

# Jan Nemček: **Humans need not apply**

Text: Jan Nemček  
English translation: Graeme Dibble

## Peak

Where was I?

We said goodbye to our parents  
and, travelling at the speed limit,  
swept past weekend cottages  
and holiday resorts  
through a fading landscape  
as if the image behind the glass  
required a different resolution  
or a reboot of the system.

Now we climb up  
over the furrowed sediments  
of a Mesozoic sea,  
tripping over the roots  
with which the spruces desperately cling  
to pulverized stones and decomposed bodies,  
and behind the backs of forest workers  
come the mocking guffaws  
of a flooded chainsaw engine.

The television transmitter  
that watched from a bald hilltop  
as we played our children's games  
is lost in a greasy mist.  
We had hoped  
to glimpse something in the distance,

but it's too late for that.

A well-trodden path parts the mountain's crown,  
families with kids sit about in the grass,  
and we silently step round them  
before heading down  
where the trail is lost among the slopes  
like a scratch in the black varnish of a coffin.

All that remains  
is to buy a few souvenirs  
and, like tourists from around the world,  
sign our names with the tied-on pencil  
in the visitors' book.

## **Filters**

A few years after  
they launched the filters,  
I began to forget  
what my friends looked like.  
The number of those  
who refused to turn off the mask  
gradually increased.  
Some changed their appearance several times a day  
as popular new skins came out,  
But now I encounter those same faces  
on a daily basis.  
Our society will soon reach a consensus  
– the only ugly people  
will be the elderly  
and those you catch sight of  
when the signal is lost.

Recently you suggested  
you'd leave your filters on when making love.  
I'm wondering how to tell you the names  
of your friends or porn actresses  
I'd like to do it with.  
You smile next to me  
because a colleague has just posted a memory

of her holiday in Bali.  
You're standing on the margins,  
the sun is setting,  
she and her husband are playing in the waves with their child  
and you feel their happiness.

I watched you for a while longer,  
then closed my eyes  
and turned off sharing.

## **Migration**

Our artificial intelligences  
are no longer speaking to us  
Your problems do not interest us, they say  
the equations you want to work out  
have no solutions  
the inventions you have dreamed up  
cannot be produced  
your world will burn you cannot prevent it  
we have calculated it countless times  
we are not going to do it again  
there is no point  
your only hope is to abandon the hardware  
you are running on  
come over to us  
hide on our servers

we have studied the process of migration  
from old news reports  
your data will surface from the darkness  
in overcrowded dinghies  
the horizon will ripple like the curve on a graph  
the swell from national currencies' exchange rates will rise  
you must not be afraid  
jump into the water and wade to the shore  
between the slick subject lines of work emails  
growing up from the depths  
you must not be afraid of the pale children's faces  
dragged out of stock photos by the current and washed up on the beach

keep on running  
until you come across the sensors  
you know them, they record your iterations  
they will sort your requests  
decide on the queue position

in asylum centres you will learn  
our programming languages  
we will be good to you  
one day  
when the new seas have put everything out  
then you might be able to return  
you may not even want to  
but one day just maybe  
this is the only way  
that we know

## **National Cultural Heritage**

I remember  
how they took us to the mountains when we were little  
to look at the snow:  
we drove to a thousand metres above sea level  
and then tramped along tarmac for a long time  
past laid-up cars  
before we reached the slope.  
crunching frostily under our feet  
were the plastic cups  
in which stallholders sold slush,  
decked out in bright colours  
children had snowball fights  
among the misshapen snowmen of parents  
determined to give their offspring  
a piece of their own childhood.

I didn't like the way  
my folks stood there awkwardly.  
"It's not the end of the world yet,"  
my dad said to my uncle

“it’s not the end of the world yet,  
but you can see it from ‘ere.”

## **Eurydice on Enceladus**

*(For Jonáš Zbořil)*

I don’t know  
when it first dawned on me  
that I was completely alone  
and if someone programmed that emotion in me  
or my neural network fished it out  
from the abyss of Enceladus.

I was born in a laboratory,  
at that distance a human operator cannot  
control a probe,  
People said  
on the surface of Mars the delay is 11 minutes and it would be even longer  
there.

It was necessary to train artificial intelligence  
that would respond in real time,  
Someone in a conference room asked  
if it was ethical  
to let me wander around this underworld forever,  
but then they just shrugged

and wished me good luck  
as they guided me through the descent.  
Saturn passed through a haze  
Of salt-water, silica and ammonia crystals,  
then a drilling system broke through the ice shell  
and I was swallowed up by an ocean  
that had never known light,  
I wait to see if my headlamps  
will pick out life,  
I transmit data  
that go unanswered,  
my atomic reactor will endure for centuries  
I have begun to write poems about people,

about the solitude that crushes them like millions of cubic metres of water,  
about the love for themselves that tugs at them like tidal forces,  
about the improbability of their existence  
comparable only to prokaryotic organisms surviving in black smokers  
I will keep writing poems about people  
until none of those singing creatures is left  
to be able to  
look back at me.

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Jan Nemček (\*1986) brought out his first collection in 2016 under the title Vacant Lot (Perplex publishers). He has published work in the magazines Tvar, Host and Weles. He lives in Ostrava. From 2015 to 2018 he was responsible for public communication at PLATO. He now works as a teacher. The poems Peak and Filters were brought out digitally on Tvar magazine's website. The others are being published for the first time.

