

OUT OF CONTROL

A viaduct on the outskirts of the city in which I live is a kind of gate en route from the metropolis, along the highway heading to the east of the republic. Until recently, its side was adorned with a blue sign saying FOR EUROPE WITHOUT WARS (ZA EVROPU BEZ VÁLEK), displayed for all to see. It was one of the last remaining signs left after state-activist campaigns of the socialist regime during the Cold War. It was placed there some fifty years ago in order to clearly declare the anti-militarist conviction of the local community. The sign was most probably connected to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which took place in Helsinki in the 1970s. Thirty years ago, some prankster crossed out two letters, changing the Czech meaning to FOR CRUDE OIL WITHOUT WAR (ZA ROPU BEZ VÁLEK), humorously and symbolically expressing the dependence of European nation states on the unregulated use of fossil fuels and the fragility of their constitutions when faced with the hegemonic struggle for resources.

Nothing happens just like that – the crossed-out letter served, until recently, as a memento of the Gulf War and a reminder of the burning oil wells (not to mention the ensuing disintegration of Iraq). This year, during the second state of emergency brought about by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the Czech railway management company, Správa železnic, had it painted over with a grey hue we can produce repeatedly (and therefore name precisely) thanks to the use of oil derivatives.

The light-grey rectangle, named RAL 7035 in the imperial terminology, used commonly in the Czech Republic, demonstrates the reliance of local industry on the German economy, and the adoption of German nomenclature only confirms such an allegiance. It seems that thanks to the activities of one still un-privatised state organisation, the local community has transitioned into a new era: from fears of nuclear war, through the impacts of a struggle for natural resources, all the way to a minimalist confirmation of the fact that threats remain invisible and can even be expressed in a single colour. Those arriving in the city are thus welcomed by a grey rectangle as an expression of powerlessness: Contagion is present here too.

The timing is apt – more than military conflicts and their impacts, we are terrified of the activity of all-consuming industrial modernisation. The Earth has shaken, from out a devastated rainforest somewhere in China flies, disturbed, a bat (though it would perhaps be more adequate to say that a pangolin leaped out of a heap of rubbish) and thus the planet is rocked by a first seismic wave in the form of an exponentially propagating virus. Welcome to the 21st century.

The viaduct remains a signal alerting us to current dangers and fears. It merely signals more subtly, almost imperceptibly. It is a barometer of threat, and a relatively precise one at that.

Oriental Atlas of Exomoons

Artists project their ideas through the image-ination into shapes and signs, imprinting their reflections of reality into materials and codes. They themselves are reflected in their creation as specific autographic expressions of the history of human society in time. They also learn to perceive other autographic phenomena of the world around them. Artists have always worked this way.

Some of them, like Vladimír Boudník, attempted to create consistent artistic-political programmes to crown the avant-garde with a synthesis of life and art. Boudník worked directly on the street. He completed wet stains on the walls and extracted entire scenes from his fantasy and discussions with passers-by he approached. He describes the situation himself in one of his manifestos of explosionism: “Each of you will become an artist if you rid yourselves of prejudice and indifference. Our planet will be an inexhaustible jewellery box of shapes and new impulses.”

His political programme was imbued with post-war antimilitarism and a belief in a brighter future for humanity as a community of creative cooperation. If we follow Boudník and his methodological enthusiasm for the permeation of various layers of meanings and images, we will discover that the viaduct mentioned above, along with its underpass, is a rich catalogue of innumerable scenes inscribed in the plaster.

But how to begin? We might take a hint from the inscription FOR EUROPE WITHOUT WARS, which we could adopt as a generalising category for the entire viaduct card index of possible images. The broader context of the superordinate slogan alerts us to the un-evident nature of peace, the permanent threat of nuclear war, and the total destruction of the Earth.

The threat made present by the sign did not only concern wars among people, but also, of course, the destruction of the planet. That distant and inhuman thing we describe with the word nature is announcing itself on the battle field called Planet Earth all the more loudly and visibly, reminding us that nature was never separate from humanity and culture, nor was it anything

foreign. And it is this alienation encoded within our language and manner of denoting that represents the key to the catalogue under the bridge.

With a little hyperbole, we can say that it is enough to redraw and complete the stains. Maps, copied into coordinates, are cartographic constructions of worlds no one has yet seen in such detail. Worlds similar to our own of whose existence we know only thanks to indirect proof and mathematical interpretations materialise and become comprehensible thanks to the conceptual grid we apply to them. This grid is the manner of naming things and systems. We created institutions that can create entire systems of symbolic representations. It is therefore no surprise if in the stains, we can easily see polygons for testing weapons of mass destruction.

What else do we do with freshly discovered worlds? Scientific knowledge walking hand in hand with a search for selfish advantage and a multiplication of profits. There are, after all, myriad worlds, and they can be easily ransacked or destroyed without bothering anyone. Bikini Atoll, the Nevada desert, the steppe in Kazakhstan, or other areas that we imagine as being located somewhere other than here are, it would seem, too far away, and nobody minds. So why not mark out a few freshly discovered exomoons for tests that are, from the perspective of Realpolitik, necessary? After all, we care only about our safety and the preservation of our existence! Thankfully, these are only interpretations of wall-stains for now, but we can glimpse in them serious questions brought about by the historical trajectories of human thinking and development concerning the present and the near future.

The Jevons Paradox

Empires are self-centredly confident and have a tendency to claim they are eternal. Some do, in fact, survive for several centuries. Their persistence is supported by a symbolic representation created by institutions established for this very purpose, or else simply by the manner of naming things. The standard for colour hues recognised around the world, used predominantly in the industrial production of paint, is a German system established almost a hundred years ago by the Imperial Office for Delivery Terms (Reichs-Ausschuss für Lieferbedingungen). The enigmatic acronym RAL hides a reference to this imperial office. Despite the fact that it only administered the Weimar Republic, its name maintained a sentiment for the imperial ambitions of the former empire. Today, thanks to the strength of the German postwar economy, it has become a global standard.

Without the effective processing of fossil fuels, the exact same shade of colour could not be extracted every time. Sovereignty is manifested in the capacity to seize and then divide the decomposed remainders of organic matter. Oil and coal are no longer a shapeless material but a scale; a variety of choices. Every choice has its designation and is thus subjugated and controlled. Capitalism, i.e. a primarily profit-accumulating empire, has long since encompassed the entire world, and through institutions created for its protection, the world is translated and symbolically interpreted so thoroughly we have no other language with which to speak about it.

And yet, in the manner of naming, in its nuances (such as the naming of colour scales), we can find a coded history of the industrial age – and its alternatives too. Some forms of state capitalism, such as the former socialist bloc states of East Germany and Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic), developed their own nomenclature and colour scales.

Central Europe is a designation that carries numerous meanings, but most of these arise from the current geopolitical arrangement and mean something a little different to each party. The region includes the states listed above and is today nothing more than a cultural signifier. If we were to interpret the present situation only through the symbolic representation using dominant nomenclature, we are living in the age of RAL.

Technological advances bringing greater effectivity in using a certain source paradoxically increases the consumption of this resource due to higher demand. The Jevons paradox is probably the greatest paradox of environmental economics. It can also be perceived as a two-word exegesis of industrial history. It probably cannot be circumvented or disproved in practice; we always arrive at greater consumption.

The photographs used in the diagrams are found material; bought in an antique shop. They were taken by Ludvík Vojtěchovský, probably in the 1970s in the north-Bohemian brown coal basin, i.e. at a time when all the mentioned Central European colour samplers were in use. The image is multiplied through interpretation and exposed to various colour taxonomies, even though it is essentially still the same image. Not even mental processes are innocent.

algebra—from al-jabr. Reunion of broken parts; bonesetter; referring to reduction and balancing, the cancellation of like terms on opposite sides of the equation.

¡¡¡Ni somos diez, ni somos cien, decimos al estado: Cuéntenos bien!!! (We aren't ten, we aren't a hundred, we challenge the state to count us right!)

—Chant shouted at demonstrations in Guatemala

Quote from Who Counts? by Diane M. Nelson

As Friedrich Kittler once remarked, war is the mother of all things – it led to the creation of most technological inventions. This makes us think about the nature of our technological world and understand the tools we use. To speak simply: our civilisation is a society of warriors and their descendants, who profit from permanent military conflict, whether open or concealed. Not even artworks could be realised without the aid of military technology. The boom of digital technology is founded upon the development of weaponry systems. Bone Setting is no exception.

The interconnection of the military-industrial complex in the USA creates a global paradigm, as well as the umbrella part of the world hides under, including the space we live in. Thanks to a system of exporting war around the world, the United States have become the greatest war machine, and this despite the fact they haven't declared any wars. This applied militarism, along with the free market, also transforms the language we use. The invention of terms such as humanitarian bombing or humanitarian sanctions bends and adapts the original meaning of the words and creates the newspeak of the "free" world. It has transpired that democracy can only be "exported" as a product under unequal conditions, i.e. with the assistance of heavy military equipment, enriched-uranium missiles, and the "correct" language.

The United States Department of Defense regularly publishes dictionaries in which the world is translated into and embodied in military terminology. This constantly expanding compendium of acronyms, names, and new words is a handbook reflecting the dominion and aims of what is now the strongest empire in the world. On the basis of these traces and other statements, we can discern the emerging trajectories influencing the future of mankind. After a hundred years of an undoubted military hegemony spreading its influence around the world, the empire is preparing to export its internal problems into the external world. If you want peace, prepare for war – this maxim is taken from Vegetius' military handbook, written in the late Roman Empire, which the United States have always followed with predictable regularity.

The thirteen successive temporal diagrams are a reflection and development of previous ideas. They were created during the state of emergency in the spring of 2020. They were inspired by the strong emotions and materialised fears brought about by the global pandemic. Emotions are messengers of the future, as Timothy Morton put it in a "lockdown" interview. They announce as-yet unarticulated and un-understood realities of our transforming present. I attempted to manifest this fear through the drawings made with a bone. Every bone becomes a mailbox; an address in a world in which data is the fate of its address. I transformed the contents of a dictionary of military terms into cases composed of a certain number of bones. The visual form arises from the alphabetic arrangement and allows us to see, in its own strange way, how taxonomies reflect social hierarchies whilst also unwillingly depicting the machinery of propaganda and expressing normative power.

Paul Virilio described one of the current aspects of globalisation and the emerging planetary consciousness as a synchronisation of emotions. In a single instant, we can all feel the same terror, the same anxiety about the future, or the same panic. Virilio claims the world is moving from a standardisation of opinion to a standardisation of emotion, from freedom of the press to a synchronisation of emotions. This work is a dark foretaste of this process, whatever it may mean.

Issues of Control

The Psychological Counter-Offensive in Algiers is the title of a photograph made in 1962 by the Keystone Press Agency. It displays the psychological campaign waged by the French security forces against the far-right nationalist militant organisation OAS (Organisation armée secrète), which refused to accept the anti-colonial developments in north Africa. A member of the security forces is captured painting over signs expressing support for OAS in order to prevent explosions of violence and other incidents at the impending declaration of cease-fire in Algeria.

The photograph was exposed to the computer viruses in the VSUM Virus Information Summary List. VSUM is a public database of all known MS-DOS viruses, compiled by Patricia M. Hoffman on her website. On this platform, she recorded all viruses between 1986 and 1998, describing their origin and the moment at which they appeared..

Both the photograph and the database represent manifestations of control of a situation against the influence of self-replicating entities attempting to multiply at the greatest possible scale and propagate through the available environment. What does this kind of experiment demonstrate or uncover? Publicly available databases are a source of imagination and learning. Testing them and

exposing them to various kinds of algorithms uncovers errors of judgement and shows new configurations and unexpected relations. They might also show that the symbolic sometimes merges all too closely with the imaginary and the real.