

A Whole Earth Monument

Planetary Mediation in Dietmar Dath's *The Abolition of Species*

Solvejg Nitzke

»I have discovered an iron law hidden in the chronicles: that it is very dangerous to sweep aside a way of life – even the Monotonous way of life – before you have made your peace with the idea that there is no point in missing this life once it is dead and gone.«¹

Almost fifty years ago, the Whole Earth-photographs realized a perspective that up until that point necessarily remained fictional. Nevertheless, the replacement of the figurative projection in favor of a technologically achieved literal self-reflection of the Blue Planet and its inhabitants did everything but stop the production of artificial Earths. One of the most striking examples can be encountered at the end of Dietmar Dath's monumental science fiction novel *The Abolition of Species*. After a plot that spans roughly three millennia of post-human history, two descendants of originally terrestrial species follow the longing gaze of their exiled ancestors and travel (back) to Earth. What they encounter, although it looks like (a version of) Earth, is a thoroughly transformed object barred from evolution and, ultimately, the flow of time. Although it contains everything that ever existed on the planet in the form of physical memories, the expulsion of any being capable of language and the planet's exclusion from evolution respectively, can be read as a critique of the Whole Earth discourse. Dath's peculiar version, I will argue, is a monument to as well as an archive of the Whole Earth that offers a vision

1 | Dath 2013, 214.

of Earth as the artistic product of its inhabitants. Read in conjunction with Hans Blumenberg, who regards Earth as a (metabolic) product of its own life forms and humanity's »fate«² and Tobias Boes' understanding of Earth as a »medium for human inscription,«³ Dath's monument becomes the ultimate Whole Earth.

Whether characterized as the god-like Apollonian gaze⁴ of the cartographer or imagined as a look at Earth and its inhabitants through the foreign eyes of an alien visitor,⁵ to view the planet in its entirety required a viewpoint that was everything but human. However fictional, scientific, and philosophical »premediations«⁶ have built up to this moment for centuries.⁷ This might explain at least part of the excitement still palpable today, and at the same time lessen the apparent surprise felt at the height of the space race, when the moon was reached: it was the gaze *back* that caught and, more importantly, held most of our attention. At the core of this defining moment in the history of »planetary mediation« (Boes) lies a story that allowed for the Whole Earth to become the driving force in a number of narratives. It goes something like this: When mankind finally was able to move away from its home planet, it came to realize that human beings would never be able to leave Earth behind. In other words, an advanced technological emancipation was required to reveal the (seemingly) basic truth that there is only one Earth and that human beings are but one species among many whose fate is intertwined with the apparently singular conditions on this and only this planet. Earth's *Totalgegenwart*⁸ (absolute presence) revealed its preciousness as well as its precariousness to the astronaut who finally caught Earth in one gaze and thus acted as humanity's representative. It also revealed a complex relationship between the visibility of human beings (on Earth), their bounded-ness (to Earth), and their vision (of

2 | Blumenberg 1997, 433.

3 | Boes 2014, 158.

4 | Cf. Cosgrove 2001.

5 | Cf. Blumenberg 1997, 340f.

6 | Cf. Grusin 2010.

7 | Cf. Cosgrove 2001.

8 | Blumenberg 1997, 439.

Earth). While it took a human being in space⁹ to finally deliver the first photographs of ›our home planet‹, the sense of immediacy associated with Whole Earth-images depends largely on the apparent absence of all human traces while suggesting to containing past and future of the human species, even holding the promise – or rather, imperative – for all human beings to act as part of this species.

In this paper, I aim to investigate the apparent paradoxes that are connected to the underlying narrative of the Whole Earth-image. Apart from its function in environmental, economic, and political discourses¹⁰, I will argue that its role as a myth at the core of a network of narratives constitutes its importance. Reading the Whole Earth as a myth, that is as a semiological system which serves to naturalize something that is in fact an artifact¹¹, in conjunction with Hans Blumenberg's reflections of the Blue planet, allows for a careful analyses of the interest and ideologies which form the contexts of specific representation of ›our‹ planet as Whole Earth.

›Species Thinking‹ is, according to environmental scholars¹², inevitable when we are faced with the view of the Whole Earth in all its beauty and yet, the very same beings who are confronted with Earth's preciousness are those who threaten its existence. However, the image of the Blue Marble as an icon of environmentalism failed to stop the ongoing destruction of natural habitats and exploitation of natural resources. To the contrary, the forces it was hoped it would be stopped, or at least slow down courtesy of a planetary awareness¹³, accelerated in an unprecedented manner. This observation alone serves to question the relationship between Whole Earth, Species Thinking, and the environmentalist mantra to ›Save the Planet.‹ German author Dietmar Dath's novel *The Abolition of Species* takes Species Thinking to a new level by designing a world after the end of human dominance. It is, however, not the emergence of new lifeforms beyond the biological restrictions

9 | And a whole host of professionals and experts working on the ground together to allow that one person the chance to snap a photo of the earth.

10 | Cf. Lazier 2011, 602-630.

11 | Cf. Barthes 1993 [1957], 111.

12 | Cf. Chakrabarty 2009, 197-222.

13 | For more on the problems of environmental awareness see Timothy Morton's article ›Why Ecological Awareness is Loopy‹ in this volume.

of species, but the connection of all lifeforms to Earth and the different Earths they produce that distinguish this novel and promise insights into the significance of Whole Earth-imagery for the imagination of Earth. In the course of the novel, as I will show, *The Abolition of Species* makes Earth an archive of planetary mediation and, moreover, a monument to itself.

WHOLE EARTH-MYTH

Hans Blumenberg's term *Totalgegenwart* (absolute presence) captures the suddenness with which all perceptions of the planet seemed to change at once. According to Blumenberg, the concurrence of institutionalized *Umweltschutz* (environmental protection) and *Mondbezwingung* (the conquering of the Moon) is far from coincidental.¹⁴ Instead, this concurrence testifies to the recognition that the assumption that human beings were able to leave anything behind by leaving their home planet proved impossible.¹⁵ According to Blumenberg, to view the contrast, captured in the Earthrise image, between the barren moonscape and the vivid sight of Earth¹⁶ that caused the sudden realization of its total or absolute presence as the only cause of the image's impact misses the point. Another cause, at least as important, is the sudden realization of the irrefutable bond between human beings and their home planet, Blumenberg claims, which becomes most apparent on the one hand in the poor visibility conditions on the Apollo mission's spacecraft and, on the other, the sight of the Earth itself. He points to the disruption of the view by the spaceship's wastewater which crystallized and clung to the vessel, thus hindering the astronauts from remaining focused on Earth – an experience well-known to everyone who has ever tried to escape

¹⁴ | Cf. Blumenberg 1997, 439.

¹⁵ | Cf. Ibid., 434-435.

¹⁶ | Boes 2014, 158: »Indeed, the very barrenness of the lunar surface in the foreground of this image raises chilling question about the exact vantage point from which it might become possible to regard humanity as a species rather than as a collection of different people. Could it be that the only logic that really unites us is the logic of mutually assured destruction?«

their own waste by moving away from it.¹⁷ The emphasis on waste with regards to the spaceship suggests an environmentalist interpretation critical of technology, but it would be misleading to regard this example only as an allegory of human wastefulness. In this case, waste must be understood as a ›natural‹ byproduct essential to the world we live in and even more so to the way we are able to view the planet. Hence, Blumenberg attributes the beauty of Earth as seen from space »to the effect of the turbidity and opacity of its atmosphere«.¹⁸ His concept asserts that the appeal of the Blue Marble is due to its atmosphere which, in turn, is in large part the metabolic product of the organisms (*Lebewesen*) populating its surface. The spaceship, thus, becomes a miniature Earth¹⁹, surrounding itself with an atmosphere formed by the inevitable byproducts of life. Even more than the deserted moonscape, the effort and energy necessary to sustain the astronauts on their journey connect a sense of homesickness to the image of the Whole Earth, which appears splendid and vivid in comparison to the poor environment of the miniature system. Nevertheless, Blumenberg contests the idea that the new perspective on planet Earth made it palpable as humanity's finite home-world (*Weltheimat*); instead, he claims that this interpretation came as exaltation after the fact.²⁰ To the contrary, since no trace of human beings, their artifacts, waste, or desertification is visible at all, the image of the precious whole Earth was in no way a warning but a reassurance.²¹ The very same perspective that lets »the entire planet seem suspended within the same horizon, suggesting an experiential fusion of all members of the human race, regardless of ethnicity, creed, nationality, or socio-economic status«²², hides the transformations of

17 | Cf. Blumenberg 1997, 434.

18 | »Wirkung der Trübung und Undurchsichtigkeit ihrer Atmosphäre« (Ibid., 433).

19 | Cf. Ibid., 434.

20 | Cf. Ibid., 440: »Nur ist eines unzutreffend, was neuerdings auch gesagt worden ist: Der neue Blick auf die Erde habe sie als endliche Weltheimat des Menschen sehen lassen. Das ist einfach eine rückprojizierende Überdeutung. Im Gegenteil: Die Erde sah aus, als gäbe es den Menschen, seine Werke und seinen Unrat, seine Desertifikationen nicht! Keine Spur vom Menschen.«

21 | Ibid., 440.

22 | Boes 2014, 157.

the planetary environment due to human civilization and thus fatally appears as pristine ground for human expansion.²³

Blumenberg's critique of Whole Earth-images and their optimistic interpretation has been picked up today by a wide range of scholars who focus on the medial conditions of the images.²⁴ While many contemporary depictions of the planet attempt to include human traces both in order to navigate the planet and make visible changes, »Whole Earth images fail to do justice to the force-like nature of the human species in the Anthropocene, because force, by its very definition, is a measure of change over time (in Newtonian physics, $F = m \Delta v \Delta t$). The iconographic nature of Whole Earth photography, however, places it outside the temporal flow entirely.«²⁵ By stepping back far enough to make any trace of human activity invisible, while at the same time the position of the photographer is only possible because of the same attitude that enables technological progress²⁶ causes the bemoaned destruction of natural environments, the appeal of the Whole Earth-image depends, as mentioned above, on a startling paradox, more specifically on its concealment. Its ongoing success relies as much on what it shows as on what it hides. The Whole Earth, in effect, can be regarded in terms of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*: it naturalizes a certain notion by veiling its artificial character thus potentially becoming a vessel for ideology.²⁷ The »universal appeal« of the images, their »undeniable thusness«²⁸ is thus the result of the effectiveness of modern myth-making.

23 | Ibid: »Eine Reinheit des Kostbaren, als sei es lupenrein. Und damit auch ein noch unberührter und ungenutzter Boden für das fatal dazugedachte Wachstum. Es war eine Versicherung, was man sah, keine Warnung.«

24 | Cf. Heise 2008.

25 | Boes 2014, 162f.

26 | Blumenberg coins it »Verbrennungsbetriebsamkeit« which translates to »a frenzy of combustion« but also can be read as a, here slightly derogative, synonym for the diligence or industriousness to burn things.

27 | Cf. Barthes 1993 [1957].

28 | Boes 2014, 159.

Consequently, the »abolition of human horizons«²⁹ goes along with an obliteration of narrative³⁰ which becomes inevitable when the temporal dimension is abolished. In other words, Whole Earth-images have always already achieved the preservation of the depicted state by freezing it in the present moment and eradicating past and future. Instead, they become projection surfaces for all too different ideologies³¹ and thus serve to obscure the very sense of urgency and need of protection that the images are meant to procure.

EARTH-MAKING

The Whole Earth-images' mythical quality depends on their apparent independence from previous narratives. Set against the backdrop of utter blackness, the glowing blue planet, indeed, seems to be life's stronghold against nothingness. Yet while Earth might appear to be »just there,« the Whole Earth-images never are. Their ubiquity masks the fact that they never come unmediated: be it when they were first published or in one of the countless contexts they come in, they are never free of a »message«. Hence, research on Whole Earth-images – as does this paper – often tries to answer what it is the images actually portray. While Benjamin Lazier studies Earth as an artifact³² and Tobias Boes looks at Earth as a medium for human inscription³³, my suggestion to understand Earth as a myth in Barthes' terminology aims at once at emphasizing that the earth that is looked at is the Whole Earth as an already mediated object

29 | Ibid., 156.

30 | This is where I argue in opposition to Boes who claims: »And therein, of course, lies the universal appeal of the Whole Earth photographs. They do not depend on previously existing narratives, which are always tainted by cultural specificity, no matter how seemingly universal. They appeal to us instead by what the Medieval Scholastics would have called their quiddity, their undeniable thussness« (Boes 2014, 159). In fact, the images do depend on narratives but analogous to their technological character (Lazier 2011, 614) they also hide their narrative roots, thus appearing to be independent of traditions.

31 | Cf. Cosgrove 2001.

32 | Lazier 2011, 606.

33 | Boes 2014, 160f.

as well as that it refers to a narrative core at the center of a network of myths. Blumenberg's account of the photograph's beauty as an effect of the turbidity of Earth's atmosphere and the inevitable creation of miniature Earths out of everything a human being inhabits or traverses,³⁴ can be extended to a (new) materialist approach. Denying the Cartesian distinction between nature and culture, Blumenberg's image acknowledges instead that both realms are interwoven. Earth consists of the layers of remnants human beings and other living beings produce, often as (unwanted) byproducts of their metabolisms. That is, Whole Earth's *Total-gegenwart* (absolute presence) (Blumenberg) or »total thusness« (Boes) are an effect of the visibility and invisibility of matter within the images.

Since the original photographs do not allow for »zooming in«,³⁵ the suggested totality of the perspective wipes out individual differences – much like one cannot focus on a beach and a single grain of sand at once. Aside from differing interpretations – united humanity as *one* species living on *one* planet that is to be protected in a communal effort³⁶ in contrast to Blumenberg's claim that Whole Earth-images might function as a quasi land-use plan – what the images seem to depict is a world of matter free of (inherent or traditional) meaning. Again, what can be read optimistically as a reunification of humankind and nature can also be understood as a reduction of »life to a set of mechanical, causal relationships.«³⁷ This reduction, Lazier argues (following Heidegger), goes along with the reduction of a second human horizon, the

displacement of earth by the »merely astronomical idea of a planet,« of *Erde* by *Erdball*. [...] The view of Earth from space threatened both of these horizons for human being. If the view transformed earth into Earth, existential ground into planetary body, it did away with world by erasing evidence of artifice altogether.³⁸

34 | Blumenberg 1997, 435.

35 | Cf. Heise 2008.

36 | Lazier 2011, 623: »The sight of an incomparably lonely living Earth, however, did produce a felt experience of a planet so eccentric, so exceptional, that it became the only thing worth attending to in the first place.«

37 | Ibid., 612.

38 | Ibid.

Heidegger's concern is based, Lazier argues, on Edmund Husserl's claim that »[n]otwithstanding our post-Copernican knowledge that the Earth revolves around the sun, [...] our everyday experience is pre-Copernican through and through«. ³⁹ Husserl's assumption and Heidegger's corresponding arguments adhere to and affirm a thoroughly anthropocentric world. Insisting on the distinction of earth/planet, world/globe, and globe/earth ⁴⁰ is also insisting on the human as the center of everything. Hence, the abolishment of human horizons ⁴¹ does not coincide with an actual abolishment of meaning; rather, it enables the narratives generated from this perspective to gain a fundamental quality unknown to former imaginations of a global or planetary perspective.

In his writings, Blumenberg introduces a perspective ⁴² that allows for an opposing view without throwing out the philosophical tradition of planetary mediation. By continuing a tradition of thought experiments, here in reference to anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, he assumes the view-point of an extraterrestrial visitor with the perk that »space tourists« (*Weltalltouristen*) ⁴³, apprehend the planet and its inhabitants not only at one given point in time, but at several. Following Leroi-Gourhan, Blumenberg claims that a being uninfluenced by the causal explanations that we are accustomed to would distinguish eighteenth-century humans from nineteenth-century humans much the same as he or she might a lion from a tiger or a wolf from a dog. ⁴⁴ As Blumenberg himself claims, this is a profound (*tiefsinnig*) perspective since it assumes the process of evolution as the only common trait of all living beings and thus sees ›our‹ history as an exception, an abnormality (*Abnormalität*) even, that is only relevant to our own species and thus not accessible to another, more advanced species. ⁴⁵ »While everything in the

39 | Ibid, 611.

40 | Cf. Lazier 2011.

41 | Cf. also Boes 2014, 156.

42 | Cf. Lazier 2011.

43 | Blumenberg 1997, 340.

44 | Cf. Ibid, 341.

45 | »Er [der außerirdische Beobachter] würde die kulturellen Veränderungen am Menschen nur als biologische Evolutionsdifferenzen des Menschen selbst auffassen können. Das ist deshalb so tief-sinnig, weil es als Normalbefund aller Lebenserscheinungen den einzigen homogenen Vorgang der Entwicklung unterstellt,

universe, if at all, only evolves and differentiates, human beings have surrounded themselves with a world of culture with which they disguise themselves treacherously from any spectator«. ⁴⁶ This second instant of *Verhüllung*, i.e. a veiling or disguising, is especially interesting since it connects to the layers of metabolic remnants that are, according to Blumenberg, responsible for the beautiful appearance of Earth seen from space. Just as the astronauts cannot escape the material byproducts of their existence, Earth keeps, he claims, every (by)product of metabolisms just as it has kept the fossils of every geological age. ⁴⁷ Continuing this line of reasoning, culture as a ›substrate of the species‹ (*Gattungssubstrat*) adds to the material layers surrounding the planet and provides it with its exceptional appearance in the first place.

In this sense, the world-making capacity of human beings is, although it might seem exceptional from an anthropocentric perspective, emphatically equal to that of other human beings. Distinguishing between world and planet, globe and earth, nature and culture is no longer an operation that can be imagined as – if only theoretically – outside of natural and evolutionary processes. The modern myth of Whole Earth, thus, hides the fact, to borrow Bruno Latour's phrase, that we have never been modern, i.e. we have never ›left‹ the planet and have never been fully differentiated from the material foundations of our existence. At the same time Blumenberg's connection of the cultural and the natural puts human beings in a position that is far from being an object, or even a victim, of, evolution. The creation of miniature Earths, exemplified by the spaceship, not only refers to the inability to leave behind the conditions of the home-planet, but also the ability to influence and determine the face and very nature of the world human beings live in both epistemologically and materially.

unsere ›Geschichte‹ hingegen als eine am Gattungssubstrat sich abspielende Abnormität vom Begreifen einer überlegenen Vernunft ausschließt.« (Ibid., 341).

46 | »Wo alles im Universum, sofern überhaupt, nur sich entwickelt und differenziert, hat der Mensch eine Kulturwelt um sich herum entwickelt, mit der er sich vor jedem Zuschauer trügerisch verhüllt.« (Ibid., 341, my translation, SN).

47 | Cf. Ibid., 344.

THE FINAL WHOLE EARTH

Dietmar Dath's novel *The Abolition of Species* offers many accounts of a world (almost) without humans. Beginning in a future circa five hundred years after the end of the ›Monotony,‹ the age of human dominance over the planet, the novel extends over three millennia and features at least three post-human lifeforms. By performing dimensional shifts in space, time, and the idea of species, and what constitutes a lifeform, *The Abolition of Species* comments on many aspects of current discourses on the relationship of humans and nature.

The novel's most prominent dimensional shift is to make non-human, in this case post-human, agents the center of attention. The ›Gente,‹ creatures who bear animal names and humanoid features, have assumed humanity's role as the dominant species on Earth. The territory that once has been known as Europe has developed into a fluctuating space of three cities which, although they resemble ›our‹ urban environments in certain aspects, fit the needs of this new era of dynamic and seemingly limitless transformation. The Gente – not quite animal, not quite human – exceed the Darwinian terms of species in that they have overcome the boundaries which determined biological life prior to their emergence. Some Gente even possess the wisdom to regard their civilization as occupying a transitional stage rather than, as is suggested, their predecessors who thought *homo sapiens* to be the climax of evolution (Dath 9). Nevertheless, the emergence of a non-biological or at least radically different life-form puts the Gente on the spot. The long postponed question of what to do with the remaining specimen of the human race has now been answered by the ›Ceramics‹ who mate – or rather, merge – with the human race and gain enough power to force the Gente into exodus.

In the same manner the Gente transform themselves, they are able to actively and consciously transform their surroundings. In the novel's fictive world, climate change on Earth had been brought to a halt by planting vast grass lands.⁴⁸ The Gente's exodus first to the Moon and then to Mars and Venus respectively relies on their ability to terraform their environments, i.e. to produce miniature Earths, thus lending credence to Blumenberg's claim that we – in this case, every species that

48 | Cf. Dath 2013, 34.

originates on Earth – are not able to ever fully leave the planet behind. Hence, for centuries the descendants of the Gente invest all available energy to find a way back. However, the way back leads to a completely transformed Earth, a monument to the ›home‹ they left and, as I will argue, to the very idea of a »Whole Earth.«

Two representatives, chosen and trained for the task, go back to Earth in order to assess whether a return would be safe. Expecting everything but the paradise they encounter, they find that »the terror that had shattered the Gente, now itself [had] given up the ghost.«⁴⁹ Instead of devouring Earth's biomass in its entirety, as the Gente had predicted, the planet appears to be the lush and fertile garden of environmentalist fantasies. However, the children quickly realize that what they see is not at all ›natural‹ but the product of intentional and thorough curation. What they encounter is not nature but »a planetary ecotecture never before seen since the Monotony began – a present moment with no speaking creatures, no one that needs language. Plants, beasts that hunt and beasts that graze – your garden, if you like.«⁵⁰ This rendering of the planet characterizes it as the literal product of conscious, if automated, creation. Holding the planet in a singular present moment changes its nature in a profound way.⁵¹

Although living things – plants and beasts – still exist, life itself takes on an entirely different quality. Instead of a system that evolves as a whole and thus, despite constant change, forms a unity⁵², the wholeness of this ultimately artificial nature is caused by the intervention of an albeit collective consciousness. Still, Dath's creation emphatically resists the introduction of a deity. The ›administers‹ of the estate – a program that is all that is left from the being who devoured the ›old Earth‹ – rath-

49 | Ibid., 370.

50 | Ibid., 374.

51 | »...you've brought history to an end? The way we might seal an arc? Earth's reality has become...a curve in time that leads back to itself, the higher-dimensional equivalent of a Klein bottle in three dimensions or a Möbius strip in two?‹ ›The construction, the monument, is held together by Ceramican work. They're diffused...‹ ›...through all phases of development right up to the Singularity. In the Age of Gente, in the Monotony...and we're two Gente partials, so that means we're visitors for you. Guests, from outside, for your museum.« (Ibid., 372).

52 | See Bruce Clarke's article »Mediating Gaia« in this volume.

er act as an afterthought of the already extinct creature which last gave the planet its shape.

The Abolition of Species does not fully realize its title until this strange and still somehow familiar vision of planet Earth appears. While both Gente and Ceramicans might have achieved freedom from taxonomy, from genetic, phenotypic, and even biological boundaries, the earth that forms the scene of this monumental novel becomes itself a monument to the ideas staged throughout the text and, more importantly, to the history of planetary imagination. From biblical Eden to Google Earth, this Earth literally contains its entire history in a single moment, a single image. It can thus be read as the fictional realization of Blumenberg's Earth, which consists of layers of metabolic products of which human and, Dath's novel adds, non-human culture are a part. Earth's curators have turned the planet into an actual artifact that can no longer be altered by evolution, since there is no room for spontaneity or randomness. And still it contains everything that ever lived and breathed on the planet, every building ever built and every organism that ever existed. Nothing is left to chance and still its structure is so complex that it will take alien visitors almost an eternity to explore. It is a perfect arc, a narrative encyclopedia of life, albeit with no purpose. The cybernetic reincarnation of the biblical paradise resembles a *tableau vivant* in that it is fixed without being fixated.

According to Stefan Willer, Dath's »encyclopedic science fiction« should be read as a »speculative extension« of an emphatically realist and materialist way of thinking towards the future.⁵³ The scenarios provided in *The Abolition of Species* are thus the result of thought experiments that have subsequently been carried out – one of which is the realization of the Whole Earth-image. Just as the novel refuses to lend itself to a mere affirmative illustration of animal studies⁵⁴, it does not exhaust itself in a vision of Earth as a warning from the (imagined) future. Rather, like Blumenberg's writings suggest, it toys around with the idea of history as a biological characteristic of our species on the one hand and biological facts as cultural artifacts. Nonetheless as Dath has claimed in many other texts⁵⁵, he is not interested in literature that

53 | Willer 2013, 393.

54 | Cf. Ibid., 398.

55 | Cf. Ibid., 404-405.

has no claim on reality. With this in mind, Blumenberg's idea of Earth appearing beautiful to the human eye because of its (human) nature, i.e. because it consists of the byproducts of life, and Boes' idea of Earth as a medium for human inscription meet in this vision of Earth as a monument to Earth. And at the same time the Earth as a total artifact, the ultimate work of art, makes visions and the very notion of life impossible as it eliminates the future in favor of the past. In spite of this, the ending of Dath's novel continues its decidedly non-apocalyptic approach to endings (of species, civilizations, history, etc.) and, at the same time, refuses to deliver a straightforward message – environmentalist or otherwise. Thus, the novel's macroscopic perspective provides a way that is able to connect the dimensional characteristics of virtual Earths with original Whole Earth-images. In its claim to assemble a sense of time on an evolutionary scale and an absolute ›sense of planet‹,⁵⁶ *The Abolition of Species* acknowledges at once the mythical quality of the Whole Earth and brings forth narration as a qualified discipline to explore its nature both figuratively and literally. Utopian science fiction lays claim to a mode of thinking that is in no way the opposite of science fact. Dath embraces this notion without risking the freedom and artistic sense of pleasure that literature offers compared with non-fictional manners of representation. The happiness and freedom the novel's last protagonists experience while roaming the Earth-monument is matched by the sense of playfulness that the text retains despite the gravity and complexity of the concepts it plays through. At last, the refusal to attach a message to the Whole Earth, to defy the claims to total preservation as much as to total possession of natural environments, opens up space for the imagination of its guests and maybe its inhabitants, too.

In the distant future of *The Abolition of Species*, thinking about whether or not life on Earth as it is lived by human civilizations is the only desirable form loses its sting, mostly because there really is »no point in missing this life once it's dead and gone«.⁵⁷ It allows for a very intriguing thought experiment: to think of humanity not as »a plague of people« (Lovelock) that could destroy the planet but as too boring or monotonous to live up to its possibilities. While Dath in his other novels *Pulsarnacht* and *Feldeváye* plays out the fate of humans without Earth,

56 | Cf. Heise 2008.

57 | Dath 2013, 214.

in this scenario Earth obviously does not need the human species, or in fact any species, to survive. Instead, it opens the stage to exciting and creative ways of life that make way for new imaginations of Earth as well as re-imagining Earth as long as we can. At the end of the novel, the paradise that Earth becomes allows for something radically new: to not be part of something and still be part of everything because progress and history have been stopped and are nevertheless eternally inscribed into the planet's surface. Here, the planet has indeed become a myth – containing the physical and cultural inscription of its subjects and at the same time being the product of their lives and ideas. Despite his refusal of utopianism as a refuge, Dath ends his novel with a utopian vision – that freedom comes at the expense of progress and, ultimately, of evolution. Still, the expulsion of a future is not a dismissal of life but rather of growth and dominion as the (badly) hidden telos of modernity. *The Abolition of Species* offers its narrative vision of the final Whole Earth as an alternative to the ›total thusness‹ of all subsequent demands: »So it was done, and then lives began such as never had been lived before. *Shanti shanti shanti.*«⁵⁸

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barthes, Roland: *Mythologies* [1957]. Paris: Seuil 1993.
- Blumenberg, Hans: *Die Vollzähligkeit der Sterne*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997.
- Boes, Tobias: »Beyond Whole Earth: Planetary Mediation and the Anthropocene«. In: *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2014), 155-170.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh: »The Climate of History. Four Theses«. In: *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 197-222.
- Cosgrove, Denis: *Apollo's Eye. A Cartographic Genealogy of Earth in the Western Imagination*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001.
- Dath, Dietmar: *The Abolition of Species* [orig.: *Die Abschaffung der Arten*, 2008]. London/New York: Seagull Books 2013.
- Grusin, Richard: *Premediation. Affect and Mediality after 9/11*, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2010.

58 | Ibid., 382.

Heise, Ursula: Sense of place and sense of planet. The environmental imagination of the global. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2008.

Lazier, Benjamin: »Earthrise; or, The Globalization of the World Picture«. In: American Historical Review 116 (June 2011), 602-630.

Willer, Stefan: »Dietmar Daths enzyklopädische Science Fiction«. In: Arcadia 48.2 (2003): 391-410.