

# The Deceleration of Terror: An Interview with Philipp Weiss

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In this interview, conducted by email in the summer of 2022, Philipp Weiss reflects on the experience of writing in the context of accelerating ecological destabilization. His first novel, the five-volume *Am Weltenrand sitzen die Menschen und lachen* [At the Edge of the World People Sit Laughing] (2018), concerns the relationships between humans, nature and technology in the Anthropocene — although Weiss takes critical distance from the term itself.<sup>1</sup> In the year of its publication, the novel was awarded the Klaus-Michael Kühne prize for best German-language debut and the Jürgen Ponto-Stiftung literary prize, followed in 2019 by the Rauris festival prize. A French translation by Olivier Mannoni, *Le Grand Rire des hommes assis au bord du monde*, was published by Seuil in 2021 and nominated for the Prix femina. According to the jurors' statement for the Kühne prize, Weiss 'captures in words the insanity of our world' ('fasst den Wahnsinn unserer Welt in Worte').<sup>2</sup> The current interview attempts to draw out some aspects of this insanity as they appear to Weiss. In his responses, the author elaborates on the literary challenges involved in narrating the enmeshment of subjectivity with fossil capitalism, virtual reality and ecological anxiety. He also emphasizes the centrality of pleasure and of encounters with other people and cultures — in short, with otherness — for his creative work. In translating the interview from the German, we have sought to preserve the author's occasionally telegrammatic style.

CND: What does it mean for you to write in awareness of ecological catastrophe?

PW: I work full of haste, driven and restless. The basic assumptions underpinning literature have changed. For the first time we do not know if the world as we know it will continue to exist. Or better: we know that it will not. It will change. We are in the process of leaving the safe nest of the Holocene, the phase of climate stability that lasted for the past ten thousand years, during which all human culture was able to unfold. Up until now, every new book took its place

<sup>1</sup> <<https://oe1.orf.at/artikel/650309/Am-Weltenrand-sitzen-die-Menschen-und-lachen>> [accessed 3 October 2022].

<sup>2</sup> <<https://buecher.at/klaus-michael-kuehne-preis-geht-an-philipp-weiss/>> [accessed 3 October 2022].

within this seemingly infinite library. Today, this no longer seems to be the case. If we follow our current trajectory, it is becoming increasingly clear that the project of civilization as a whole is at risk.

There are immediate practical consequences for writing. Because writing requires deceleration. And it requires the future. It is only by having trust in tomorrow that I can retreat for years at a time, in order to brood over a complex communicative act which will then at some point find its way into the world. It is only through an expansion of perception, through boredom [*Langeweile*], that spaces can be opened — for complexity, ambiguity and beauty. But what happens when there is no time? Where can we find the courage to slow down, when the *Zeitgeist* and the proliferation of crises dictate a paranoid freneticism? So I write full of unrest.

The state of the world also has consequences for the matter, the subject, of writing. If Brecht was able to write eighty years ago that a conversation about trees was a crime because it meant being silent about so many misdeeds,<sup>3</sup> today we have to invert that idea. It would be a crime not to talk about trees, that is, not to talk about our natural context and its destruction. That which seems to be self-evident has lost its innocence. Even the most everyday things — what will I eat, how will I live, how do I move from place to place — must be related today to the larger whole. And this also applies to the question which, for an author, is life-defining: what will I write?

The one thing that is certain is that I *do* write. Because I do not stand powerless before things; I do not have to fall silent before the terror. Because literature is a space of transformation and it is the possibility of another world.

CND: When you were beginning work on your large-scale Anthropocene novel *Am Weltenrand sitzen die Menschen und lachen*, were there decisive experiences or insights that motivated you to realize this literary project in this particular form?

PW: The catalyst for this work was the multiple catastrophe of Fukushima-Daiichi in 2011. A neologism has established itself for events of this kind: *Natech*, the entwinement of natural catastrophe and technical malfunction.<sup>4</sup> The medial impressions which reached me and unsettled me at that time moved me to think again and more concretely about the relationship between humans, nature and technology — a complex of related topics with which I had long been preoccupied. This was the impetus for my first journey to Japan. It was not clear

<sup>3</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'An die Nachgeborenen', in Bertolt Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe: Gedichte 2*, ed. by Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag/ Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 85–87.

<sup>4</sup> Duane A. Gill and Liesel A. Ritchie, 'Contributions of Technological and Natech Disaster Research to the Social Science Disaster Paradigm', in *Handbook of Disaster Research*, ed. by Havidán Rodríguez, William Donner and Joseph E. Trainor (Cham: Springer, 2018), pp. 39–60.

at first that this would trigger my attempt to create a grand narrative about modernity's loss of control. Looking back now, I find it interesting that my first attempts to confront this complex through literature seemed to lead to a dead end. I was working on a book that would later become one of the five volumes of *Am Weltenrand: Terrain Vague*. This tells the story of an androgynous artist, Jona, who travels to Japan in search of his lover, the climate scientist Chantal, who has disappeared. While in Japan, Jona witnesses the earthquake and then the nuclear disaster. I had to pause my work on this story for a year due to theatrical commitments. When I came back to the text I realized that this relatively linear and conventionally narrated story was completely inadequate for a literary investigation of what really interested me. How had the world in which we find ourselves come about? What is the prehistory of this fragile technological membrane which has spread itself over our globe? And where is all of this headed? Liberated from the narrow boundaries of theatrical work and in a state of creative fury, I began to enlarge my concept and within a couple of weeks I had mapped out all of the novel's five volumes. For many years I then had to pay the price of hard work and self-isolation for those few naïve moments of realization.

It was the idea of a non-linear narrative network which allowed me to think about our present time in a more complex and all-encompassing way. The form allowed me, for instance, to look back into the nineteenth century, to the time when the Enlightenment took material form and the foundations were laid for many of the events that followed. Relevant factors here were industrialization, colonialism, capitalism, the labour movement, the women's movement, the belief in progress and the nation state. In another volume I was able to work with the mega-frame of Big History, a blend of natural and cultural history which allowed me to derive the protagonist and her intellectual struggle with the present from of the history of the universe, read as a history of catastrophe. For me this was very productive in narrative terms and a joy to execute.

Polyphony and networks were the key. Each of the five volumes is a highly subjective model of the world — each one is told by a different character in the first person, each protagonist has their own language and their own way of perceiving the world, in the sense of modelling it mentally. The utopian project of making an inventory of the world in the encyclopaedia of the nineteenth century; the roving, fragmented, self-referential and ultimately unravelling thought-movements of philosophical notebooks; the fantastic visual world of the Japanese manga<sup>5</sup> — these are not just contrasting narrative forms, they are different ways of accessing reality and also manifestations of different personalities. Together they form a kind of playful symbolic hyperspace, a complex weave of texts and images, in short: a novel.

<sup>5</sup> The volume *Die glückseligen Inseln* [The Blessed Islands] is in the style of a Japanese manga, with artwork by Raffaella Schöbitz.

CND: What formal and aesthetic challenges confront the attempt to narrate the Anthropocene and Anthropocene consciousness?

PW: Let me say first of all that I think it's worth problematizing the concept of the Anthropocene. After all, it takes some hubris to call an entire geological age after humans, even if it's done with critical and political intent. It shows that we are in the human age of vanity, in which we may have lost sight of everything that is not human. I like the suggestion of the ecological philosopher Timothy Morton, who says that we have been living for the past three billion years since the great oxygen catastrophe in the 'Bacteriocene'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Anthropocene concept makes it impossible to differentiate historically and socio-politically because it introduces a universal perpetrator and hero, *Anthropos*, the human as species, into the history of the earth, thereby obscuring the fact that there are massive global differences between humans with regard to geological and ecological impact. In this way the concentration of capital power [in the Global North, CND] leads to a concentration of visibility and representational power. And because the concept has become a fashionable term, it serves above all the profitability of a greenwashing economy.

But the problem of the concept leads me back to the actual question. I believe that we — and by this 'we' I now actually mean a humanity that is united in and by this problem — no longer have a language for the world today. Not only do we not have a language for complex global interrelations — for hyperrealities and hyperobjects such as climate change and the disinhibited dynamics of late capitalist modernity — but we are also failing to visualize the fragile weave of which we are part, the living layer that envelops the vulnerable planet. We fall silent in fear at the fact that what appears unchanging and eternal — this fabric of seas, mountains, ice sheets, rivers, forests, life — could actually be endangered. We are inverted utopians. While utopians are capable of imagining more than they can effect, we are creating effects while unable to imagine any longer what it is we are actually doing. We are no longer able to envisage the consequences of our actions. We have access to more data than ever before. We are connected to inexhaustible streams of information. Yet we are no longer able to integrate any of it into a meaningful whole. But if we are unable to imagine something, that is, unable to tell of it, then we cannot be answerable for it, nor can we change it. Here's where I see a task for literature: to convert bare numbers back into narrative and so to work our way through the bleak silence with which we currently face the world.

I would like to highlight one particular aspect by way of illustration. Reaching back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, we find a normative conception common to dramatic and narrative forms that has remained influential regarding the unity of place,

<sup>6</sup> Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, interview, 'Timothy Morton: Ecology Without Nature', CCCBLAB *Cultural Research and Innovation*, 13 December 2016 <<https://lab.cccb.org/en/tim-morton-ecology-without-nature/>> [accessed 1 October 2022].

time and action.<sup>7</sup> A story happens when protagonists encounter each other at a specific place and come into some form of conflict. At the end, depending on the genre, they are either a couple, or dead. But what if the scenes are disjointed, if the characters never meet, because conflicts are decoupled in either space or time? What happens in one particular place on earth has immediate and unpredictable effects in countless others. What happens virtually or on the financial markets has manifold and complex effects in the Real. What we emit today will have consequences beyond tomorrow. How can this be narrated? This is the question I am exploring in my new novel.

CND: During the ecocidal age of climate change and mass extinction, in addition to the fundamental Kantian questions (What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope for? What is the human being?), we confront the question: What must I fear? How does this question resonate with you, and how does it arise in your writing?

PW: Both climate research and risk management have a wonderful tool for engaging with that which cannot be predicted: scenario technique. I can never know what the future will bring, but I can tell myself various probable and improbable stories about what might happen, and take up a stance towards each of these stories. This practice was already familiar to the Stoics. Seneca dubbed it *premeditatio malorum*. If I can allow for the possibility of the worst-case scenario, I will then be better prepared should it occur. I have developed three possible future scenarios for the twenty-first century in my play *Der letzte Mensch* [The Last Human]:<sup>8</sup> first, a collapse scenario; second, the story of humanity's technological self-transcendence; and third, a utopian narrative which asks what a desirable future could look like. These three world-historical scenarios are portrayed through the main character, whom I release into three parallel universes, following their story in each one. Perhaps this play was my attempt to create a *premeditatio malorum* in literary form. Yes, I feel fear. But I can take action to counter this fear through my writing. We humans are an exceptionally adaptable species. How come? We are neither particularly strong nor fast, nor do we have especially robust bodies. There are two qualities that we do have, however: the ability to imagine and the ability to cooperate. We don't have to accept things as they are, we can imagine instead how they could be, because we have language, which frees us from the given. This makes us tremendously creative and solution-oriented. Nevertheless, we are powerless as

<sup>7</sup> As Aristotle states in his *Poetics*: 'As to that poetic imitation which is narrative in form and employs a single metre, the plot manifestly ought, as in a tragedy, to be constructed on dramatic principles. It should have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It will thus resemble a living organism in all its unity, and produce the pleasure proper to it' (Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. by Richard Koss, unabridged republication of S. H. Butcher's translation (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), p. 47).

<sup>8</sup> Philipp Weiss, *Der letzte Mensch* (Suhrkamp Theater Verlag, first performed on 7 October 2019 at the Theater Nestroyhof Hamakom in Vienna).

individuals. Everything that humankind has ever achieved has been achieved through cooperation, through alliances across space and time, between different places, generations and parts of the world. Literature itself is one such cooperative achievement.

CND: The culture, history and landscape of Japan play an important part in your novel *Am Weltenrand*. What role have intercultural encounters played both for your own literary practice and for your engagement with planetary crisis, both during your work on the novel and since then?

PW: If you want to write about the world, that is, about the entirety of human interconnections, then you've got to be willing to transform yourself. I am only interested in writing about myself and what is close and familiar to me insofar as I find in myself that multitude of inconsistencies and fractures that the social and global worlds inscribe in us. But my literary anthropology begins at the point where I myself end. For me, writing means exploring what it's like to be another. What it's like to live somewhere else and to look from there on the complex weave of the world. So I have to set off on my travels. And I have to hold conversations. To listen carefully. Every literary character, every story takes me with it into unknown territory. Bit by bit, I have to map the reality of my characters, their models of the world in thought and language. Alongside books, films and the internet, travel is the most important medium through which I achieve this. Which is why I suffered when I was unable to travel during the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. Without the forms of knowledge and encounter that can be experienced through travelling, without the specific perspectives and unexpected discoveries these afford, of motion, relativization, porosity and exploratory curiosity, writing becomes one-dimensional. It becomes entangled in clichés and turns into a *Kopfgeburt*, a disembodied intellectual output with little epistemological value. I have just returned from an exhilarating trip to the Brazilian Amazon. For my new novel, I have already been to China, on a cargo ship in the Atlantic and in Chile, during the protests of 2019. In an interview with Herta Müller I once read that as a child she attempted to become *pflanzennah*, close to plants — to turn herself into a plant — by ingesting copious amounts of plants. In a similar vein, I'd like to become *weltnah*, close to the world, by assimilating so many stories from all around the interconnected planet that I myself would then consist of world, like a sphere of stories.

CND: Let's stay with the Herta Müller image. Interestingly, this is the illusion of a child: in the worst case, the consumption of the plants could lead to poisoning. The vegetal other is also assimilated: consumption becomes a technique of self-transformation. (I find myself reminded of Erwin Wurm's sculpture *The Artist Who Swallowed the World*.<sup>9</sup> What other metaphors or figures of thought for the

<sup>9</sup> Erwin Wurm, *The Artist Who Swallowed the World*, ed. by Museum Moderner Kunst

encounter between world and ever-mutable writing self suggest themselves to you, even playfully?

PW: I would call it metabolism rather than consumption. To live means to assimilate the other — and to excrete the self, at least in part. This happens when we eat, when we breathe and also in that mental metabolism we call thought and communication. We are in permanent material and immaterial exchange with our environment, and this only ends when we die. Of course, this can lead to symptoms of poisoning. The world is often indigestible.

In addition to the inwardly directed metaphor of assimilation, one could add the outwardly directed metaphor of expansion. In the history of human culture and technology, the invention of the microscope and telescope were a revolution which significantly changed our thinking and perception. These visual technologies were an extension of the eyes which transcended the limitations of the human sense and brought the previously invisible suddenly into the range of the visible, so that it could be beheld and understood. This is also how I experience writing, which always arises from non-understanding. Literary discourse is like a fine lens which makes the imperceptible perceptible, the inconceivable conceivable. Language is the ultimate technology of perception. It doesn't simply expand vision the way a microscope does; rather, it's what makes perception possible in the first place. I see literature as the permanent labour of establishing the foundation for this possibility.

Marshall McLuhan described the development of technology as the gradual externalization of bodily functions.<sup>10</sup> The hammer was the externalization of the hand, the bicycle that of the legs, writing was the externalization of memory and the internet externalizes the central nervous system. In a gentle, non-invasive variation of this idea, one could also describe literature as the gradual extension of the self. It is a transformation and adaptation machine, a utopian instrument which perforates the boundaries between self and world. The reading or writing self expands, changing its colour and shape, its language, narrative and characters like a chameleon, in an ongoing metamorphosis which drives it toward dissolution. In extreme cases, as I have experienced myself during my years of writing, the self ruptures. The ego becomes unimportant.

CND: Returning to the question of travel as a medium and stimulus for your creative work: did you experience the pandemic restrictions primarily as privations, or did the transformation of everyday life during lockdown have any upsides for you, for example through the new routines and perspectives they enforced? Were there also aspects of the pandemic that were conducive for your writing?

Stiftung Ludwig Wien (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

PW: Nothing really changed in my everyday life. I continued, rather reluctantly, with the same retreat rituals I have rehearsed over many years. Instead of travelling, I sat in my writing studio in Vienna as if in a space capsule. I ate, slept and worked there. I read and went online; I soaked up through various media channels what was happening around the world and kept it spinning. Kant wrote his entire oeuvre in Königsberg, Karl May wrote his exotic travelogues somewhere near Zwickau, and if I'm not mistaken Jules Verne journeyed to the moon, the centre of the earth and all around the world without ever leaving France. Inspired by this, I tried to write my *Weltroman* from my Viennese space capsule and to feel weightless in the process. Borges calls this an 'Aleph' — a place which contains all places.<sup>11</sup> Of course I knew it was a huge privilege to be able to observe the world with such comfort and safety during this time. After all, I was able to follow the unfolding of something that I had set out to explore through literature: an event on a global scale.

Many people have drawn attention to the fact that the occurrence of a pandemic is by no means an inevitable natural phenomenon but is directly related to our invasive relationship with nature. Covid-19 — like HIV, Ebola or Sars — is a zoonotic disease, transmitted by mutation from animals to humans. Most of the up to 600,000 mammalian viruses that have the potential to become zoonotic diseases are bound by regional cycles within undisturbed ecosystems. However, through intrusion into and destruction of ever more remote areas, through the wildlife trade and the loss of virus-limiting biodiversity, pathogenic germs are transmitted to people and then spread rampantly around the globe via the extreme mobility, interconnectedness and population density of humans. The virus and even more so the climate crisis are uncontrolled feedback effects of our having made of the world a disposable resource.

If there is anything positive to be gleaned from the pandemic, it might be the ability to study and see more clearly the epidemiological consequences of globalization, along with the societal upheavals that have ensued — the faltering of healthcare systems already weakened by the neoliberal agenda of recent decades, the reproduction of global hierarchies in relation to vaccine distribution, the radicalization of individuals in medial echo-chambers.

CND: Could you tell us more about your recent trip to the Amazon? What was exhilarating about it? How do you think your experiences there will feed into your creative work? And where did you most feel the vulnerability of the world?

PW: The world is vulnerable. But so are we, who live in it. When I finally decided to set off on another major research trip in 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. I was petrified, so I postponed the trip. I noted at the time: I am world-weary. The sociologist Hartmut Rosa says that the world has become a 'point

<sup>11</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories: 1933–1969*, ed. and trans. by Norman Thomas di Giovanni in collaboration with the author (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970).



of aggression' for its late-modern subjects.<sup>12</sup> It must be known, controlled, conquered, made usable in all of its manifestations. There are no longer any moments of contemplation. It is as though we are on a downwards escalator. If we pause for a moment, we lose ground in the face of this highly dynamic reality. Paradoxically, the project of subjugating the world, rendering it completely at our disposal, causes it to recoil from us. Promise becomes threat. The euphoria of optimization leads to burnout.

Since the pandemic I have been plagued by the fear of setting forth and rendering myself vulnerable, perhaps because we have all learned that even the most immediate interactions between humans and the world, breath and touch, could potentially be fatal. I felt that the world was no longer a reliable place. This feeling seeps inward and encrusts. Seeking safety, you retreat into your small refuge, if you're lucky enough to have one. We become protectionists, with walls and fences. The world is threatened and threatening at the same time.

But the moment when this crust breaks down again and the dynamic is reversed, because you can carefully open yourself up again to others and to the unknown, allowing them to change you, is a moment of happiness. Life recommences. Literature can help us with that. Poetry, according to Alexander Kluge,<sup>13</sup> serves to slow down the terror, to create a vessel in which it is possible to hold and witness what would otherwise overwhelm us. The deceleration of terror, that sums it up aptly. It allows us to direct our gaze without repressing, deflecting or glossing over. And it allows us to set forth.

Armed with this poetic protection, I went on my travels once more. I visited the *Acampamento Terra Livre* in Brasília, a protest camp at which thousands of Indigenous people from all over Brazil gathered in resistance over ten days. After that I travelled by plane, bus, jeep and boat into Munduruku territory, in the Amazon. Accompanied by a translator, I conducted dozens of interviews in both places. During these humbling conversations with people who are in mortal danger every day, confronted with the horrific ecocide and genocide that has escalated since the election of Jair Bolsonaro, I was able to learn much about further strategies for decelerating terror and countering the capitalist death wish — through unwavering humour, through community and art, including ritualistic body painting, dancing and song, all practices which weave a connection through time and space to past generations and to the place of co-existence, the forest and all of its creatures.

<sup>12</sup> Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, trans. by James C. Wagner (Cambridge, UK/ Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2020). Hartmut Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2018.)

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Kluge, 'Augenblick tragisch-glücklicher Wiedererkennung: Rede zum Lessing-Preis der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg 1989', in Alexander Kluge, *Personen und Reden* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2012), pp. 7–22; Alexander Kluge, 'The Moment of Tragic Recognition with a Happy Ending', trans. and ed. by Devin O. Pendas, in *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, ed. by Michael Geyer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 381–93.

CND: Literary theory addresses various conceptions and orientations of literature, which can be located on a spectrum between hedonism (desire, language games, *plaisir du texte*) and grief (dealing with loss, the birth of poetry out of mourning, thanatography, writing against the horizon of mortality). To what extent is this polarity present in your writing practice? How is it felt anew or differently in an age of accelerating ecocide?

PW: I grew up with late capitalism and cultural postmodernism. I have learned that the subject must capitulate before the monstrous contradictions of their time, that progressive narratives are totalitarian, that it is no longer possible to see or think the whole, and that the way out is the endless present in which the consumer self prevails, devoting itself to hedonistic play and self-irony. At the edge of the world, people sit laughing. The deconstruction of opinion and attitude and the celebration of egoistic subjectivity are a dead end, in my view. The same goes for postmodern irony, which relativizes and reduces everything to play and pleasure.

So what could be a way out? The philosopher Timothy Morton suggests one: what he calls ecological irony. It's the basic premise of my writing in the late 'Bacteriocene': you wake up in the morning with a murder weapon in your hand and you know that you've done something bad, but you can't say what exactly. It plays out like a classic *film noir*: I am the detective and I discover that I am the one who has committed the crime. I am a narrator who has fully succumbed to complexity and metaphysical homelessness, and at the same time I am part of something that has geophysical force on a planetary scale. It's related to the feeling of the fictional protagonist of whom Bruno Latour writes that, wherever they look, at the trees, the sun, the cultivated landscape, they feel only guilt, the influence of humans and the threat of destruction; only when they look at the moon can they breathe a sigh of relief, for they feel in no way responsible either for its orbit or for its phases.<sup>14</sup> Yes, my writing comes from grief. And it seeks the lunar. It is a thanatography, a death report. But it is unclear what is dying and what will become of it. My writing comes from solastalgia.<sup>15</sup> A friend recently gave me the gift of this word and since then I have carried it around with me. It describes the pain we feel when we have lost the beloved place. But I cannot stop at this point. This is where the games begin. Roland Barthes distinguishes between *plaisir*, the pleasure of the text that stabilizes the reading self, and *jouissance*, the linguistic lust that dissolves the self. I try to work with the latter — in the literary tradition of many language-critical Austrian writers, from Hofmannsthal through the Wiener Gruppe to Jelinek. But at the same time, I try to ask once more the forbidden question regarding the whole,

<sup>14</sup> Bruno Latour, *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis*, trans. by Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Glenn Albrecht, Gina-Maree Sartore, Linda Connor and others, 'Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change', *Australasian Psychiatry*, 15 supplement (2007), pp. S95–S98. Doi:10.1080/10398560701701288.

to set totality and fragmentation in a relation to each other. I see my novel *Am Weltenrand* as games of this kind, as a play with the whole, with the world, with five volumes in no particular order, five forms and perspectives and the riddle they hold. Laughter, as we know, originates from a threatening gesture of primates: the baring of teeth.

*Translated from the German by Caitríona Ní Dhúill and Deirbhile Mellotte*

