebanon conflict in the Middle East, it engages with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and varied threats of nuclear mobilisation in this context: from damage to Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia power station, to launches of nuclear attack. In doing so, the lethal competitive links between fossil fuel and nuclear economies is foregrounded, reminding us of Cold War times when it was nuclear annihilation, rather than climate change, that threatened an unliveable planet. In engaging with these threatening dynamics, I also work with historical and present experiences and definitions of genocide and ‘theatres of war’, drawing on research regarding one of the first Indigenous ‘uprisings’ in Namibia – then German South West Africa; a context that also experienced one of the first modern genocides. In doing so, I raise the spectre of how it remains exceptionally difficult for legitimacy to be granted to the disruptive voices, experiences and perspectives of those beyond, and mostly written out of, the formal written historical record. Ultimately, the essay focuses on the following and increasingly pertinent questions. What transformational forces may turn around war’s worlding to mutate the experience, witnessing and haunting of terror into healing? And what practices may help us find paths of coherence amidst experiences of meltdown?

Keywords: meltdown, nuclear power, climate change, genocide, Russia-Ukraine, Namibia

It is the sorcerer who can read the signs in this precious moment of a time out of time.
And in this case, the future is ominous.¹

1 MELTDOWN

There is nothing like war to focus the mind. Especially one in which a nuclear superpower threatens use of nuclear weapons.

¹ Michael Taussig, *Mastery of Non-mastery in the Age of Meltdown* (University of Chicago Press 2020) at 181.

Seemingly from nowhere, but of course not at all, the deadly anthropocenic choice between climate-forcing fossil fuel use and the promethean energy of nuclear power seems to be tilting towards the latter – at least if the stock price of uranium is anything to go by. April 2022 saw a brief ‘meltdown’ in prices for uranium stocks, following which uranium sold for a record high, with prices remaining buoyant until the end of the year.² Thus,

[i]t’s largely because of surging prices of fossil fuels amid the Russia-Ukraine war that several nations are rethinking their energy policies and bringing clean energy back to the discussion tables. That includes nuclear energy [*sic* – there is little that is ‘clean’ about nuclear power], which has, in fact, received a significant amount of attention lately.³

For decades climate justice activists have been mobilizing for exactly the kind of urgent unhooking from fossil fuels prompted by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

The context of this present energy regime shift, however, is definitely not one for celebration. As a proxy weapon of war, sanctions against Russian fossil fuel exports in retaliation for invasion of the independent nation of Ukraine are entwined with escalating rhetoric from Russia’s president threatening nuclear attack. ‘[O]ne Sarmat missile means minus one Great Britain’, a Russian state TV journalist close to President Vladimir Putin threatened, allegedly reporting on a newly tested generation of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles.⁴ This hostile utterance comes only weeks after Russian troops gained control of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in Ukraine ‘which experienced a catastrophic meltdown in 1986’.⁵ Radioactive

² See Uranium Energy Corp. prices at <<https://finance.yahoo.com/quote/UEC/history>> accessed 22 December 2022.

³ Neha Chamaria, ‘Why Uranium Stocks Melted Today’ (2022) *The Motley Fool* 21 April <<https://www.fool.com/investing/2022/04/21/why-uranium-stocks-melted-today/>> accessed 29 April 2022.

⁴ Evan Simko-Bednarski, ‘Russian State TV Threatens to Wipe Out “Boorish” UK with Ballistic Missile’ (2022) *New York Post* 27 April <<https://nypost.com/2022/04/27/russian-state-tv-threatens-to-wipe-out-uk-with-ballistic-missile/>> accessed 29 April 2022.

⁵ Matthew Sparkes, ‘Risk of Nuclear Disaster is Minimal as Russian Forces Reach Chernobyl’ (2022) *New Scientist* 24 February <<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2309599-risk-of-nuclear-disaster-is-minimal-as-russian-forces-reach-chernobyl/>> accessed 29 April 2022.

materials from the decommissioned plant are known to have been looted.⁶ A second Ukrainian nuclear power complex, Europe's largest nuclear plant at Zaporizhzhia, has since also been attacked. In April 2022 the level of safety there was described by the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) director-general as 'like a "red light blinking"'.⁷ In December 2022, the plant remained described as possibly 'the most dangerous place on earth'.⁸

'Struggles over nuclearity permeate our radioactive world', writes historian Gabrielle Hecht,⁹ clarifying the historicized exceptionalism attached to nuclear things. In her monograph *Being Nuclear*, Hecht disentangles the market devices transforming uranium into a banal commodity for energy production, re-establishing uranium's source in hazardous mines – usually in hidden, impoverished places – and, of course, its causal connection with making nuclear bombs. The 'yellowcake' of mined uranium goes through an enrichment process separating out the more radioactive uranium-235 fuel, which when burnt in a nuclear power station leaves a radioactive cocktail of waste materials. One of these – plutonium – is used in the making of nuclear bombs. Through Second World War and Cold War arms races, the creation and production of plutonium for this very reason drove the current legacy of nuclear power.¹⁰

The contemporary moment appears unprecedented in its stark clarification of the lethal competitive links between fossil fuel and nuclear economies. Almost overnight, the 'Anthropocene' has become newly energized. Anthropocenic productivities are not only

⁶ Richard Stone, 'Dirty Bomb Ingredients Go Missing from Chernobyl Monitoring Lab' (2022) *Science* 25 March <<https://www.science.org/content/article/dirty-bomb-ingredients-go-missing-chnobyl-monitoring-lab>> accessed 29 April 2022.

⁷ Al Jazeera, 'Atomic Agency: Danger Signs at "Occupied" Nuclear Site in Ukraine' (2022) *Al Jazeera* 27 April <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/27/un-nuke-chief-wants-ukraine-zaporizhzhia-plant>> accessed 29 April 2022.

⁸ Julian Borger, 'Safety of Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Plant Hangs in the Balance' (2022) *The Guardian* 12 December <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/12/safety-of-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-hangs-in-the-balance>> accessed 22 December 2022.

⁹ Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2012).

¹⁰ Sian Sullivan, 'After the Green Rush? Biodiversity Offsets, Uranium Power and the "Calculus of Casualties" in Greening Growth' (2013) 6(1) *Human Geography* 80–101.

‘organized around internally differentiated priorities of fossil extraction, productivism and consumption abundance’ that become ‘major geological forces by dint of their dominant institutionalizations and existential priorities’ – as Connolly writes.¹¹ The spectre of fossil-fuelled climate change caused by unequal burning of coal, oil and gas by members of a single global species is now firmly joined with remembered fears of future nuclear meltdown.

Anthropologist-sorcerer Michael Taussig writes that ‘[w]ith meltdown the language of nature swamps the nature of language’,¹² making it increasingly hard to even gesture towards the conceptual divides that animated the Enlightenment (as documented and deconstructed by many brilliant ecofeminist scholars¹³). Nature can no longer be conceived as mute when the natures of fossil-fuelled climate change and/or nuclear meltdown loudly dominate all discourse. Or, as Jane Bennett writes,

[in] a time when *nonhumans* assert their presence to the point where we can no longer ignore their manifold, conflicting and intersecting agencies [...] an old, seductive model of what human action *is* no longer really works for us, even as a heuristic.¹⁴

As a child of the 1970s, I feel very familiar with a sense of the imminence (and immanence) of meltdown. Coming into awareness of the world then, it was nuclear annihilation, rather than climate change, that threatened an unliveable planet. I remember clearly how Cold War rhetoric was overcast with the imminence of a nuclear war of Mutually Assured Destruction that could be minutes away, and that madly justified the making of more nuclear weapons. ‘What will you do with your last four minutes?’ was a frequent refrain, referencing the British government’s four-minute warning system during the Cold War, its name describing the time it would supposedly take for a Soviet nuclear missile to impact the UK.¹⁵

Our world was swamped with and shaped by this language of nuclear meltdown. As children we knew that in a nuclear explosion everything just melts. We knew that in the aftermath of

¹¹ William E Connolly, ‘The Anthropocene as abstract machine’, this special issue.

¹² Taussig (n 1) at 174.

¹³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (Harper & Row 1980); Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Routledge 1993).

¹⁴ Jane Bennett, ‘Acting amidst: some concepts and practices’, this special issue.

¹⁵ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four-minute_warning> accessed 2 May 2022.

nuclear fall-out, remaining life would deteriorate and mutate: organs and their bodies imploding through the invisible invasion of terrifying radioactivity.

My mind has been morbidly turning back to these times, in some shock that such fears are once again at reality's fore in the present and for the future, rather than being a memory of a potential future from times past. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, writes philosopher Slavoj Žižek, via Hegel and Marx, describing the tendency of historical events towards a crudely exaggerated repetition that takes on the guise of deadly caricature.¹⁶ It does indeed seem a cruel and ludicrous joke to observe the different 'vibrant matters'¹⁷ of our potential destruction seemingly vie for precedence in this battle between anthropogenically sourced and commodified geological forces of human and planetary demise.

2 GENOCIDE AND THE 'THEATRE OF WAR'

I was invited to contribute to this volume in June 2021, when the invasion of Ukraine, directed by Russian President Vladimir Putin from February 2022, was apparently not on the horizon. I write 'apparently' here, because as I learn more about the signs, tensions and histories prefiguring this particular moment of war crimes and genocidal intent it becomes clearer how the present echoes past acts of invasion of this territory.¹⁸ Ukrainian philosopher Volodymyr Yermolenko asserts via Twitter/X – today's commodified social media technology for circulating and spectacularizing images of this war – that 'this is *repeated* genocide [...] on Ukrainian lands': '[a] repeating evil' arising zombie-like through history in regimes claiming to be guided by widely opposing organizational values.¹⁹

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (Verso 2009).

¹⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press 2010).

¹⁸ See, for example, Timofey Sergeytsev, 'What Should Russia Do with Ukraine?', M. Kravchenko trans. (2022) <https://medium.com/@kravchenko_mm/what-should-russia-do-with-ukraine-translation-of-a-propaganda-article-by-a-russian-journalist-a3e92e3cb64> accessed 2 May 2022; Timothy Snyder, 'Russia's Genocide Handbook: The Evidence of Atrocity and of Intent Mounts' (2022) <<https://snyder.substack.com/p/russias-genocide-handbook>> accessed 2 May 2022.

¹⁹ Volodymyr Yermolenko, 27 April 2022 <https://twitter.com/yermolenko_v/status/1519408066327945219> accessed 28 April 2022.

It is of course important not to invoke the term ‘genocide’ lightly. I have spent my academic life working in connection with a context widely understood to have experienced one of the first modern genocides:²⁰ namely Namibia, or what at the time of these events was named and claimed as Deutsch Südwestafrika. Here, forensic scrutiny of historical military orders and texts for their adherence to contemporary United Nations definitions of the crime of ‘genocide’ – itself positioned alongside, and differentiated from, ‘crimes against humanity’, ‘war crimes’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’²¹ – drives a heated discourse of recognition and reparation in international law. A rapidly expanding literature in Namibian history and historiography debates details of colonial military strategy and intent, iteratively revising prior interpretations.²² An additional proliferation of texts draws attention to German colonial state-making as a precursor to the affirmed genocidal intent of the mid-twentieth century Nazi state.²³ Hyperbolically so, according to some German historians scrutinizing military records to find when specific intentions behind orders and strategy in the Deutsch Südwestafrika military campaign became ‘increasingly deadly’; the extent to which they were ‘genocidal’ in intent; and the different agencies of Indigenous leaders and fighters engaging with Imperial territorial expansion and control over land.²⁴

These mountains of texts and important minutiae, however, can smother the differently voiced experiences of those diverse Indigenous actors and their descendants who variously

²⁰ See <<https://the-natural-capital-myth.net/namibia-research/>>.

²¹ See <<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>>.

²² Horst Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting* (Zed 1980); Brigitte Lau, ‘Uncertain Uncertainties: The Herero-German War of 1904’ in Annemarie Heywood (ed), *Brigitte Lau History and Historiography: 4 Essays in Reprint* (Discourse/MSORP, 1995[1989]); Helmut Bley, *Namibia Under German Rule* (Lit Verlag 1998); Wolfram Hartmann (ed), *Nuanced Considerations: Recent Voices in Namibian-German Colonial History* (Orumbonde Press 2019).

²³ David Olusoga and Casper W Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (Faber and Faber 2010); Elizabeth R Baer, *The Genocidal Gaze: From German South West Africa to the Third Reich* (University of Namibia Press 2018).

²⁴ For example, Matthias Häussler, ‘From Destruction to Extermination: Genocidal Escalation in Germany’s War against OvaHerero, 1904’ in W Hartmann (ed), *Nuanced Considerations: Recent Voices in Namibian-German Colonial History* (Orumbonde Press 2019); Isabel V Hull, ‘The Military Campaign in German South West Africa, 1904–1907 and the Genocide of the OvaHerero and Nama’, in W Hartmann (ed), *Nuanced Considerations: Recent Voices in Namibian-German Colonial History* (Orumbonde Press 2019).

engaged with and resisted the imperial strategies of the Kaiser's representatives, and other aspirational Europeans in the territory. It remains exceptionally difficult for legitimacy to be granted to the disruptive voices, experiences and perspectives of those beyond, and mostly written out of, the formal written historical archive.²⁵ Repeating the theme of repetition opened earlier, patterns of silencing are also habitual. They become habituated too, effecting a double-silencing of victims for whom directly experienced, as well as inter-generational, trauma may be associated with complex layers of self-suppression, continuing to shape lives and possibilities in ways that escape expression.²⁶

Writing from what might pretentiously be called a poststructuralist anthropological perspective, and acknowledging Michael Taussig whose works I sometimes turn to for inspiration, succour and humour in times like these, it seems relevant to ask how we can bear witness to horrifying past and present events that exceed everyday understanding, without becoming voyeurs or trivializing these experiences. Via spectacle, now 'social media-ised', images of violence and accompanying thoughts 'innervate the body of the viewer'²⁷, becoming activated parts of multiple archived images of similar scenes: for example, a chain of imaged urban ruins from Dresden to Hiroshima to Aleppo, and now to Mariupol and Gaza – that once seen cannot be unseen.

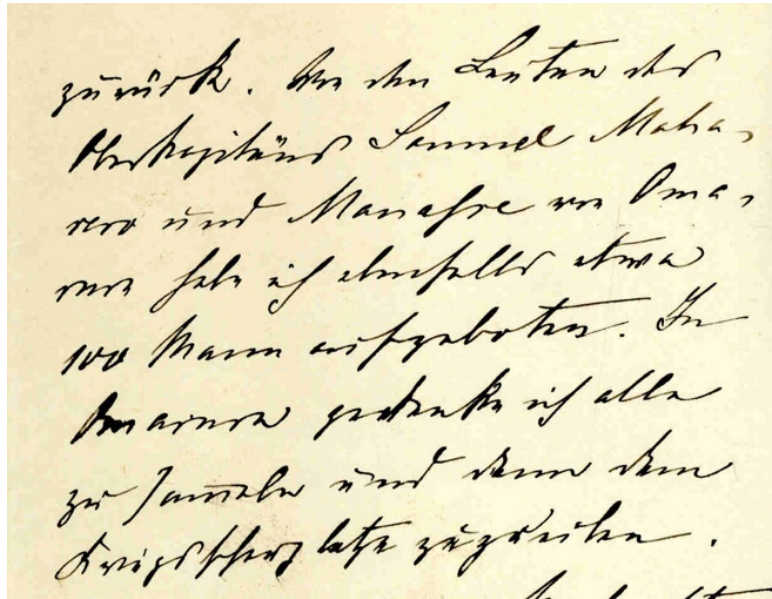
I am personally haunted by a connected thread of images from this specific moment. Eviscerated and burnt homes from which the material stuff and accumulated memories of ordinary lives is turned into scattered, incoherent debris. Battered and bombed landscapes in which 'the environment' becomes simply a 'theatrical space' for the performance of war; reminding me of Fredrich Von Lindequist in Südwestafrika, Governor of the colony from 1905, reporting Hauptmann (Captain) Von Estorff's description from early 1898 of the mustering and moving of men 'towards the *theatre of war*':

²⁵ Tsukhoe M |Garoes, 'A Forgotten Case of the #Nūkhoen / Damara People Added to Colonial German Genocidal Crimes in Namibia: We Cannot Fight the Lightning During the Rain' (2021) Future Pasts Working Paper Series 11 <<https://www.futurepasts.net/fpwp11-garoes-2021>>

²⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, New York 2012); on how trauma silences, also see Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (Verso 2010).

²⁷ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (University of Chicago Press 1987) at 175.

[f]rom the people of the chief captain Samuel Maharero and Manesse of Omaruru, I have mustered about 100 men as quickly as possible. In Omaruru I intend to gather them all and then ride towards the theatre of war.²⁸



zu mir. Am 5ten Januar ist
Hauptmann Samuel Maha-
ro mit Manesse von Oma-
ru zu mir in Omaruru
mit 100 Mann erschienen. In
Omaruru werden in alle
zu sammeln und dann zum
Kriegsschauplatz zu ziehen.

Image 1 Von Lindequist writes to the Berlin Foreign Office on 2 February 1898, relaying combat report from Captain Von Estorff of 5 January 1898 (source: NAN-ZBU DIVf 1, p. 159, translation in text)

In this particular colonial war theatre, the German military campaign mobilized ovaHerero allies, who later became prominent victims of ‘genocidal escalation’,²⁹ to crush one of the first Indigenous uprisings in a mountainous area of north-west Namibia known today as ‘Grootberg’ (Kai|huis), that is, ‘Big Mountain’. This uprising involved a complex, multicultural alliance of peoples:

²⁸ NAN-ZBU DIVf 1, p. 159 – Von Lindequist to Foreign Office 2 February 1898, relaying combat report from Captain Von Estorff of 5 January 1898. National Archives of Namibia (NAN) texts transcribed from Kurrent handwritten texts by historian Wolfram Hartmann and translated into English by Sian Sullivan with the help of DeepL Translator <<https://www.deepl.com/en/translator>>.

²⁹ Häussler (n 24) at 183.

I learned from the spy that the Kaisib detachment, composed of Topnars-Swartbois [Nama] and Bergdamaras [#Nūkhoe], was about 35 men strong, well armed (partly with 88 weapons) and with several other weapons.³⁰

And,

According to the latest news from Omaruru, the Herero leader Kambatta, who lives on the border of the Kaokofeld, has gone over to the enemy with about 70 men, but allegedly few rifles.³¹

In the course of this particular military and imperial campaign different autochthonous Africans allied with and were mobilized against each other; local leaders and fighters were executed;³² and hundreds of people were deported to become forced labour in the new colonial capital of Windhoek – intentionally opening previously inhabited lands for appropriation by German settlers.

Reading these military records from a context that escalated into genocide more than 100 years ago, the phrase ‘theatre of war’ leapt out at me for a host of reasons. The phrase subsumes the spectacular landscapes and lively ecologies of this area into a label invoking a passive space or ‘backdrop’ for the performance of colonial war. This backgrounding of the landscape contrasts startlingly with the multiplicitous meanings and experiences of known places for peoples with long histories in this area, dampening recognition of their lively ecologies that are both nourishing and beautiful for peoples with intimate and technical knowledge of how to thrive in these lands.³³

Reading these military archive texts whilst learning of events in Ukraine – a reminder that our work is always situated in the context of history as it happens – it was impossible for me

³⁰ NAN-ZBU DIVf 1, p. 191, Officer [Hauptmann] Kaiser to Imperial Provincial Government, Windhoek, 3 February 1898 [received 19 February 1898].

³¹ NAN-ZBU DIVf 1, p. 159, as above.

³² For example, ‘I humbly inform the Imperial Governorate that Swartboi Hottentott Kuton was shot today after having been sentenced to death’, NAN-ZBU DIVf 1, p. 189, as above.

³³ Sian Sullivan and Welhemina Suro Ganuses, ‘Densities of Meaning in West Namibian Landscapes: Genealogies, Ancestral Agencies, and Healing’ in U. Dieckmann (ed), *Mapping the Unmappable? Cartographic Explorations with Indigenous Peoples in Africa* (Transcript 2021) 139–90.

not to be struck by the horrific literal use of Mariupol's Drama Theatre as a 'theatre of war'. Sought out as a refuge by diverse families with their children, this theatre was spectacularly flattened by Russian missiles, despite the word 'children' being painted in Russian outside to signal clearly that children were sheltering within:

[o]fficials in the besieged city said on Friday that at least 300 people were now known to have been killed in the bombing on 16 March [2022] of Mariupol's Drama Theatre, which had been marked with white paint as containing sheltering children.³⁴

As these theatrical images flicker through my mind's eye, I wonder too about the mimetic connections between this attack in Mariupol and the murderous seizure of a Moscow theatre in 2002 by 'Chechen rebels' continuing a tortuous and long campaign by this different former Soviet southern state seeking independence from Russian control and 'Russification'. Here too, a precursor to this event was the mass deportation of Chechens ordered by Stalin in 1944 that has since been formally recognized by the European Parliament as constituting genocide.³⁵

I am myself a frequent and enthusiastic theatre goer. I cherish the suspension of time and 'humdrum reality' signalled by the lights going down and the curtain going up, and the intimacy of the collective trust needed for multiple strangers to sit in a large, darkened room so as to share an affective and enchanted journey. It seems especially shattering to stage and enact war in such hallowed theatrical safe spaces.

And images of bodies in black bags (and now in white shrouds). Bags and bags of bodies, each one a person embodied and embedded in communities of others. The multiple traumas of these lives cut brutally short surely colonize our collective consciousness as restless spirits of the dead requiring placating.

Incorporated in individual and collective bodies, Taussig³⁶ suggests that images become part of historicized corporealities, effecting normalized corporeal worldings through war and

³⁴ Daniel Boffey, Dan Sabbagh and Julian Borger, 'Mariupol Theatre Bombing Killed 300, Ukrainian Officials Say' (2022) *The Guardian* 25 March <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/25/mariupol-theatre-bombing-killed-300-ukrainian-officials-say>> accessed 2 May 2022.

³⁵ See 'Chechnya: European Parliament Recognises the Genocide of the Chechen People in 1944' <<https://www.unpo.org/article/438>> accessed 2 May 2022.

³⁶ Taussig (n 27).

terror that beg for transformation and healing. As asked by Jane Bennett and William Connolly in the essays inspiring this special issue, the question then becomes how to act amidst these historicized corporeal worldings that evoke and emote meltdown? What transformational forces may turn around war's worlding to mutate the experience, witnessing and haunting of terror into healing?

3 ON DOODLING AND OTHER ENCHANTED ACTS

Jane Bennett writes of the salience of enacting transformation through influencing as a form of 'relentless persistence' that is 'without fanfare'. Thus,

[i]f we are to effectively redirect energies away from deeply entrenched, destructive modes of consumption and production [and war...], we need a wide range of different tactics, including those operative at the level of inflections and infusions of new affects and affections.³⁷

Doodling with its semi-intentioned wandering – 'somehow subjective without being the expression of an interiority all my own', is for Bennett a praxis as well as a conceptual metaphor for agencies that act but are simultaneously carried along.³⁸ Doodling here evokes our situated subjectivities – our subject[ificat]ion in both senses of the term³⁹ – participating in practices that find paths of coherence amidst experiences of meltdown. Enacting amidst – transforming in connection – to weave resistant and constituent values into a tight ecosocial fabric of non-commodified alliances.

Being an agent that is simultaneously carried along is the zeitgeist of practices of enchantment. Liberated through transforming exercises of the self on the self with the support of varied human and beyond-human others, techniques of enchantment encourage the 'significance of human interventions' in a perceptual context of a communicative more-than-human world asserting multiple kinds of agency.⁴⁰ Such acts participate in skilled revelation

³⁷ Jane Bennett, 'Acting Amidst: Some Concepts and Practices', this special issue.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. R Hurley (Penguin Books 1998[1976]) at 60, 70.

⁴⁰ Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (Continuum 2000). I follow these thoughts more extensively in Sian Sullivan, 'Towards a Metaphysics of the Soul and a Participatory Aesthetics

of skilled concealment to peel away and refract the layers of commoditized and propagandized mystification that obscure our alienation from each other and ‘the world’. Or as Taussig invokes: finding ‘words [and deeds] that act like those evanescent spells murmured into things to activate their glow, their speed, their love’, to ‘engage with my body, your body, and the body [and bodies] of the world in waves of *mimetic impulsion*’.⁴¹

Drawing on whatever powers are to hand to change things is sorcery: and, ‘[f]rom the howling of animals to the wailing of elements and particles’,⁴² it does seem clear that ‘the courage to express a different sort of planetary sorcery’ is required. Sorcery turns things around, and upside down, subverting images *jiu jitsu* style so as to throw their intended effects back on themselves.⁴³

This ‘monkey-wrenching [of] received meaning in bourgeois reality’ was embodied as the praxis of *détournement* encouraged by Guy Debord and consorts in the 1960s *Situationist International*, and enacted as the necessary *modus operandi* for responding to the absurdities of commodification – including the commodified machinery of war – *so as to recreate meaning*.⁴⁴ I was reminded of Debord recently in seeing how volunteers for the Drones for Ukraine Foundation are making keyrings from material gathered from a shot-down Russian Sukhoi Su-34 attack jet as ‘cool souvenirs’ to be exchanged for a significant donation to help fund drones for the Ukrainian Armed Forces.⁴⁵ Via collective action and crowdfunding, these diminutive mimetic transformations of a spoil-of-war into a response-to-war become acts of dark humour, pragmatism and perhaps even imaginative doodling that recreate meaning.

of Life: Mobilising Foucault, Affect and Animism for Caring Practices of Existence’ (2019) 95(3) *New Formations: A Journal of Culture, Theory & Politics* 5–21.

⁴¹ Taussig (n 1) at 189, emphasis added.

⁴² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (The Athlone Press 1987[1980]) at 249.

⁴³ Andy Merrifield, *Magical Marxism: Subversive Politics and the Imagination* (Pluto Press 2011) at 26–7.

⁴⁴ *ibid* at 27.

⁴⁵ Valus Venckunas, ‘Ukrainian Volunteers Offer Parts of a Shot Down Su-34 in Exchange for Donations’ (2022) *Aerotime Hub* 27 April <<https://www.aerotime.aero/articles/30856-ukrainian-volunteers-offer-pieces-of-su-34-for-donations>> accessed 2 May 2022.



Image 2 Transforming a spoil-of-war into a response-to-war – keyrings made by Drones for Ukraine from material gathered from a shot-down Russian Sukhoi Su-34 attack jet (source: shareable image from <<https://twitter.com/vysoven/status/1518904362319421440>> accessed 2 May 2022)

It probably was ever thus, but in today’s mode(s) of meltdown it also seems that engagement requires coupling deep acceptance of the addict’s ‘serenity prayer’⁴⁶ – especially pertinent given our individual and collective addictions to the matters fuelling war⁴⁷ – with the clarity of individual and collective mimetic actions revealing what is concealed, so as to turn things

⁴⁶ ‘God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.’

⁴⁷ Sian Sullivan, ‘I’m Sian, and I’m a Fossil Fuel Addict: Paradox, Disavowal and (Im)possibility in Changing Climate Change’ in S Böhm and S Sullivan (eds), *Negotiating Climate Change in Crisis* (Open Book Publishers 2021).

around. To master what cannot be mastered through parody and caricature,⁴⁸ refracting the farcically amplified repetition of tragedy through shared compassion, humility and humour.

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⁴⁸ Taussig (n 1) at 83.