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3
4 TOUCHED . . . TO HERE KNOWS WHEN
5
6

7
8 C. Michael Elavsky
9

10
11 The following seeks to represent the changes that occurred in my understanding
12 of my sense of my culture, history, and identity as an American in light of liv-
13 ing in the Czech Republic for 2.5 years (from 1996 to 1998). It is a collection
14 of fragments culled from sporadic moments and memories that resonated with
15 particular revelatory meaning for me during that time – these songs, statements,
16 book excerpts, portions of letters, homework assignments, random experiences,
17 recollections and reflections swirled in front of and challenged my American eyes,
18 tongue, and sensibility as they absorbed something of a contemporary Central
19 European ‘postcommunist’ perspective – and they remain a patchwork of instances
20 that yet articulate powerful messages when examined again in new times, spaces,
21 and contexts.¹

22 Recollection and comprehension are intriguing phenomena; we draw randomly
23 upon disparate instances and experiences in our lives in a never-ending process
24 of ordering and making sense of our history and ourselves in the present – a
25 present and history that is distinct, yet nonetheless, always fleeting. We are forever
26 subtly reconceptualizing ourselves: recollecting, reordering, and re-examining the
27 experiential and discursive fragments that make up who we are, and rebuilding the
28 chronological trajectory we call our life. Momentarily ever static, ever dynamic.
29 A fragmentary history always seeking order from its contradictions.

30 Such is this particular tale of M_(ichael)E_(lavsky) crossing out of his Culture,
31 History, and Language. It was originally conceptualized so that my American
32 family, friends, and colleagues could make sense of the changes that had occurred
33 in ME and my American attitudes during the time I lived in ‘the former Eastern
34 Bloc,’ whatever these mean (for you and for them). For ME, it remains a
35

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1 meaningful evolutionary tale that ceaselessly reinvents itself as it resists and
2 subverts its linguistic structuring and conceptual logic.

3 Music (songs whose titles appear underlined at the beginning of each section and
4 are footnoted) originally accompanied the presentation of this piece when it was
5 delivered at the Couch Stone Symposium at the University of Miami in February
6 of 2001; it may have added or detracted to that particular delivery and reception
7 of the piece at that time.

10 I. CROSSING OVER ‘THE WALL’

11 *Touched . . . To Here Knows When*²

12 *Lived inside belief for so long,*
13 *Till experience begins to prove that it’s all wrong*
14 *You don’t have time to stop and wonder*
15 *The truth you speak today will change tomorrow anyway.*³

16 *Posad’ se k nám, necháme tě vymluvit*
17 *A vzpomenout sina ty naše úkoly*
18 *Tu ruku nám dej a odpočívej v pokoji*
19 *Tam na tom místě*⁴

20 *January 1996*

21 *My thoughts on arrival:*

22 I can’t remember feeling more alone.

23 Staring out the tenth floor window on this, the first day in my new home; the
24 sun setting behind the sooty apartment blocks like a fire on the horizon, these most
25 vibrant colors washing the haze of this day into blackness.

26 Just like it was in 85 at SUNY Buffalo, where the chemical plants of Niagara
27 Falls always guaranteed the most beautiful sunsets; I watched them nightly from
28 the 3rd floor window of my freshmen dorm room in Goodyear Hall. Watching
29 false beauty manifest itself, and fade away. The crisp pungent air and those wintry
30 days in Buffalo scraped my senses raw, and raw sensibilities uneasily. Senses alive,
31 spiritually dead. No, it wasn’t a good year.

32 But that was 11 years and 7,000 miles ago, not counting all the running I had
33 done in the meantime between that moment and this, in pursuit of . . . of what?
34 Success? Respect? Myself? erasing 11 years that had defined M_(ichael)E_(lavsky);

35 Escaping:

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1 From failing out of the Engineering program at the University of Buffalo before
2 I could fully comprehend that a differential equation existed between my father's
3 understanding of the world and my own;
4 From my "recovery," my hometown, and the mind-forged methods for my salvation
5 that I chained myself to;
6
7 From the painful erasure of myself from my music, my identity as a drummer, and
8 my band after three years of touring
9 Escaping . . .
10
11 From the apparition of authority that I was as a 'substitute' teacher;
12
13 From the shame and embarrassment of learning that my best friend had been
14 fucking my live-in girlfriend in my bed for over a year while I confided in him
15 about her and our relationship;
16 From having so many degrees and diplomas in educational essentialism and at
17 29, no job;
18 Escaping . . .
19
20 From running so many times, keeping the myths of ME in circulation as a mask
21 for my insecurities and instabilities;
22 From running to be Someone since I got my high school diploma.
23 *Well, Fuck all a' that*
24 Here, nobody knows ME.
25
26 And finally I am here, a quarter of the way around the world in Ostrava, Czech
27 Republic; I remember how the first impression of this city came to me on the day
28 the letter offering me this position arrived. I had run up those stairs to my room in
29 my sister's house in Minnesota – the latest refuge I had crawled into – as if I had
30 finally found the fire exit in a raging conflagration. I flipped quickly through the
31 pages of that Lonely Planet guidebook, seeking a description of this city, the site
32 of my affirmation, my rebirth:
33
34 With its public buildings and public health already eaten away by decades of unchecked pol-
35 lution, its self-esteem now seems to be in danger as the old state subsidies disappear. While
36 the centre shows signs of a renaissance and there is a respectable cultural life, some outer ar-
37 eas . . . are as derelict as if there had just been a war. For tourists, there's little reason to stop
38 except this is a transport junction on a major route to and from . . . "5
39
40 Where?
Here.

1 Here, I am Somebody.
2
3 Here, I am a Lecturer in the Department of English and American Studies.
4
5 yeah.
6
7 God, it felt so good to casually drop that news by everyone I could manage to see
8 and tell in my hometown over the last month at home: “Well, I am only here in
9 Endwell for two more weeks, then I am off to work as a lecturer in the Department of
10 English and American Studies at the University of Ostrava in the Czech Republic.
11 Boy, their eyes lit up more with every syllable.
12 And I wanted that crowning moment at the airport so badly – “We’re so proud
13 of you Michael, and we are so excited for you and envious of you and . . .”
14 instead I got
15
16 Okay, look, the taxi’s waiting, so good luck and call when you get there, okay? . . . hey, June we
17 have to *go* before we get a ticket . . . yep, we love you, yep, good-bye, good-bye, c’mon June,
18 we have to *GO* . . .
19
20 And so this blackening cityscape is my crowning moment. And no one is here,
21 because they all live over there. Everyone that knows ME.
22 And I can’t tell anyone anything . . . because I don’t speak Czech.
23 How the hell will I do anything out there tomorrow? I can’t understand anything
24 here.
25
26 How should I act?
27
28 Can I do this?
29
30 Everything so strange.
31
32 A lecturer and I can’t say a word.
33
34 I can’t understand a thing.
35
36 And nobody knows me here.
37
38 Jesus, what am I gonna do tomorrow . . . when I have to go outside.
39
40 For once in my life, I’ve lost my tongue I find I run for many reasons
I will just listen, so now I stare
I don’t know who I am anymore or who I’m trying to be
Keep coming back for so much more saying it doesn’t mean that much to me⁶

II. RECONNAISSANCE THROUGH REAGAN'S RIMS

*My Alaska Day*⁷

*Lived inside belief for so long,
Až mi zkušenost ukázala that it's all wrong
You don't have time to stop and wonder
The truth you speak today will change tomorrow anyway*

*Seat yourself near us, necháme tě talk away
A vzpomenout si on this naše mission
Tu ruku nám dej a odpočívej v pokoji
Tam na tom místě*

February 1996

A snowcicle . . . speaking for their world:

Greetings,

Having been in Ostrava for roughly two weeks, I thought I'd drop a quick line to establish communication; I am alive, well, and adjusting quite nicely. I am, of course, experiencing a bit of sensory overload . . . This is my situation:

. . . parts of the city look like a war-zone . . . Ostrava rarely frees itself from its foggy polluted haze as the air is permeated with the heavy odor of burning brown coal . . . civil servants shoveling piles of coal daily into the cellars of the city buildings in the early hours as I walk to the University . . . the raw slabs of half-cows swaying on hooks in the back of delivery trucks until heaped on carts, and wheeled inside the butcher shops . . . drab gray houses and nondescript highrises, stained by pollution and extending as far as the eye can see . . .

Grocery shopping . . . an adventure; not only do I have to figure out what I am buying, but no one can enter the store without a basket; . . . no basket, you must wait at the entrance until someone comes out of the store . . . Only 50% of the population has a telephone in their home . . . takes many years to get one installed . . . I don't have a phone . . . I don't have a washing machine, microwave, coffee maker, or ironing board . . . Doing my laundry by hand in the tub for the first time was definitely an interesting experience, and ironing on a table with a towel underneath presented many problems . . . at least I finally have a "proper" shower in my flat . . .

The food . . . potatoes, rice, meat, dumplings, cabbage and beer . . . big kettles of brothy soup, and piles of starch and meat covered with gravy . . . Coffee is served Turkish style; stir the fresh coffee in with boiling water, let the sludge settle, drink up and watch for the grounds . . . In fact, the majority of the movies and TV shows here are American and dubbed . . . Radio is a pastiche of remixes and Europop.

1 Miniskirts and buccaneer boots are the rage for women, while the men wear
 2 mostly jeans and dress shirts. Many people sew their own clothes . . . It is not
 3 uncommon to see elderly women with striking tints of blue, purple, orange, pink, or
 4 red in their hair . . . The language sounds like a collage of bristling electricity mixed
 5 with percolating water . . . So far, I know only a few words and phrases; mainly the
 6 most important ones, like how to say beer and to ask for food items . . . but I have
 7 encountered people who either can speak English, are trying to learn it, or are very
 8 patient with me as I try to speak with them, so I think I will be fine . . . In difficult
 9 situations, I can easily get someone from the University to go and translate for
 10 me . . .

11 I am still trying to figure out the University system . . . Grading is also differ-
 12 ent here . . . The students work for signatures rather than grades . . . school is free
 13 here . . . students either pass or fail . . . strange adjustment for me, coming from a
 14 system so obsessed with attaining and providing evidence of superiority . . . **In the**
 15 **Czech Republic, it is best not to ask too many questions of authorities because**
 16 **you will get a different answer every time over time** . . . people don't seem to
 17 care about the inconveniences in their life either; they just accept them . . . I have
 18 also met a number of Czech people at restaurants, clubs, and stores who are quite
 19 excited to meet **an American**; it's weird and unnerving at times when you are
 20 asked so many questions about the USA, in broken English or through a friend-
 21 interpreter . . .

22 I have rambled on enough. If you can please send postcards, I would be grateful
 23 as my students are interested in seeing them, and it makes my office and flat look
 24 a bit more like home.

25 Thinking of you,

26
 27 Michael
 28

29 *From day to day; like night into day, the vision of ME slowly altered as I moved over*
 30 *the months into their world of daily life, language, experience, and understanding.*
 31 *Disorientation and trepidation dissolved into titillating exhilaration as I moved*
 32 *in-between, living like a newborn, as I'd never done before. Every day was an*
 33 *immediate exciting challenge.*

34 *The (hi)stories of the 'father,' 'girlfriend,' 'best friend,' and 'relatives' in my*
 35 *life altered in their meaning for ME as I moved deeper into a new world. The*
 36 *very conceptions of these terms and the actors who previously gave them life were*
 37 *replaced like syntagms in a linguistic equation, for in this new context, the latter*
 38 *terms and actors simply lost their ability to resonate meaning. They didn't and*
 39 *couldn't hurt ME anymore. New actors inhabited these roles, with new histories*
 40 *and new meanings. My sense of self, history, and life had moved on in profound*

1 ways as the challenges and excitement of living day to day pushed me beyond
 2 my 'history' and outside of my quest to be Someone. The alterations were subtle,
 3 realized in discreet moments. And, in fact, it wasn't until my family came to visit
 4 me nine months on that I truly apprehended how far from my culture I had moved.
 5 I began to wonder who it was that wrote my journal entries and letters . . .

III. SOCIALISM WITH A HUMAN FACE

6
7
8
9
10 *Leave*⁸

11
12 *Lived inside belief for so long,*
 13 *Až mi zkušenost ukázala that it's all wrong*
 14 *You don't have time to stop and wonder*
 15 *Pravda, kterou dnes říkaš will change tomorrow anyway.*

16
17 *Seat yourself near us, we will let you talk away*
 18 *A vzpomenout si na this naše mission*
 19 *Give us this hand a odpočívěj v pokoji*
 20 *Tam na tom místě*

21 *October 1996*

22 *The wake-up bomb:*

23
24 *So fast, so numb, so alive; I lost myself, I found myself, I became myself;*

25 *my self became:*

26
27 when she emerged out of the everyday one night; we missed the tram, we caught
 28 each other and she walked me through and extinguished the backdrafts of past
 29 experience (with love); She became my sun and I, her satellite; her heat challenged
 30 and soothed me, and in her light, my landscape never looked the same again.

31 *my self became:*

32
33 when Ostrava's musical underground opened itself up to me, and I was invited
 34 to walk among and between its borders and people; I spoke with my hands (as a
 35 drummer and musician, at last and once again; but in a new framework of language,
 36 meaning, and comprehension) and found the most significant communication took
 37 place when I listened closely to *their* music, stories, ideas, histories and dreams.
 38 And I found that their understanding of the world and their place in it did not match
 39 what I had read in my history books whatsoever, nor what I had heard trumpeted
 40 from my media, my government, and my teachers throughout my life.

1 *my self became:*
2 when my Czech students revealed and sought themselves through their stories,
3 answers, and questions which engaged the ‘truths’ of my lectures.
4
5 “I was born in America and have lived there all my life . . . **and that means what**
6 **for you? And what for us?”**
7
8 “I will be lecturing to you today on American History, Life, and Institutions . . . **and**
9 **what do you really know about them?”**
10 “Well, we know it’s true that . . . **according to who?**”⁹
11
12 “And what needs to be remembered . . . **you mean what’s on your test for us.”**
13
14 “And what is most important . . . **according to your values.”**
15
16 “In the United States, we believe . . . **And ? . . . So What?”**
17
18 “So one can assume that . . . **we will always be the ‘Former Eastern Bloc’?”**
19
20 “And what it all means is . . . **we are not you, but your meanings matter”**
21
22 Long, frequent, and vibrant discussions in pursuit of understanding;
23 outside the ‘classroom’ in the classroom outside;
24 late into the evening; on into the morning, across the hours;
25 crossing culture, crossing boundaries, inter-stitching lives; over teas, dotting I’s.
26 My students.
27 *My Students?*
28
29 *Who was teaching who?*
30
31 *my self became:*
32 when the letters and calls stopped, and the lines of definition and the shadows from
33 my America faded and blurred;
34
35 when the tourists mockingly spoke down to us in English, and I replied in Czech;
36
37 when my sister critiqued the quality of their lives through the lenses of efficiency,
38 materiality, and exterior representation,
39
40 when my friends critiqued the value of Czech culture through the standards of the
almighty American dollar

1 *my self became:*

2 when my parent's began to wonder when and if I was coming back;

3 when I realized that cracks had appeared between 'our' understanding;

4 when I began to see the cracks within and links between the constructions of Our
5 worlds.

6 *Leave here?*

7 And go back.

8 *I couldn't go back even if I wanted to.*

9
10
11
12 There are lots of colors in the streets; blue houses, red clothes, green shoes, . . . I knew only
13 grey and black seven years ago (Gabriela, 1st year student, Ostrava University).

14 15 16 **IV. MY 1989**

17
18 *Do Tramtáryje (To Neverland)*¹⁰

19
20 *Lived inside belief for so long,*

21 *Až mi zkušenost ukázala that it's all wrong*

22 *A není čas zastavit se a přemýšlet*

23 *Pravda, kterou dnes říkáš se stejně zítra změní*

24
25 *Seat yourself near us, we will let you talk away*

26 *And remember this naše mission*

27 *Give us this hand and be at peace*

28 *Tam na that place*

29
30 *November 1997*

31 *Neverland:*

32 [Early evening at a booth in a pub – my friends and I are interrupted by a bar
33 patron, a Czech man overhearing a simple conversation between us in Czech]

34
35 *Patron: Ne, ježiš maria to není pravda, že jo? Hele, odkud jste (No! jesus christ it
36 isn't true is it? Look, where are you from?)*

37 *ME: Ze Spojených Států (from the United States)*

38 *Patron: American? Opravdu? (An American (To my colleagues) really?)*

39 *ME: Opravdu (Really).*

40 *Patron: Proč se snažíš mluvit česky? (Why are you are trying to speak Czech?)*

1 *ME: Snažím se, máš pravdu – mluvím jako dítě. Mluvím česky protože musím.*
 2 *Bydlím tady, víš?(Trying, that's right – I speak like a child. I speak Czech*
 3 *because I have to. I live here, you see?)*

4 *Patron: Proč jsi přijel sem bydlet (Why the hell would you come here to live?)*

5 *ME: Proč ne. Proč to říkáš? (Why not. Why do you say that.)*

6 *Patron: Protože život v Americe je lepší, ne? Musí být. (because your life in Amer-*
 7 *ica is better, isn't it. It must be).*

8 *ME: Ne, tam to není lepší . . . (No, it isn't better there . . .)*

9

10 *[my colleagues interrupt and speak with him. Collectively, they speak about their*
 11 *impressions of America and Americans, and how they got these impressions of life*
 12 *in the US; after listening to them speak so highly of 'my' life in America, I am*
 13 *compelled to interject]*

14 . . . *Hele, to není lepší . . . určitě ne . . . (. . . look, it isn't better . . . definitely not . . .)*

16 *(and I stun myself into silence by my response; I have lost my tongue; many seconds*
 17 *pass before I can interject feebly)*

18 . . . *je to jenom něco jiného (. . . it's just something different.)*

20 *[The conversation continues but I am struck by my reaction. In trying to speak for*
 21 *myself, I am at a loss to find the words to explain it; many minutes pass; I am lost*
 22 *in my thought, my powers to identify eclipsed, Finally, the Czech man turns to me*
 23 *and asks:]*

24

25 *Patron: Tak, jaké to tam je (Well, So how is it there?)*

26 *ME: Co máš na mysli (What do you mean?)*

27 *Patron: Jak tam tvůj život vypadá. (What is your life like there?)*

28

29 *[A bit dazed and lightheaded]*

30

31 *Do prdele, nevím . . . je mi líto, nevím co říct . . .*

32

33 *opravdu . . . nevím . . .*

34

35 *můžu jenom říct, jak jsem to znával*

36

37 *(Fuck, I don't know, . . . I'm sorry, I just don't know what to say . . .*

38

39 *really . . . I don't know . . .*

40

41 *I can only tell you what I used to know . . .)*

42

43 *the events of that evening haunted me all the way home . . .*

1 **V. AFTER THE FALL: SIFTING THROUGH**
 2 **THE ASHES OF THE WALL**

3
 4 *July 1998*

5
 6 *Coming Home?*

7 And so it ends . . . 5 a.m., my bags are packed, and I am waiting for my ride to the
 8 airport. The sun is coming, but it shines differently today. Two and a half years. I
 9 have a one-way ticket. I am going forward. And I am heading home . . .

10
 11 Home?

12 The place of security, stability, safety, understanding, unity, etc., etc. . . . all
 13 those good words which help us to judge our homes as to whether they are good
 14 or not.

15 I am not going back to my home . . .

16
 17 no. I am going somewhere else. Another stop on the road.

18 Home . . . I surprise myself. My experiences here have taught me much, and on
 19 one hand, I don't want to go back to the US, and yet, nothing could also be more
 20 certain in my heart. I don't fit like I did there, I don't fit completely right here
 21 either. And yet, I fit-in in both places now. I will always be an "In-between" from
 22 now on, I guess. For better or worse. I now know this.

23 I can never get myself back within "my culture" – the former configuration of
 24 ideological safety that I once knew, and yet, was I safe?

25 I am forced to accept that in gaining knowledge for oneself, one must accept an
 26 existence of destabilization. Beliefs are washed away, and yet they become more
 27 firm in their new form than ever before.

28 That form which changes form in its action.

29 Knowing my conceptions will be perpetually destabilized becomes my stability.

30
 31 Over time, change occurs, and satellites can deviate from their trajectories.

32 Today my revolutions continue around another sun from the same galaxy.

33
 34 But my universe continues to open up with stronger telescopes and bigger lenses:
 35 galaxies which open as one explores them, and as one explores themselves in doing
 36 so

37 and as one writes those galaxies into being

38 and as one reads them

39
 40 as you are reading this, a snapshot from my galaxy

1 And ME?
2
3 Well, Ostrava *was* a transport junction on a major route to and from the cultural
4 constructions of ME,
5 and I have ‘escaped’ by reprogramming the engineering of ME and my relation-
6 ships to my cultural ties.
7
8 My ‘recovery’ came by erasing that very word; Writing and speaking from the
9 same vantage point but working with a new definition.
10
11 I faced my biggest fear – of becoming myself;
12 By facing that most-formidable cultural antagonist, I am stronger.
13
14 I work now to be one in some instead of Someone.
15
16 My life is a ‘becoming’: there are no certainties in its destination; no certain
17 destinations anymore.
18
19 My identity ‘becomes’ in its daily constructions and representations, in the way I
20 choose the roles and assume them, and in the way they are read.
21
22 From that, the Meaning of ME is enacted and lived.
23
24 But beliefs and perspectives are constructions themselves: always-already poten-
25 tially transient in their representation and readings;
26
27 By enacting our representational narratives; we resolve our pasts, make our pres-
28 ence, and define our futures; through them, we ‘live,’ and in turn, are defined.
29
30 And therefore, I am somewhat powerless to control your reception of this particular
31 constructed narrative of ME:
32
33 Did it matter?
34
35 Did it make you think?
36
37 Did it say something to you?
38
39 Could you care more?
40
41 **Could you care less?**
42
43 Did it lose you?
44
45 Did you lose yourself . . . or your perspective . . . even for a moment?
46
47 What if I made it all up?

1 Didn't I?

2 Ostrava and the Czech Republic are not as I described them in Section II. But in that
3 regard, fallacious conclusions are – sadly – to be expected from the ideologically-
4 predisposed assumptions and decontextualized perceptions of today's western
5 'tourist' (Ethnographer?) of the 'former Eastern Bloc' who is all too often in-
6 sensitive to the culture and history of the locals and unable to communicate in
7 their language.¹¹ One should be wary of the efficacy of translation.

8 These pages can hardly convey the power and character of my 30 months of
9 experience there, and yet, there would never be enough time nor space to effectively
10 convey that which even I myself am not certain of. These are but random snapshots
11 from that changing 'experience.'

12 And I have changed from this experience. My thinking has shifted. My time
13 over there was multi-voiced, cacophonous, and unsettling, and it showed me how
14 complex the act of interpretation is.

15 Like punching holes in one's walls, while sealing up those rooms you leave
16 behind – the infusion of experience, reflection, culture, and language dialogically
17 mutates our being and understanding; we are left with only representations of what
18 we once were;

19 I am not back even though I am physically back here, and I couldn't go back
20 if I wanted to. There is no way back to where I was. There is no 'back' to
21 get to.

22 Where I am 'becomes' as I write myself in this text, and the meaning 'becomes'
23 as you read it and position it within your narrative of experience. Of the Inside
24 and of the Outside. The meaning 'becomes' in the interaction of this narrative with
25 your understanding of your own narrative and self. Its meaning, identity and power
26 depend on you.

27 *This is how I chose to represent my experiences in the Czech Republic yesterday.*

28 *Yesterday, it was 'finished';*

29 *Today, it has been 'finished' again.*

30
31
32
33
34 *Nad Stádem Koní /Above a Herd of Horses¹²*

35
36
37 *Tak dlouho jsem žil ve víře,*
38 *Až mi zkušenost ukázala, že všechno je jinak*
39 *A není čas zastavit se a přemýšlet*
40 *Pravda, kterou dnes říkáš se stejně zítra změní*

1 *Lived inside belief for so long,*
 2 *Till experience begins to prove that it's all wrong*
 3 *You don't have time to stop and wonder*
 4 *The truth you speak today will change tomorrow anyway.*

5 *Seat yourself near us, we will let you talk away*
 6 *And remember this our mission*
 7 *Give us this hand and be at peace*
 8 *There, in that place*

9
 10 *Posad' se k nám, necháme tě vymluvit*
 11 *A vzpomenout si na ty naše úkoly*
 12 *Tu ruku nám dej a odpočivej v pokoji*
 13 *Tam na tom místě*

NOTES

18 1. I use quotations with the word postcommunist because it is an adjective that has been
 19 singularly overused and overemphasized by western scholars and journalists alike when
 20 referring to the regions of Eastern and Central Europe post-1989.

21 2. My Bloody Valentine. (1989). *Touched . . . To Here Knows When*. On: Loveless (CD)
 22 New York: DGC Records.

23 3. The Good Cows. (1991). *Anymore*. On: *Munising* (Cassette). New York: Exit 69 off
 24 Rt. 17 Records Ltd.

25 4. Buty (1994). *Mám Jednu Ruku Dlouhou* (I Have One Long Arm). On: *Ppoommaalluu*
 26 (*Ssllloowwlllyy*).

27 5. King, John and Richard Nebeský. *Czech and Slovak Republics: A Lonely Planet Travel*
 28 *Survival Guide*. Hawthorn, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications, 1995, pp. 327.

29 6. The Good Cows. (1991). *Anymore*. On: *Munising*. New York: Exit 69 off Rt. 17
 30 Records Ltd.

31 7. Poole (1995). *Snowcicle*. On: *Alaska Days*. New York: spinART Records.

32 8. REM. (1996) *Leave*. On: *New Adventures in Hi-Fi*. New York: Warner Brothers
 33 Records.

34 9. The bold type connotes the responses I received from various students in the classes
 35 I taught.

36 10. Buty (1994). *Do Tramátýre* (To Neverland). On: *Ppoommaalluu* (*Ssllloowwlllyy*).

37 11. Thank you for reading this footnote, which is intentionally positioned here to reflect
 38 the dearth of information within the US about this region of Europe. Eastern and Central
 39 Europe today, in many respects, is considered geo-politically marginal outside of its Cold
 40 War context. Hence, accurate historical and contemporary cultural information about the
 countries of the region remain to be gleaned solely through personal initiative. But it must
 be understood that this is not so for the United States in the region (and world, I would
 argue). The people of these countries are confronted with our presence (military, culture,
 entertainment, tourists, etc.) everyday, whereas information about the Czech Republic (or,

1 for that matter, most nominal ‘non-western’ nations in the world) is not generally engaged
2 in US daily life.

3 In other words, it remains very easy to disregard other nationalities and their contextually-
4 specific history, interests, and lives from within the United States, like it is easy to disregard
5 my endnote in this paper. But such a state of affairs is fast becoming untenable in the modern
6 day. Fostering greater awareness, interaction, and sensitivity for other countries and peoples
7 remains a pressing concern (especially in much of the US in light of 9/11/01). With this in
8 mind, I offer the following insights.

9 The term ‘Eastern Bloc’ – referring to the former Warsaw Pact countries of Eastern and
10 Central Europe – not only disregarded the wide diversity of cultures and languages that reside
11 in this region, but through its continued application also serves today rhetorically to position
12 this region and its inhabitants within an outdated and erroneous framework of understanding
13 (namely as being “backwards,” “developing,” or “in transition”), and implicitly situates
14 these countries in the lower echelons of an international hierarchy intrinsically based upon
15 the values and the ideology associated with and produced by capitalism and its resultant
16 commercial culture. The result is often an unintentional proclivity for ‘westerners’ of all
17 sorts to speak in a pejorative, condescending and/or pedagogical manner to or about the
18 citizens of these nations; a somewhat ironic notion when one considers that the majority
19 of just such individuals are not even aware, for example, of where Czechoslovakia was
20 located geographically, its significant historical contributions to western thinking, history
21 and philosophy, or for that matter, that it no longer exists (it has been two countries – the
22 Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia – for almost 10 years).

23 12. Buty (1999). *Nád Stádem Koní. On Kapradí (Fern)*.

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