

Caitríona Leahy / Marcel Illetschko (Hg.)

Mapping Ransmayr

Kartierungsversuche zum Werk von
Christoph Ransmayr





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Mit einer Abbildung

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Inhalt

Vorwort	7
Caitríona Leahy (Dublin) / Marcel Illetschko (Salzburg) Introduction: Stargazing, Worldmaking and Worldmapping. The human and inhuman, the poetical and geographical dimensions of Christoph Ransmayr's work	9
Hermann Dorowin (Perugia) Der Reporter und die Kunst. Zu Christoph Ransmayrs Anfängen in der Zeitschrift „Extrablatt“	43
Doren Wohleben (Marburg) Carmen perpetuum. Zur Idee der Vollendung in Ovids Metamorphosen und Christoph Ransmayrs Romanen <i>Die letzte Welt</i> sowie <i>Cox oder Der Lauf der Zeit</i>	61
Jill Thielsen (Kiel) Fakt und Fiktion, Chronist und Dichter. Zur Erzählinstanz in Christoph Ransmayrs <i>Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis</i>	77
Andreas Stuhlmann (Edmonton) Mapping the Way to Surabaya. Christoph Ransmayr's Travelogues <i>Der Weg nach Surabaya</i> and <i>Atlas eines ängstlichen Mannes</i>	97
Günther Schaunig (Wien) Panhumanes Schreiben. Gemeinschaftsstiftung und Verewigungsstrategien im Werk von Christoph Ransmayr	119
Gilbert Carr (Dublin) Ice and fire: From Christoph Ransmayr to Ernst Weiß	135

Daniela Henke (Freiburg im Breisgau)	
Den Menschen kartographieren. Zu Funktion und Bedeutung der Stein-, Vogel- und Pflanzensymbole bei Christoph Ransmayr	151
Anna-Lena Eick (Augsburg)	
Narratives Mapping – Grenzen und Möglichkeiten der literarischen Bearbeitung historischer Stoffe. Christoph Ransmayrs <i>Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis</i> als Auflösung der großen Geschichte in Möglichkeitsformen einzelner Geschichten	169
Arno Herberth (Wien)	
Die Relationen von Fremdem und Eigenem in Christoph Ransmayrs <i>Der Weg nach Surabaya</i>	193
Attila Bombitz (Szeged)	
Around the world. Zum Werk von Christoph Ransmayr	201
Beiträgerinnen und Beiträger	211

Vorwort

Tagungsband zur Konferenz *Mapping Ransmayr – Konferenz und Lesung*
16.–17.6.2016, Trinity College Dublin

Der Großteil der Beiträge gibt den Forschungsstand von 2017 wieder.

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Caitríona Leahy (Dublin) / Marcel Illetschko (Salzburg)

Introduction: Stargazing, Worldmaking and Worldmapping. The human and inhuman, the poetical and geographical dimensions of Christoph Ransmayr's work

Stargazing and worldmapping: the human and inhuman dimensions of Christoph Ransmayr's work

Stargazing in Dublin with O'Casey

When the drunken, dreaming hero of Seán O'Casey's (almost) hundred year old play *Juno and the Paycock* lifts his head from the grinding poverty that earths his existence to gaze into the free-floating openness above him, he utters one of the great questions of Irish literature: "what is the stars, what is the stars?" (O'Casey 1980, 23). It is, of itself, a sparkling question, twinkling brightly with all the fun and the tragedy, the irony and provocation that its context can muster. "What is the stars?" indeed: a question for religion, for science, for poets and dreamers and philosophers. It is not, however, a natural or proper question for the disenfranchised characters of the play, for those who are relentlessly bound and grounded by earthy, earthly demands. The poor are disenfranchised then not just materially and politically, but disenfranchised because the big existential questions are deemed not theirs to proclaim. For them, the stars are out of bounds. And out of bounds then too, are the wonderment that stars bestow, the impossible knowledge they dangle and the horizons they stretch. To be poor is to have lost sight of the stars, to have one's eyes fixed firmly to the binding, grounding earth. To ask about the stars, therefore, is no innocent question, no mere twinkle question; it is a question about all the dimensions of apprehension that bind heaven and earth to one another. These are the dimensions of the human condition in its material, physical, social, psychological and philosophical need. In these human and inhuman dimensions, in between heaven and earth, between dreaming and drudgery, all cartographers and all star-gazers ply their trades. And as they gaze, they don't just map their environment, near and far, they also forge the instruments of our apprehension – our theological, philosophical, astrological, geological, and, above all, our poetic narratives.

In the Irish context, O'Casey's question has become a proxy for the problem of literature's role in national history, which for centuries was dominated by the struggle for independence from British rule. His play recreates a familiar landscape: the colonial power structure and the generalised poverty of vast swathes of the Irish population shape an environment in which the gap between material life and the life of the mind seems great. For O'Casey the "what is the stars?" question, planted in the poverty of inner-city Dublin is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is a question asked by those who have abdicated their domestic responsibilities in favour of alcohol induced flight into the imagination – it is literature as a way out of life. On the other hand, it raises and is counteracted by a further question, namely: what remains to those so materially impoverished except the capacity to dream? "We are all in the gutter", says Lord Darlington in the Oscar Wilde play *Lady Windermere's Fan*, "but some of us are looking at the stars" (Wilde 1966, 417). If the stars mark the outer reaches of our horizon, the place where knowledge pushes against the great unknown, and where the imagination rushes in to fill that void, O'Casey suggests that dreaming and storytelling might come at the human cost of real life neglect. At the same time, storytelling might be the very medium of insight into the political and social injustices that curtail people's real lives.

All of this seems a long way from Ransmayr's kind of writing, and so it is. Ransmayr comes to the stars by a very different route, but shares with O'Casey an acute interest in the relationship between reality and the imagination, and more specifically, the role of storytelling in what we call reality. Where O'Casey posits a dichotomy between dreaming and living that is complicated by the fact that the dichotomy itself is offered in literary form, Ransmayr's work is forthright in its defence of art. Here, the real and the imagined are woven together in such a way that they are fundamentally inseparable from the outset. It is that inseparability that constitutes the fabric of his narrative and is a thematic focus of so many works. It is also a thematic focus in essays by Hermann Dorowin, Jill Thielsen and Anna-Lena Eick in this volume.

The entwinement of the real and the imagined is also present in Ransmayr's account of his interest in the stars in *Bericht am Feuer. Gespräche, E-Mails und Telefonate zum Werk von Christoph Ransmayr*, where the dimensions of human existence – its external borders and its internal means of orientation – are bound up ab initio with our relationship to the stars. When the schoolboy Ransmayr is given a present of Nietzsche's collected works, one sentence jumps out at him: "Solange du die Sterne noch empfindest als ein 'Über dir', fehlt dir der Blick des Erkennenden".¹ This develops into the insight that understanding our position

1 *Bericht am Feuer. Gespräche, E-Mails und Telefonate zum Werk von Christoph Ransmayr*, ed.

vis à vis the stars is the beginning of human understanding and orientation per se:

Den Blick zu heben war schließlich nur eine Möglichkeit von vielen. Der Himmel konnte plötzlich auch Abgrund sein oder etwas jenseits von unten und oben. [...] Ich habe erlebt, daß, was oben und was unten ist, selbst Himmel und Hölle, menschliche Erfindungen sind, die nur wenig mit der Realität zu tun haben (BaF, 27–28).

And then, as if in response to O’Casey’s concern with whether the stars and literature are the proper concern of those in the gutter, he continues:

Es heißt, unsere Probleme seien doch sozialer, politischer, bestenfalls ästhetischer Natur. Was gehen uns also die Sterne an? Das soll allein Sache der Astronomen und Physiker sein. Dabei ist doch unabweisbar: Wir sind mittendrin. [...] Wenn man fragt: Was ist eine Geschichte, was ist die eigene Geschichte und was die der anderen, wo beginnt eine Geschichte, und wo endet sie? Wenn man also in Geschichten denkt, klingt selbstverständlich immer die Frage mit, woher wir kommen und wohin es mit uns geht. Dann muß ich irgendwann aber auch den Kopf heben oder mich sonstwie bewegen und danach fragen, in welchen Räumen sich unsere Existenz ereignet. So werden allmählich die fernsten Weiten, selbst wenn es um Lichtjahre geht, Maßstäbe unserer Lebensrealität (BaF, 28–29).

In a world so mapped, stories are central to reality and the stars are central to stories, both as orientation and as substance. Moreover, the scientific reality of the stars – the sheer magnitude of the dimensions they confront us with and the narrative of formation and decay they embody – seems to point disparagingly at the small-minded organisational fictions that have structured and orientated our knowledge for too long, hiding their ideology behind a veil of truth. In revealing so much of our knowledge, born of such narratives, to be untruthful, in the sense that it does not map onto the bigger picture reality, the stars thus open our eyes to the value of other kinds of fictions. These are the fictions of Ransmayr’s re-imagined worlds – the kinds that map and measure in the light of the stars. Such fictions are unconcerned with the authority of their own truth, where truth is reduced to a line between history and fiction. Here a bigger truth is at stake, one concerned instead with what it is about the human condition that literature so conceived can bring to light.

Insa Wilke. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2014, 26–27. All further references are marked BaF and page number in the text.

Stargazing in Barjac with Kiefer

In the spring and summer of 2000 and 2001 Ransmayr visited the visual artist, Anselm Kiefer, in his vast indoor and outdoor studio complex carved into the landscape of the Cevennes in southern France. The visits are recounted in the essay *Der Ungeborene oder Die Himmelsareale des Anselm Kiefer*, later published in the catalogue of Kiefer's Basel exhibition *Die sieben Himmelspaläste 1973–2001* as well as in Ransmayr's own series of publications entitled *Spielformen des Erzählens*. As so often with Ransmayr, the essay straddles forms and functions. It is, at one level, an informed layperson's answer to O'Casey's question "What is the stars?", but it is more interesting as a contextualisation of the question than an answer to it. It is less interested in physics than in where and why the question might arise in the first place, how it imposes itself on our human horizons, how it steers our seeing and our making – our poesis – in the widest sense. In Ransmayr's hands, the "What is the stars?" question is thus fundamental in two respects: fundamental to our earth-bound situation as we make sense of our surroundings, and fundamental to our accounts of that situation across the landscape of science and literature. More specifically, Ransmayr's account of Kiefer's living and working between the earth and the sky captures something essential in the evolving totality of his own writing, because he sees in Kiefer – though not uncritically so – a fellow worldmaker.

Great writers are worldmakers, as Andreas Stuhlmann reminds us in this volume, and the term makes a good starting point for us in mapping Ransmayr's mapping. It also underpins the bird's-eye view adopted in Attila Bombitz's contribution. It is a good starting point, because it is important to take in from the outset the magnitude and ambition of the task: Ransmayr makes a new world, by observing the given one. Or put differently, the world he observes is re-made in being observed. It is re-made in being transposed from life into literature and in having the laws which govern it – the laws of physics, of time and space, of perception, of human nature, of nature – stretched, bent, probed, sped up, slowed down, amplified and made visible in their effects and affects. There is something primal about this worldmaking, something rooted in the first principles of both creation and creativity, both the world of nature and the world of books.

Kiefer's worldmaking fascinates Ransmayr, but he observes the act of creation, fascination notwithstanding, at a distance. The essay, *Der Ungeborene*, recounts a night-time walk in Kiefer's grounds in the company of Kiefer himself – referred to in Ransmayr's text as a "Meister aus Deutschland"² – and his dogs, Castor and Pollux. It recounts, too, an earlier walk in which a bulldozer, as dictated by Kiefer,

2 The reference here is to Paul Celan's poem, *Todesfuge*, which features frequently in Kiefer's artworks.

carved out the path on which the artist now leads Ransmayr and his party through the wilderness. In the course of a few pages here, Ransmayr traces in broad brush strokes the thematic territory that his other work explores more comprehensively. He follows in the steps of Kiefer through the jungle – “das hier ist die Wildnis”³ – as Kiefer gives a tour of his own creation, and an account of an act of conquest and creation that is ongoing. It is both demonstration and narrative, explicitly primitive and demiurgic: “Castor! Pollux! Hierher!” (DU, 7) orders Kiefer, apparently bending the heavens to his will. But as always in Ransmayr, it is not the event, but the telling of the event that shapes its significance, and Kiefer’s telling is encased within Ransmayr’s. Ransmayr’s story of the walk ensures that the ironic gap between Kiefer’s divine or demonic gestures and his bulldozer, between the magnitude of the stars and the name of the dogs, between the natural world and its telling in art and in stories is all the time to the fore. Unlike Kiefer, Ransmayr does not wrap the world around his own axis.

Kiefer’s map of the territory between the earth and the sky is a very specific one and bears a proper name:

Fludd! ruft unser Gastgeber einen Namen in die Dunkelheit zurück: Von Robert Fludd, dem in der Grafschaft Kent geborenen Mystiker des 17. Jahrhunderts, habe er zu sehen gelernt, daß jeder Pflanze, ja vielleicht jeder organischen Struktur eine Figur am Firmament zugeordnet sei, eine Makrokosmische Entsprechung für alle Gestalten der terrestrischen Flora – jeder Blüte, jedem Rhizom, jedem Samenkorn ein Stern (DU, 11).

Inspired by and in imitation of Fludd’s theory of a world bounded and defined by imitation, likeness and relationships, Kiefer’s work reproduces a world in which all things find reflection in all others. All the earth is reflected in the sky, the sky in the earth, and between those two mirrors all things are mapped and accounted for. The constellations he draws in the earth with his bulldozer form an earthly version of the constellations above, while his canvasses feature plants suspended from painted starscapes. They are, says Ransmayr, “Sternbilder, Wunschbilder, Trugbilder” (DU, 11); “Wunschbilder”, because the names and stories of the stars originated not in the heavens, but in our heads; “Trugbilder”, because our names and maps and images of the stars seal in and conceal behind their flat surfaces a world of infinite texture and metamorphosis. For Ransmayr, behind the two-dimensional stillness of the night sky and the Kiefer image churns the violence of “Materie” coming into being, “Feuersäulen” and “Kernfusionen”, the endless, turbulent business of *Schichten*, *Geschichte*, *Geschichten* emerging from the furnace of galactic formation. This is life as it takes shape behind Kiefer’s images of earth and stars.

3 Christoph Ransmayr, *Der Ungeborene oder Die Himmelsareale des Anselm Kiefer*, 7. All further references are marked DU and page number in the text.

Ransmayr's version of the world between the earth and the stars, between the *Schichten* of the earth, the *Geschichte* of human and inhuman time and the *Geschichten* that aspire to weave narratives of both has more mystery than Kiefer's and is more attentive to the import of O'Casey's awed question. O'Casey challenges us to read the stars in the light of the human, to tread the earth in the light of our dreams and to understand that all stories of human existence participate in both politics and nature – the nature of the natural world and the nature of the human condition. To be clear: Ransmayr and O'Casey are not alike, but the star question posed by both points in both cases to these defining dimensions of human experience: our environment, our history and our stories. Regardless of the specifics of such literary historical connections or coincidences, the positing of the sky as the horizon of human vision and understanding, as well as human habitation and space, is no coincidence. The sky is, in a literal sense, the limit, and the stars are the means by which we make of that limit a readable map. Without the stars, there is only blackness; without features, there is no map, only whiteness.

We could say then that the night sky marks not just the end of the map in the sense that it is a horizon, but it also opens the field of cartography in the first place; it is the beginning of the map because it makes possible seeing and reading. The field of reading and the space of the map have common structural and cartographical features: they have external borders and internal structures. They have points of intersection and spaces in between, they have connections, coordinates, lines of correspondence, meridians, patterns, sets, networks. They also have symbols – a means of representing and naming – and a key that translates those symbols into meaning. Insofar as there is a difference of dimension between the symbol and the thing it represents, and between the dimensions of the map and the dimensions of the thing it renders present, there is also a scale. The scale is another kind of key that does another kind of mapping; the scale measures the space between the map and its object, between what we can read and what lies beneath or behind it.

Ransmayr's concern with the "Feuersäulen" and "Kernfusionen" that are hidden by the map or image or representation suggests a certain humility with regard to scale and to naming. Indeed, the Kiefer essay seems explicitly about these two things: the possibility of representing our space (in both senses), and the possibility of aptly naming the person who undertakes that representation. This is more complicated than might first appear. The opening paragraphs of the essay outline how Kiefer maps the earth and represents the sky, but the account of how he does so, as noted above, is framed within a story of a leader and his followers. Kiefer is followed by "Sammler [...] Galeristen oder Kommentatoren und Deuter seiner Kunst [...] das Gefolge eines Meisters aus Deutschland" (DU, 8). Kiefer is only one in a long line of those who make representations then; he

represents Fludd's representations of the earth and the sky, while his representations are interpreted and described and disseminated by those who follow him through his very own wilderness here. Ransmayr, as one of those who follow Kiefer and then present their version of him to further audiences, is but one in a line of map-makers trekking through the landscape. So on the one hand, this is the physical landscape being moulded by Kiefer to represent a particular world view; on the other hand, it is the landscape of aesthetic production and consumption. A map is made not just by conquering and describing the physical environment; a map is also made when Ransmayr reads Kiefer reading Fludd. And that map is extended when we read Ransmayr reading Kiefer.

This is a structure that is echoed repeatedly in Ransmayr's work as a whole. Adventurers and travellers are followed by others who travel in their wake; maps are followed and made as narratives are followed and made. In fact, the story told in many of his texts is – as in the Kiefer essay – the story of this following. In *Die letzte Welt* Cotta follows Naso, going in search of a disappeared author and a disappeared text; in *Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis*, Mazzini follows Weyprecht and Payer using archived documentation of their original journey; Pad follows Liam in *Der fliegende Berg*, Cox follows the Kaiser in *Cox oder Der Lauf der Zeit* and so on. In other texts there are less specific versions of followers as collectors and witnesses and tourists. What is significant is that Ransmayr's stories emerge from the distance and connection between the follower and the object of his attention, be that a sought-after person or place, or a third person who can open up a place or object to the follower. His stories are thus self-consciously about mediation, about the gaps and connections between people, and between people and their environment. They are also in their turn instruments of mediation that embed objects and images, other authors and artists, within a text that tells of them, giving them a story. *Damen und Herren unter Wasser*, *Willy Puchners Tierleben*, *Der Wolfsjäger*, for example, all make explicit the role of the collaborator in the making of a story. More than that, they point to collaboration as a matter of form, because their literary form is explicitly born of the difference and connection between two artists, as each gives the other part of the whole work.

We might extend this to say that the structure of the gift offers us one model or map of Ransmayr's aesthetic. Life – experienced or witnessed or imagined – is given to the observer or traveller or artist; it is transformed into the form of a story and then presented to an audience the members of which in turn receive, transform, re-gift to those who come later. This is one way of thinking about the Kiefer essay, namely, as a mutual exchange of gifts that then extends beyond Ransmayr and Kiefer because the *Gefolge* of both parties are now part of a new chain of creation and transformation. As we know, such collaborations have stretched and transformed the shapes that Ransmayr's stories have assumed.

And the map that plots these stretches and transformations is an important one. The series *Spielformen des Erzählens* that has emerged alongside his novels has sketched the landscape of possible forms of speaking from the tirade to the interrogation to the picture story, the duet, the gift and so on. Moreover, it has made explicit the fact that it is the possibilities and capacities of literary form that map our understanding of space and of reality.

The invention or revival of text types and literary forms is one way of populating and stretching the map of the world. There are other ways, too, in which textual or linguistic territory is discovered or recovered by being given its words: from the *fliegender Berg* narrated in *fliegenden Sätzen*, to the landscapes transposed into wordscapes in which the sparsity of the former is recouped in linguistic abundance, including of words that don't often come out to play. A further aspect of the forms of speaking is the more concretely geographical question of language. Ransmayr is a very widely translated author; like himself, his works travel well. He is also, unsurprisingly, interested in the process of transposition, as well as its function. This is described in the speech (or is it an essay?) *Verriegelte Orte, luftige Räume. Zur Kunst der Übersetzer*, as a “kostbares Instrumentarium zum Verständnis der Welt”.⁴ More memorably, in the story told in the text, translation is the vehicle that takes us out of the bathroom and into the open air, out of linguistic enclosure and into the wilds of Babylon.

Babylon is where we are when the voice of the storyteller is heard by a listener and “ins eigene Verständnis übersetzt”.⁵ Of one voice becomes many, of one book a library. Babylon is in that sense a map without end, but it begins before the act of listening that transforms the one word into the many. There is a previous act of listening in which the storyteller eavesdrops on the world, listening to its babble. This precedes the storyteller's “Verwandlung von etwas in Worte” (UB, 8), and the chain of listening and understanding that sets in motion. With the process of listening and re-telling, the world and its given languages contract and expand.

Worldmapping in Cork with Eamon

If the *Spielformen des Erzählens* texts push back the borders of the map by inventing or re-inventing forms, sometimes on the basis of an artistic collaboration, collaboration as a meridian of connection and distance between two points also operates internally in the telling of Ransmayr's stories. The very Irish

4 Christoph Ransmayr, “Verriegelte Orte, luftige Räume. Zur Kunst der Übersetzer”, 33. All further references are marked VO and page number in the text.

5 Christoph Ransmayr, “Unterwegs nach Babylon – Notizen zu einer Poetik in eigener Sache”, 7. All further references are marked UB and page number in the text.

text *Die dritte Luft oder Eine Bühne am Meer* with which Ransmayr opened the 1997 *Salzburger Festspiele* is interesting in this regard. The “Bühne am Meer” of the title refers to the now overgrown remains of a stage in the middle of a field in Cork, looking out to the Atlantic from the south west coast of Ireland close to what was Ransmayr’s own home for many years. The story of the stage on which the local people commemorated, celebrated and mourned their own history in song and dance and story – all this under the sign of *Verwandlung* of life into art – is related to Ransmayr by his friend Eamon, whose mother bought the field when its owner, Liam O’Shea, emigrated. In emigrating – “irgendwo im Westen Australiens *verschwand* [Liam]”⁶ – O’Shea entered into the fate of many of the characters in the stories and songs performed on his stage. In telling his story and that of the stage, Ransmayr’s narrator in turn places himself in a long line of storytellers – followers and leaders – who make stories and songs out of life, who perform them and bequeath them and who, in so doing, become part of that story themselves. From the generations of emigrants remembered in stories to the generations who rehearsed them before entering and extending them, time is marked, history made and lives remembered in a chain of transmission. In *Die dritte Luft*, the lynchpin of the story, connecting the performances on the open-air stage to the present story of their demise, is the figure of Eamon’s mother. She lies at the time of telling on her deathbed, hovering between life and death, already beyond language, “beinah schon verschwunden” (DdL, 27). The narrator accompanies Eamon to visit her and they wonder if, behind her open eyes, with so much of her human definition already erased, she has retained the capacity to remember; and if so, if her mind has returned to the stage in the field and the stories performed on it, stories of disappearance and remembrance, like the one she is currently performing and the one of which she is becoming part.

This is Ransmayr’s worldmapping in miniature and writ large: it tells the story of life becoming story becoming life, as the baton of listening and speaking, following and leading, appearing and disappearing is passed down through generations and across borders. Here the dimensions of time and space are the product of the act of storytelling itself, and the stories and their telling suggest that our understanding of time and space is insufficiently informed by the stars – in other words, by the matter of physics and the matter of the imagination. It is, in both senses of the word, the dimensions of these matters that grant the story of Eamon’s mother its proper significance, that is to say, its proper transcendence of its own time and place. It is these dimensions, too, that set the parameters of both Kiefer’s artworks and Ransmayr’s account of them: “Wie groß oder wie klein

6 Christoph Ransmayr, *Die dritte Luft oder Eine Bühne am Meer*, 24 [my emphasis, C. L.]. All further references are marked DdL and page number in the text.

können Kunstwerke vor den Dimensionen der Wirklichkeit sein – oder vor den Maßstäben unserer Träume?“ (DU, 27)

Does the version of worldmaking that is mapped (for example) in *Die dritte Luft* as witnessing, performing and disappearing into what one has co-created in an act of collaboration, have a name or an origin? In that text, while Eamon’s (unnamed) mother is the focal point, she is not the origin of the story to which she gives rise. She simply makes visible the chain of performance and disappearance of which she is part. This mesh of life and art has no origin or endpoint and no owner: “Wem gehört eine Bühne? Doch wohl immer nur denen, die auf ihr erscheinen.” (DdL, 24) It comes to life in the marking of a life, when someone bears witness to a disappearance; it ends in exactly the same way, at Eamon’s mother’s deathbed, witnessed by Ransmayr’s storytelling narrator. The vignette, poignantly drawn and intensely personal, is at the same time an illustration of the most impersonal of forces and the biggest of pictures.

The Kiefer essay, while also evoking the chains that bind art to life and transcend the coordinates of a particular time and place is, in contrast, from the outset, in search of a name for its protagonist. Kiefer is not just the means by which such chains become visible to the cartographer, he is also a designated origin and endpoint. Designated, he bears a sign. He is “Gastgeber” to his followers, “Herr” to his dogs, a “Meister aus Deutschland”, a “Freund des Bleis”, “ein Lehrer”, “ein Kind”. But it is the title of the essay that settles on Kiefer’s proper designation: *Der Ungeborene*. The plural unborn, *Die Ungeborenen*, appears in the essay as the title of an artwork in which miniature smocks are attached to a map of the sky amidst the names of the stars. The unborn are those who do not yet, or who have not worn these clothes; the clothes themselves symbolise, according to Kiefer, the realm of the possible. It is this realm which is the true measure of the real. The vastness of the possible, the innumerable unborn, not yet having taken shape in space and time, dwarf even the enormity of the stars and the map of the sky. But the human unborn, waiting for their time and space, participate in the same reality as the stars and the same reality as that being forged in Barjac by the artist and his bulldozer:

Wunderbar, sagt unser Gastgeber, die bloße Möglichkeit, alles, auf seine Gestaltung, Verwirklichung und Vollendung noch Wartende, hier, in unserem Leben, wie dort draußen, im Raum, wunderbar – (DU, 30).

It is Ransmayr who calls this “Gastgeber” himself unborn, belonging to those not yet shaped and grounded and having coordinates. Kiefer, the unborn, says Ransmayr, makes artworks that bring himself into being as he who dwells outside of being.

In Kiefer’s work “the unborn” as name and title is ubiquitous; it is the name of many different artworks and symbols from unworn clothes to flowers to ferns to

stars to resin embryos. In other words, it does not name a singular given thing or have particular coordinates. For the cartographer therefore, like many of Kiefer's names and symbols, it is disorientating. Ransmayr's interest in the unborn, like Kiefer's, is also dispersed across various works. But if the emphasis in Kiefer is on denying the singularity of the name or title or sign, for Ransmayr the very opposite is true. For Ransmayr, it is the specificity of a given name in a given time and place that is to the fore, and this is at the very heart of his interest in the stars. His cosmic backdrops are not the means by which the singular disappears, as is the case for Kiefer, rather they are the means by which the singular becomes properly visible. It is the time of nature that makes properly perceptible human time and human space. "Das Schicksal und Leben des Einzelnen erscheint nirgendwo kostbarer als im schwarzen, im Leeren Raum" (UB, 17), he argues, in the 2012 *Tübinger Poetik Vorlesungen*, shared with Raoul Schrott. A short time later he describes the coming into being of the singular life in the opening sentences of a story as follows:

Mit den ersten Sätzen hat sich der Erzähler von der unendlichen Zahl aller Möglichkeiten einer Geschichte gelöst und sich für eine einzige, für seine Möglichkeit entscheiden, und hat unter allen möglichen Schauplätzen, Zeiten und Personen seinen Platz, seine Zeit, seine Gestalt gefunden. [...] er hat seine Geschichte begonnen, seine einzige, unverwechselbare Geschichte und entdeckt in ihr nach und nach alles was er von der Welt weiß, was er in ihr erlebt, erfahren und vielleicht erlitten hat (UB, 20).

The creative version of this making-visible occurs in every *Verwandlung* of world into word, every step into the map of the world-made-story. On the platform in West Cork, the world is transposed into word in the "Luft der Geschichten" and in the "Verzauberung des Lebens in Lieder, verwandle sich beispielsweise ein ganzes Meer in ein einziges Wort, in eine Melodie, und rausche aus diesem Wort wieder hervor" (DdL, 26). This is the defining act of the cartographer: giving a very specific piece of world its own very specific coordinates in time and place and linguistic form.

Human and inhuman dimensions

Many of the contributors to this volume – Daniele Henke, Günther Schaunig, Arno Herberth – while mapping Ransmayr's travels and his aesthetic, come face to face with the question of the human: what is its place against the backdrop of the stars, the sea, the ice, the sun, the vastness of the earth, the vastness of time? A very early waymark in this regard is *Strahlender Untergang. Ein Entwässerungsprojekt oder Die Entdeckung des Wesentlichen*, a text which reports on the evacuation of the human from the world by means that are entirely scientific, that

is to say, reducible to and predictable by physics. One of the remarkable features of the text is that the disappearance of the human is brought about by allowing the big picture cosmic forces to work directly upon it. The unmediated power of the sun is targeted at the human being and literally dissolves it. The focus here is on scale – the extraordinary power of the sun pitched against the human body. Also stressed is the evacuation of the human of its own identity and *Geschichte* before it becomes the test person. The person is to be their function and nothing further, reduced and dissolved even before the sun touches them. This facilitates their embodiment of ideology (in itself, another *Geschichte*); and renders the test person impersonal, even to themselves. The name of this person, of such a person, is “der Herr der Welt”⁷, a man no more and no less than the coordinates of a cosmic occurrence, predicted and verified.

This “Herr der Welt” seems like one important point on the map of human history, namely the point of disappearance of at least one human story. This is not just one human story, however, because what disappears here is the very possibility of an individual story, that is to say, a story that is more than predictions and their fulfilment. What disappears in the form of the “Herr der Welt”, who dies as a cipher, not as an individual, is the possibility of a story lived, owned and crafted by a unique person. With this the human per se disappears, evaporated by the power of the sun, sublated into the dictates of “die Neue Wissenschaft” (SU, 19).

In a way, many of Ransmayr’s later works might be regarded as antidotes and counter-narratives to this particular end of the road, described as a “Vorwegnahme” (SU, 17) of the future. While his physical and metaphysical backdrops are often still cosmic in scale, the focus tends to lie with the singularity of human motivation and experience playing out against that backdrop, and not with the inhuman dimensions themselves. Indeed, it is in the context of cosmic forces that the meaning of human coordinates in time, space and text are best understood.

A good example of this is Ransmayr’s most recent novel *Cox oder Der Lauf der Zeit*, which features another “Herr der Welt”, another follower and another cosmic backdrop. The “Herr der Welt” in this instance is called by many names: “Qiánlóng”, “der Kaiser”, “der Erhabene”, “der Allmächtige”, “der Herr über zehntausend Jahre”, “der Herr der Horizonte” ... his many designations indicating the effortful stretch of language to point towards rather than capture his god-like dimensions. Qiánlóng, who cannot be looked at directly and cannot be spoken to directly, cannot be measured; that is what his names convey. His wish is for Cox to invent a clock that represents this, that is to say, that measures (his)

7 Christoph Ransmayr, *Strahlender Untergang. Ein Entwässerungsprojekt oder Die Entdeckung des Wesentlichen*. 22. All further references are marked SU and page number in the text.