

**On the edge of the world
man sits and laughs**
A Novel by Philipp Weiss,
Illustrations by Raffaella Schöbitz

Approx. 1000 pages
Five paperback volumes in a slip-case
With numerous black-and-white and
colour illustrations
Book design by Pauline Altmann

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**We stand at opposite ends, Child of
Gyokusendo. I, here, in France, at the
Western edge of the Eurasian continent;
you, there, in Japan, at its Eastern edge.
I, by the Atlantic Ocean; you, by the
Pacific. There are spaces between us,
Child of Gyokusendo. And times. And
yet, there is something that unites us,
I can feel it, there is no doubt about it.
Our bones know each other, as do our
rituals, and our thoughts, perhaps.**

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'Wanderer at the Edge of the World'

An interview with Philipp Weiss

What is your novel about?

To be honest, that's the hardest question for me to answer. In fact, I have come to the conclusion that the novel, in everything it is and wants to be, is designed to undermine and torpedo precisely that question, because as a novel it refuses to be circumscribed. And in fact what I was aiming for was just that kind of all-encompassing thought and writing. Nevertheless, let me try to answer your question: It's about loss and departure. All the characters are searchers, travellers, each in their own way trying to come to terms with what they've lost and with being lost themselves, with the loss of loved ones, say, or with the erosion of reality.

In one of your first statements about the novel you wrote that it was about the 'invention and transformation of the world'.

I still like that characterisation, because in the last two hundred years we really have completely transformed our planet. No doubt the world, i.e. the totality within which our communal lives take place, has always been something humans invented, but surely never before on such a global scale, or with such a high degree of technical complexity. Another description of the novel that I like is that it is about the relationship between humans and nature and technology in the Anthropocene – which is the new epoch in the history of the Earth in which the human has become the main transformative force. And in that context what I was particularly interested in were moments where we lose control, collectively or individually; the eventful and unpredictable things that happen to a person and give shape to a life, to a self, to a history. We see it in natural disasters, in technological accidents, in political upheaval, but also in love. In the end, it all comes down to the question of utopia and the future of humanity. And then, juxtaposed to and in between these genuinely European themes we have Japan – as a complementary culture, as a screen onto which occidental desires are projected. And as a country that has not only incorporated the Western world-view but outdone it.

The novel consists of five volumes. How do they fit together?

When I started writing, which was in 2012, and for a long time afterwards, only one of the five volumes existed conceptually: *Terrain vague*. It is about an androgynous artist, Jona, who travels to Japan in search of his lover, Chantal, a climate scientist who is quite a lot older than him and who has disappeared. And while he's in Japan the earthquake and the nuclear disaster at Fukushima happen. Because of other obligations at the theatre I had to put my writing on hold for a year, and when I returned to the novel I quickly realised that this one story and this format weren't going to be enough for me to explore and write about what really interested me. Which is: how did we end up with this world that we now live in? What is the history of this fragile technological membrane that stretches over the planet? And where are we going? So I started widening the scope of my novel, and relatively quickly I had the idea of these five volumes, which allowed me to think through these questions in a much more complex and comprehensive way. It was incredibly productive for me, on a narrative level, to go back to the nineteenth century, for instance, to that period of great upheaval and utopian imagination, or even all the way back to the moment when the universe suddenly came into existence out of nothing.

And how do these five separate volumes add up to one novel, one story?

There are thematic and motivic connections on various levels. One of the novel's anchoring points is the historical development of individuality. Something happens with the rise of the bourgeoisie: the idea of the individual, who is evidently to a certain extent independent of his or her environment and capable of autonomous action, has rights and is able to demand them, etc. In the twentieth and twenty-first century this experience seems to disintegrate again. To a certain extent, technology and consumerism have made us all the same. Paradoxically, the 'I' begins to erode even as it becomes the absolute. Each of the five volumes explores what I call a different 'state of aggregation' of the self.

Can you say a little more about that?

In the *Encyclopaedias*, which are situated in the nineteenth century, you can experience the historical constitution of the self in the form of Paulette's story of feminist self-empowerment. In *Akio's Notebooks* we pursue the phenomenology of her child's-eye-view of the world, where, in her symbiotic imagination, the self as inextricably bound up with its technological and biological environment. In *The Blissful Isles* the self ends up

in an 'echo chamber', a virtual, solipsistic bubble.

The various parts are also connected by the characters and their narrative arcs...

Indeed. The *Cahiers*, for example, begin with the discovery of Paulette's body, frozen in ice. Paulette is the narrator of the *Encyclopaedias*, who died in an accident in the French Alps in the late nineteenth century. Or to take another example: *The Blissful Isles* is a comic by Abra, a young Japanese woman, whom the aforementioned Jona meets in *Terrain vague*. The different parts are all nested inside each other like paradoxical Russian dolls. This produces a dense network of thematic and narrative connections. There is also a shadow figure who haunts (almost) all five volumes: Satoshi, the 'man from the moon', a homeless 'nuclear gypsy' who works as a day labourer cleaning up nuclear power stations.

Each volume has a format of its own – encyclopaedia, notebook, novella, transcript, comic. What made you choose this form? What purpose do these different formats serve for you?

Each of these five volumes is a highly subjective vision of the world – each told by a different character in the first person. Each character has his or her own language but also a genuine way of perceiving the world, which is to say of producing a mental image of it. How do you represent thought processes and experiences in narrative? The utopian inventory of the world in the nineteenth-century encyclopaedia, for instance, or the desultory and fragmented movements of thought, caught up in itself and striving for disintegration, set down in a philosophical notebook; or else the fantastic visual world of comic books—these aren't just different narrative forms, they are different approaches to reality, not to mention different manifestations of unique personalities. We don't think so much in terms of linear narratives any more these days, but rather in terms of symbolic hyper-spaces, in a complex network of images and texts. I wanted to make room for that in my novel.

Tell us about the title.

Well, the first point of reference is the *Flammarion Engraving*, which in German is also known as *The Wanderer at the Edge of the World*. This is where I borrowed the wonderful term 'the edge of the world' from. This famous image was first published in a book by the French astronomer Camille Flammarion at the end of the nineteenth century, although it was

long (erroneously) thought to be a medieval engraving. It depicts a missionary who, according to the caption, has found the point on the horizon where the earth and the firmament are not fully fused, which enabled this wanderer to stick his head through the narrow gap. This image opens up a positive reading of the title and tells of the fundamental human gesture of transgression.

The second reference point is the 'last man' from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche's last man is an insignificant and vaguely content creature who is incapable of anything but blinking. In *Zarathustra* it says: "What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?"—thus asks the last man, blinking.' Perhaps laughter can be seen as a preliminary, hysterical stage to this blinking.

In what order did you write the volumes?

There is an anecdote about an author—I can't remember if it was Thomas Mann, or Kant, or Freud, or whoever. In any case, he has two desks, at which he is working on two different books. Whenever he gets stuck with the one, whenever his text rejects him, in other words, he is irresistibly drawn straight to the other desk, and vice versa. There is no escape. In this way, his flight response becomes productive and the whole set-up becomes a sort of literary perpetuum mobile. This is roughly how I worked on the novel as well—with the exception of large portions of *Terrain vague*, which were written first. So whenever for example Chantal's cynicism in the *Cahiers* and the long winter's darkness got too much for me, I would switch over to *Akio's Notebooks*, which have something more joyful and comforting about them. And when I got tired of playing I would run off to the *Encyclopaedias of an I*, and so on.

What's the best order to read them in? Is there even one?

There isn't. But there are definitely easier and more challenging orders. In principle, you can approach the novel from any angle. You can also read selectively or in parallel. That's probably a very contemporary idea of reading. Personally, I've usually got up to fifty books on the go at any one moment, and I basically never read one cover to cover.

One common thread running through the whole novel is Japan. The country plays an important role in all five volumes. Some of your characters leave Europe behind to go to Japan in search of all sorts of things, be it happiness, fossils, or a vanished lover.

What is it about Japan that interests you?

I first visited Japan in 2012 and I was immediately captivated by it. Not so much because of its supposed strangeness, which you hear so much about. Of course Japan is different from Europe. Because of the Shinto tradition of ancestor and nature worship, for instance, whose influence on daily life remains very palpable. Not to mention the thousand-year influence of Chinese culture. But what fascinated me above all was how familiar Japan seemed. I once asked a Japanese friend to describe the essence of Japan. He answered: the appropriation of the foreign. That sounds odd to us Europeans, who tend to assume that the innermost must also be the ownmost. *Oitsuke, oikose!* is what they say in Japan: catch up with and surpass! Japan internalised not only Chinese culture and knowledge, but also, and in a historically unique way, the science, economics, and ideology of the West—particularly during the so-called Meiji period and later as a result of the American presence after WWII. This means that in Japan one encounters the all-too familiar cracks and absurdities of the European way of life—but amplified to the point of distortion. From the start it was this sense of the familiar, which, however, like in a Kafka novel, is slightly skewed and at times pushed over the edge of absurdity, that produced in me a very productive inner tension. Plus Japanese culture places a far higher value on aesthetics in daily life than we do in Europe, which is of course right up my alley. I sometimes feel like I'm really Japanese and just happened to be born in Europe.

Part of your novel is written in the form of a diary. This diary contains the thoughts and reflections of Paulette Blanchard,

a young French-woman from a bourgeois family who gets caught up in the events surrounding the 1871 Paris Commune. Yet the diary entries are arranged alphabetically, in the form of a sort of encyclopaedia. What role does the encyclopaedic play? Why did you choose this form?

In the 1870s, Paulette is struck with a 'fever of the self', filling a thousand diary pages, which she revisits years later, turning them into an encyclopaedic project to capture the moments in which, as she puts it, 'the world comes crashing down on the self'. In this format the extreme subjectivity of the diary meets the formal, systematising objectivity of the dictionary. In this instance, then, the encyclopaedia serves an ordering function that gives shape to the self. It is a laborious, obsessive self-projection—the utopian idea of being able to grasp and order one's life as a whole—which is of course doomed to failure. The novel as a whole follows this encyclopaedic

gesture. I'm fascinated by this utopian idea of representing the entirety of human knowledge, of making the world graspable in its entirety. After Hegel, the Romantics believed that the task of the novel was to render the 'totality' of the world perceptible and communicable. In the twenty-first century, it seems to me, this utopian project of the encyclopaedists, the World's Fair organisers, cartographers, and Romantics is back. But this time with a new, technological vocabulary: that of the Internet and Big Data.

Besides the historical events in France in the late nineteenth century, your novel also tackles a range of really big themes: evolution, women's emancipation, climate change and climate politics, it even tells an entire history of the universe. What sort of research goes into a project like this? Where do you begin?

Working on this novel was a joy for me. For several years, interrupted only by a number of research trips to Japan, I was holed up in a country house where I worked day and night. My starting point was a question: How far can I get with my thoughts and my aesthetic searching if I devote my life entirely to writing? There were times when I literally disappeared as a person. I was a ghost, guided by whichever character in whose thoughts I was currently immersed. How does a Japanese boy see the world? How does he react to a disaster? What does he know about the world? How does someone who is a climate scientist and theoretical physicist think? What kind of reality does a young late-nineteenth-century bourgeois woman grow up in? What are her experiences? I mapped out my characters' mental landscapes piece by piece, while reading piles and piles of books all at the same time, always in search of that vivid detail; I talked to people, travelled all over the place. I had a rucksack full of books weighing over fifty kilos that I would schlep from library to library. The key to not losing my nerve or my sense of direction was to divide my research into smaller units. I just needed to make sure I had a vague idea of the whole project, but day by day I would be working on just a tiny section of it.

The relationship between the human, technology and nature is a central theme in your novel. From nineteenth-century cameras to a meltdown at a nuclear power station to cyborgs – is the tragedy at the heart of the novel the human idea that we can control nature?

Absolutely. But I don't think humans can do anything else. The human has always been a technological creature. To a certain extent we've always already been cyborgs. Plato's Protagoras describes the creation of the world:

Zeus tasks Epimetheus with allotting attributes to all the creatures of the Earth. To some he gives strength, to others speed, one animal gets claws, and another is given thick armour. But there is one creature he forgets: man. Hence, man is a deficient being, a creature without qualities. So instead Prometheus teaches man wisdom and the secret of fire, and Pandora gives him that fateful box. Ever since then, man has pursued his promethean project. Always trying to think his way out of difficult situations, trying to control nature, designing technological defences against nature's violence and caprice and unpredictability. And then in order to control these technologies he needs to devise even more complex technologies, and so on. The interesting thing is the way loss of control recurs dialectically. Humans develop ever more sophisticated technologies in order to control nature, until this second, technological nature itself gets out of hand.

Is humanity destined to vanish into virtuality?

Are we going to leave materiality behind us?

The history of technology can be seen as a history of successive disembodiment. The hammer is the externalisation of man's first tool, the hand; the wheel is the externalisation of his legs, writing the externalisation of memory, and the internet that of the central nervous system. But this shift into the virtual carries with it a qualitative leap. Something emerges that was not there before, and that used to be the exclusive domain of dreams and of literature: a completely immaterial world. Theoretically, in such a world there are no laws of physics and no limits. The computer simulation, you might say, is the externalisation of our dreams. And our nightmares.

One volume of your novel tells the story of Abra, a young Japanese woman, who takes us on a sort of Odyssey, uncoupled from the coordinates of reality, a disturbing but also at the same time breathtaking virtual journey through Tokyo. This story is told entirely in the form of a comic book. What is it about that medium that interests you?

I'm really no expert, but I'm told that some of the most exciting and innovative narrative experiments are happening in comics and graphic novels. I'm sure that's the case. In literary language, musical aspects like sound and rhythm play an equally important role as visual elements such as imagery and mental landscapes. And if one translates these linguistic images into actual images, they can exude such power that language fades into the background. I found this both reassuring and exciting. The internet, the television and the newspaper utilise this power of images on a daily basis.

In comics, the images rupture the linearity of the story— they have an immersive quality: you can get lost in them; you can wander around on the surface or just let yourself be swept along by the current and get caught up in little details. All of which was perfectly suited to the kind of story I wanted to tell.

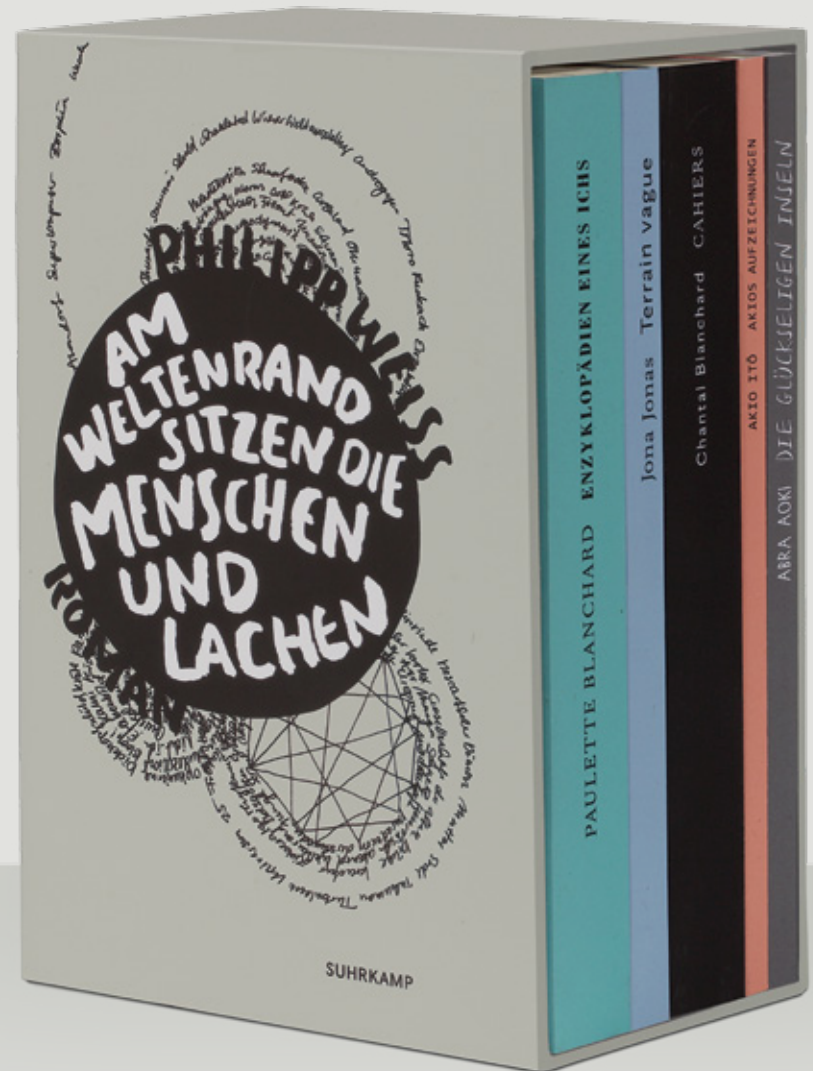
The comic was drawn by the Viennese artist Raffaella Schöbitz. What was it like working with her?

Working with Raffaella was a delight. We got together on a regular basis to exchange thoughts and ideas. It all went extremely smoothly. It was important for me to give her as much freedom as possible to translate my text into images. I would give her feedback on each page as they were finished, mostly to do with small details and especially our mutual desire to avoid visual Japanese clichés. Raffaella approached the task completely fearlessly and with single-minded dedication. The result demonstrates her fantastic versatility as an artist, which I like to think also reflects the novel as a whole.

Is *On the edge of the world man sits and laughs* a political novel? Is it a sort of indictment? A reckoning, even?

Or is it a declaration of love for humanity?

All of the above! I was thirty when I started working on this novel. Let's call it a preliminary résumé.



ENZYKLOPÄDIEN EINES ICHS

VON
PAULETTE BLANCHARD

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
LOUIS DE NEUFVILLE

PARIS, 1897



Charlière

Paris, 1870. Paulette, a wilful seventeen-year-old filled with a boundless hunger for life, feels stifled by the narrow confines of her bourgeois existence. Everyone around her seems determined to snuff out her passions and steer her into a life befitting her class and gender. But then, with the uprising in 1871 and the Paris Commune, she finally sees a way out. The young woman learns that it is possible to push back against the status quo. But the communist experiment ends in carnage. Fleeing her sorrow, Paulette travels to Vienna where the 1873 World Expo is being held, and where she meets Tetsuo, a young man from Japan and her future husband. With him, she turns her back on Europe and becomes one of the first European women to move to Meiji-period Japan, which, after two hundred years of isolation, is beginning to open itself up to the West and is about to change profoundly.

yschen Schock, mit welchem ich den Muskel des Lachens stimu-
Da ließ Monsieur Duchenne zur Erleichterung aller Anwesen-
und entfernte die Stäbe
te ungläubig sein Gesicht
den Teufel selbst wieder
n?», fragte Monsieur Du
rinnere, Monsieur Duch
önne schön werden, sel
dieser zurück. »Ganz r
heit, allein durch das al
selbst das meine?« »Nu
das Ihre zeigt im Verbo
irkten mit einem Mal
fortsetzten! »Ich bitte
ich in die schöne Heler
en?« Und Monsieur E
Das Gesicht bewahre

Wer weiß, vielleicht kann ich überholen, und dann, von ganz vorne, einen Blick zurück wagen. Vielleicht sehe ich dann die Linien, die Wege und Verläufe. Vielleicht, wer weiß, setzt sich alles wieder zusammen.

2. Heute spazierte ich durch die Praterauen, die Hauptallee entlang, auf der die feine Wiener Gesellschaft promenierte, und sah da und dort, auf eigens dafür angelegten Bahnen, elegante Herren auf riesenhaften Velozipeden, wie sie zwei Meter über der Erde auf ihren Satteln schwebten, mit ihren Füßen, fernab des Bodens, in die Pedale traten und, erst einmal in Fahrt, mit Leichtigkeit selbst an den Pferdefuhrwerken vorüberstoben. Ein schwindelfreies Volk der Akrobaten! Die Vorderräder dieser neomodischen englischen Gefährte, mit leichten Drahtspeichen versehen statt mit schweren Eisenstreben, überragen die Hinterräder um ein Vielfaches. Je größer das Rad, desto höher die Geschwindigkeit, so klärte man mich bereitwillig auf. Wird man also, so frage ich mich, in einigen Jahren schon auf Hochrädern fahren, so titanenhaft, dass man über die Baumwipfel und Häuserreihen wird hinwegblicken können? Man würde in diesem Fall Stechbrillen benötigen, die es erlauben, Hindernisse auf der fern unter einem liegenden Straßenschlucht zu erspähen. Und um auf- und abzustiegen bedürfte es eigens konstruierter Aufzüge. (Es bliebe zu hoffen, dass diese funktionstüchtiger wären als jener des hiesigen Industriepalasts.) Wagemutige würden kurzerhand über die Dachsimse auf ihre rasenden Räder springen und mit Fallschirmen, die sie in modischen Taschen auf dem Rücken trügen, von oben herab auf die Boulevards herabgleiten, um sich in den schicken Boutiquen, vom Rausch der Geschwindigkeit sich erholend, ein wenig zu zerstreuen.

ARMES (Waffen) — Ich betrete den Pavillon, sehe bloß aus der Ferne die Krupp'schen Kanonen und muss denken: Sind es nicht dieselben, die auf Paris zeigten? Da wird mir schwindlig, und es ergreift mich eine so entsetzliche Furcht, dass ich die Flucht ergreife. Ich höre Schüsse widerhallen, sehe die toten Leiber überall auf der Erde. Da warte ich durch Blut. Ist es deines, Yann? Oder deines, Clementine? Oder etwa deines, kleiner Jules? Und wenn gleich mir alle Kräfte schwinden, wage ich es nicht, auch nur kurz zu halten, mich umzuwenden, laufe vielmehr mit meinen fühllosen Beinen in einem fort bis nach meinem Quartier,

FORNICATION (Unzucht) — Mir ist zum Heulen zumute! Zum Lachen! Mir ist zum Schreien. Ich glaube zu ersticken. Ach was, Pausette, atmen, atmen. Nein, ich wünschte, die Ärzte kämen und brächten mich in die Salpêtrière, dann erschiene mir der Irrsinn wenigstens all das zu verstehen!

schließe mich in mein Zimmer ein, werfe mich aufs Bett, liege dort, zitternd, in Schweiß getränkt, starre an die Decke, wo die schwarzen Schmetterlinge flattern über dem brennenden Paris, warte und bitte, dass der Spuk wieder ein Ende nähme, die grässlichen Bilder wieder verschwänden!

ARRIVÉE (Ankunft) — 1. Sechs Uhr morgens. Ein schmaler Streifen Helle am Horizont. Genug für mich, danach zu greifen. Die Lokomotive stößt ihre Schreie aus, nein, es sind keine Jubelrufe. Wir rollen also in die Bahnhofshalle ein. Das Quietschen der Bremsen so grell, Eisen auf Eisen, ich muss mir die Ohren bedecken. Es zischt, es faucht. Meine Haut ist so dünn dieser Tage! Man gibt Signale. Alles drängt sich nun in den Gängen, die Gesichter platt an die Fensterscheiben gedrückt, wenigstens kaum mehr zu sehen ist als Finsternis. Die Reihe der Gaslaternen längs der Bahnsteige. Ob ich mir telegrafisch in der letzten Station denn keinen Fiaker bestellt hätte?, fragt mich die Triesterin, lächelt überlegen, da sie mit der Zeit zu gehen weiß. Nein? Man wirft mir mitleidige Blicke zu. Nun denn, viel Glück!, sagt sie. Und adieu! Die Türen auf. Mitten hinein in das Gewirr aus fiebrigen Stimmen und Beinen. Ich schnappe nach Luft. Vielmehr nach Staub. Man dreht sich im Kreis, man steigt sich auf die Füße. Rundum Balkengerüste. Der Bahnhof ist noch nicht einmal fertiggestellt. Es riecht nach Ölfarbe und Terpentin, nach Mehrarbeit und Erschöpfung. Da finde ich ein improvisiertes Schild: Gepäckshalle. Gaslampen weisen mir den Weg. Am Ausgang des Perrons händigen dazu berufene Organe Metallmarken aus, mit Nummern der bereitstehenden Fuhrwerke. Ich gehe mit der Menge. Und während ein Träger mein Gepäck geschickt durch die Halle manövriert, zwischen Rollwägen, forsch schreitenden Herren, trippelnden Damen, tollenden Kindern, aufdringlichen Hotelwerbern und allerlei Hausierern und Krämern, fällt mir mein Traum wieder ein. Der Lokführer und der Heizer sind abgesprungen. Der Zug rast in wilder Fahrt durch die Nacht, führerlos, mit glühender Feuerbüchse und brodelndem Dampfkessel, in voller Fahrt durch die Bahnhöfe, immer schneller und schneller, durch Tunnel, über Brücken, kreischend, nimmersatt. Doch genug! Draußen dämmert es. Ein weiter Platz. Der Bahnhof steht am Rande der Stadt, beinahe im Nirgendwo. Ich bin dar-

Japan, 2011. Jona is an artist, thirty, anaemic, androgynous, a traveller between genders. His life is informed by his search for encounter, his yearning for an other, a 'you'. Ever since Chantal, his 'rhapsodic lover', suddenly disappeared, he has been obsessed with the idea of finding her again. In search of this woman, twenty years his senior, he travels to Japan. After a desperate night's lovemaking, in a Tokyo high-rise he is caught in the great Tohoku earthquake. Wandering alone through the streets of the city that has suddenly come to a standstill, on a big screen overhead he sees the approaching tsunami. At first he assumes it must be something from a movie, but shortly thereafter he hears the news of the nuclear disaster...

ich mit Chantal tatsächlich einem über jede Verführung erhaben, lustfeindlichen Geistmenschen begegnet war, brach der Bann, und wir liebten uns, ohne noch einen klaren Gedanken fassen zu können, auf dem Schreibtisch ihres Universitätsbüros. Die mäd-

ekt durch ihr
a verstreuten
chte, nur um
em Boden zu
es die nahen,
e und Diskus-
r Körper und
Chantal stets

Jona Jonas Terrain vague

ERZÄHLUNG

e – etwas an-
Dünnhäutig-
anchmal zu
stundenlang
egen bleiben
si entlassen –
nal hatte sie
i. Nachts war
ihrem Kopf
nft bändigen
, die Nerven.
e sogenannte

es alte, mehr-
nte, in einer
ir benennbar
Unmittelbar
n, mir mitge-
e unerwartet

an, es tue ihr leid, aber sie mit
und wolle stattdessen nach Hau-
damals meiner Beharrlichkeit u-
wir uns noch zu einem Kaffee u-
in der Stadt trafen, bevor Chant-
dort aber statt ihrer Wohnung n-
die Wolken von Staub sich schlie-
Feuerwehr zu legen begannen –
Ort –, war zu erkennen, dass da-
der vordere Teil weggebrochen
ein Puppenhaus. Auch Chantals
Straße aus einsehen, doch jene
fehlte. Es lag, wie die zwei alten
graben. Lange standen wir da un-
blickten wir auf das, was Chant-
Welt« genannt hatte.

- 9 -

Es ist etwas nicht da. Es gibt etw-
Vielleicht war das auch der
Es war unvernünftig, impulsiv, i-
te ich Anhaltspunkte, wo Chant-
Vorstellung davon, was mich in
verständigen oder was ich, war
tun würde. Geld hatte ich kaum,
Vorhaben. Tokio, so hatte ich ers-
sei die teuerste Stadt der Welt. I-
Termine ab, noch gab ich irgen-
scheid. Vielmehr packte ich eil-
eine Tasche, schrieb eine kurz-
mit der Bitte, sich um meine Ka-
denselben Tag ein bizarr über-

There are several reasons why climate scientist Chantal Blanchard decides to disappear: her destructive love for the much-younger Jona, news of a spectacular discovery of human skeletal remains, and the emergence of her great-great-grandmother Paulette's body from the receding glacier. Following in her footsteps takes her from Siberia to Japan. In her travel notebooks Chantal reflects ironically on the fragmented relationship between the self and the world. She tries in vain to find a way out of the narcissistic spiral of her thoughts and back to reality. In a cynical pamphlet entitled *Destroy Yourselves!*, she rails against her ridiculous despair and the place of the human in the cosmos.



Ich bin kein Hamlet. Und spreche doch zu einem Knochen.
Was grindest du mir, hohler Schädel, her? Ich tue es jenem Dadaisten
gleich, der sich in den Totenkopf einer jungen Frau verliebte –
gerade einmal zweiundzwanzig, als sie 1811 an der Schwindsucht
starb. Er fand den Knochen in einer alten Kapelle, trug ihn jahrelang
mit sich herum. Auf der Schädeldecke waren Name und Geburts-
ort verzeichnet, die Backenknochen mit Rosen und Vergissmeinnicht
bemalt. Er sei, so schrieb er, in die 133jährige recht vernarrt und
könne sich nicht von ihr trennen.

DIE LIEBE ein Unfall.

*Ein inneres Desaster,
ein Kollaps der Vernunft,
ein Zusammenbruch
alles Denkens und Fühlens.*

Wie alt bist du,
Kind von Gyokusendo?
Wie lange hat dich
die Erde konserviert?
Tausend Jahre?
Dreißigtausend?
Hunderttausend?

Eine Million?

Kann es denn sein?
Bist du das, wofür ich dich halte?
Was wäre dann zu tun?
Was würde das bedeuten?

Gefällt dir die
Geschichte, Schädel?
Hast du jemals geliebt?
Hast du?

Du verwirrst mich, Skelett. Ich habe dich genau mit der Lupe
betrachtet. Ach was! Ich habe dich gescannt und dreifach, fünffach,
zwanzigfach vergrößert. Dein Kopf bleibt dabei klein wie eine
unreife Frucht. Er hat dieselben Merkmale wie der von Flores.
Die flach gewölbte Schädeldecke, die leicht vergrößerten Überaugen-
wülste, die Wangenbeine, die Jochbögen, die Oberkiefer und Unter-
kiefer zart wie die eines Menschen. (Aufschlussreich wäre ein
genauerer Blick auf dein Gebiss. Wo klappert es heute?) Wie der
Kopf eines Säuglings. Verstörend klein. Alles in allem: Der Schädel
eines Frühmenschen. Als wärest du zwei Millionen Jahre alt.
Oder drei? Ein verzweigter *Homo-erectus*-Schädel? Oder der eines
Australopithecus? Als wäre Lucy, die Wunderbare, deine ältere
Schwester. Kennst du sie, ja? Sag mir, wann wanderten die ersten
Menschen auf den japanischen Inseln ein? Und wie groß ist dein
Skelett? Vielleicht etwa einen Meter? Und diese langen Äffchen-
arme. Als würdest du mit einem Arm noch an den Bäumen hängen.
Kann es sein?

ist oder so etwas Ähnliches. Und zur Sicherheit habe ich
jedenfalls dann noch nachgefragt: Oder dass ich viel zu viel
rede? Und sie hat mich angeschaut mit ihrem Beste-Mama-der-
Welt-Lächeln und hat mir geantwortet: Du bist ein sehr wichtiger

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AKIOS
AUFZEICHNUNGEN

AKIO
ITÔ

(Transkription)

Akio is a precocious and sparkling nine-year-old. He lives with his great-grandmother Hibaba, his parents and his mute little sister Keiko in a small coastal town in northern Japan. In the 1970s his grandparents had moved to Fukushima prefecture, which was booming on account of the nuclear power station: jobs, economic growth, and great natural beauty. In March 2011 the earth shakes and the black tsunami washes the house and the two children away. Left to fend for themselves, they set off on a days-long journey along the wrecked coastline. Akio's story is the transcript of his monologues recorded on his Dictaphone as a way to keep his fear at bay.

It is a mysterious pain that causes the world around Abra, a young Japanese woman, to come apart at the seams: the 'pain in the machine', namely in her mechanical prosthetic arm. She sets off on a vertiginous journey through Tokyo which gradually strays from the coordinates of reality; a descent into hell through cultural archives, simulations, and strange loops of the self. *The Blissful Isles* is about the idling search for a foothold and the loss of the other in a mediatised world. For this volume, Philipp Weiss's text was translated into images by the Viennese artist Raffaella Schöbitz.



Cool Cafe



Ich
Laufe durch
die Stadt

Die Schmerzen bleiben.



Philipp Weiss was born in 1982 in Vienna. He studied German and Philosophy and has published theatre plays and short stories, for which he has received multiple awards. In 2009, he took part in the competition for the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize with his text *Blätterliebe*. In 2011, he was awarded the Hans Gratzler Stipend for his play *Allerwelt*, which premiered at the Schauspielhaus in Vienna, where he was writer in residence during the 2013/14 season. His play *Ein schöner Hase ist meistens der Einzelle* won the prize at the 2015 *Journées de Lyon des Auteurs de Théâtre*, and was published in French by Éditions Théâtrales (Montreuil). *On the edge of the world man sits and laughs* is his first novel. In 2018, he has been awarded the Literary Prize of the Jürgen Ponto Foundation.

Raffaella Schöbitz was born in 1987 in Korneuburg. She studied theatre, film, and media in Vienna, as well as film studies and art history in Berlin. She is currently a freelance author, playwright and illustrator. Her work has appeared in *Revolver: Zeitschrift für Film* and in *Deadline: Das Filmmagazin*, among others. She is a member of the nicht.THEATER ensemble. Her plays *Zugvögel* (2014) and *Im Mutterbauch war's früher besser* (2015) are published by the Kaiser Bühnenverlag. She is also the author of several children's books, including *Knollnase* and *Roboter haben's auch nicht leicht*, which she also illustrated. She has received multiple awards for her work, e.g. the DIXI children's literature award for illustration (2015) as well as grants from the BKA Kunst und Kultur (2016, 2017). In 2017 she was a fellow of the Peter Suhrkamp Foundation. She often works with mixed media collage, otherwise mostly with ink, watercolour, charcoal and coloured pencils.

One thousand pages, five volumes—one novel. In this stunning début, Philipp Weiss tells the story of the transformation of the world in the Anthropocene, the new epoch in the history of the Earth in which the human has become the central formative force. From France to Japan, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, in the form of an encyclopaedia, a novella, a notebook, an audio transcript, and a comic, this bold novel presents a panorama of our fleeting reality. The Paris Commune in 1871, the 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima, the catastrophes in the history of the Earth and the event of love. How does one come to terms with the unpredictable? And what does the future hold for humanity?