
BECOMING CZECH

MANILA FOLDER

ANTHOLOGY OF TEXTS WRITTEN FOR
THE PROJECT BECOMING CZECH (21-22/3/2022)



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Anthology of texts written for the project *Becoming Czech* (21–22/3/2022)

Authors: Masha Kovtun, Nadezda Nazarova, Andrei Shulha, Olga Krykun, Viktoriia Tymonova, Darja Lukjanenko, Georgy Mezhuev, Arseniy Aleinik, Aliaksandra Yakubouskaya, Polina Khatsenka, Ekaterina Plechkova

Editors: Matyáš Dlab, Claire Gilbert, Lora Krasteva

Translation: Padla Němečková

Proofreading of English texts: Lívia Tomečková, Štěpán Pařízek, Padla Němečková

Photos: Adam Holubovský

Graphic design: Jana Hrádková, Květoslav Bartoš

Terén - Field for Performing Arts

Centre for Experimental Theatre

teren@ced-brno.cz

jasuteren.cz

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Becoming Czech. As a part of our long-term plan, the collective project focusing on first-generation immigrants in Brno and the Czech Republic, and their relationship to the topics of national identity, belonging, and general issues of migration, was prepared to be presented by the end of March. No one could have predicted that this date would mark one month since the beginning of Russian aggression in Ukraine causing a huge wave of migration.

Besides the very practical ways in which we could contribute to improve the situation of migrants coming to the Czech Republic because of the war conflict, we were also thinking about the possibilities that we have, as a cultural organization, at the level of our own artistic activities.

We decided to contact artists coming from the countries directly affected by war who have participated in the open call for this project. We offered them the possibility to use this opportunity to make a public statement. Eleven out of seventeen artists we approached expressed their wish to participate. They were asked to submit a written text that would articulate their personal perspective on the themes and topics of the Becoming Czech project, and in particular on the terrible experience of war that affects all of us to varying degrees. The content of their texts remained unedited. The printed compilation of these texts was handed out to the participants of the two-day Becoming Czech event in the Centre for Experimental Theatre, Brno. Texts in electronic form are always available in English and Czech.

FOREWORD

The authors come from the countries of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, and have been long-term residents of the Czech Republic. We, the members of the Becoming Czech team, are fully aware of the immeasurable suffering of the people of Ukraine that Russian aggression has caused. However, it has been particularly important for us to supplement the experience of Ukrainian artists with personal views of Russian and Belarusian artists who carry the weight of their countries' criminal actions. We believe that beyond belonging to a nation or a territory, there is above all the perspective of humanism where a human being and their unconditional rejection of terror constitutes the main point of departure.

Becoming Czech team

Writer's who have contributed include:

Olga Krykun, Georgy Mezhev, Arseniy Aleinik, Nadezda Nazarova, Masha Kovtun, Darja Lukjanenko, Andrei Shulha, Ekaterina Plechkova, Polina Khatsenka, Aliaksandra Yakubouskaya, Viktoriia Tymonova

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«Моя хата с краю – ничего не знаю».

Literally translated, „my house is on the edge - I know nothing“ is a well-known saying in the post-Soviet space. This is a saying that I am not afraid to use as a metaphor for contemporary society, both Western and Eastern. A society that is either out of politics or is only politically engaged on the surface. A society where war or other tragedy is nothing, but a brief stream of posts in the form of a sad smiley face reaction.

I can't remember the first day of the war. But certainly, it was the beginning of the darkness. The darkness came to my house and choked the heart of every Ukrainian this day. „My house is on the edge - I know nothing“. This saying, unfortunately, began to fulfill its meaning the moment my home started to burn literally. The moment when the aggressor who brought that darkness to my homeland became this edge. A cry for help became an unexpected cry into the void. Especially when it came to the reaction of my Russian colleagues, who are fogged by Russian propaganda or still live in the illusion where art can be apolitical. „Russia is not Putin, Ukraine is not Zelenskyy, contemporary art is apolitical“. I got this answer as a refusal to find a common solution about the exhibition in Moscow, I was invited to take part before the open Russian invasion started. The curatorial intention of this exhibition was to bring together „Russian-speaking artists“ and create a friendly platform for communication.

But the moment the Ukrainian part of the artists wanted to express themselves politically, the whole initiative was canceled without any communication possible. An apolitical society is the dream of every dictator.

It's horrible how easy is to sit in a comfortable chair saying „our art goes beyond politics“, through the buzzing emptiness of cynical openings and tagging #contemporaryart on Instagram.

business as usual

But as a Ukrainian artist, I'm still looking for the light in the darkness. I believe there is room for sunflower in the garden full of flowers.



Everyone is fighting the war as best they can.

Ten days after Russia invaded Ukraine, my parents decided to leave my hometown of Dnipro. I don't want to call it „escape“. Rather, like millions of Ukrainians, they faced a difficult choice. To leave their home. My home.

After 10 days, a journey through love and pain awaited my parents. One night they slept in a kindergarten full of children without parents, where sirens screamed outside the windows every hour. Once they saw Russian planes heading to the same city they were heading to. But then they arrived in a village full of loving strangers who took them under their roof.

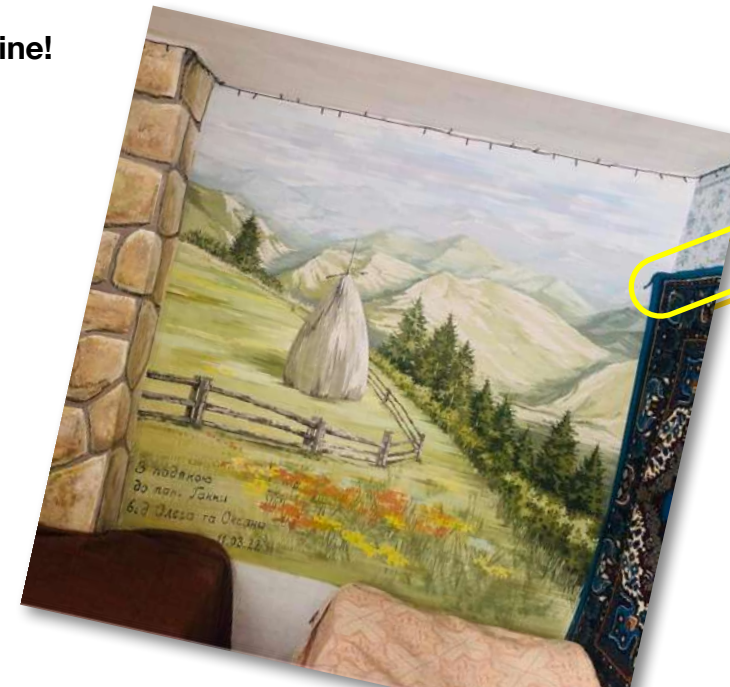
My parents are architects, but they made a living painting on walls in apartments and restaurants all their life. And in that difficult time, they cope with their feelings of pain, fear and incredible helplessness through painting. They left these paintings as a thank you to the people who saved them from sleeping in a car somewhere on the road.

Love makes love.

Their journey continues. Where another very difficult decision awaits them. After 30 years of living together, they may have to say goodbye indefinitely. Just like the several million Ukrainian women with children who had to leave their partners, fathers and brothers at the border.

I'd like to leave the story here. My parents have been a lifelong inspiration to me, not only as a couple who have been together for 30 years, not only as strong people, but also a great inspiration for my art.

Glory my beloved Ukraine!





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PROVOKING A THOUGHT

Voices of the war

I. Liza, a hairdresser from Kiev, (Ukrainian)

a close friend of mine, fled to Poland with her family

“Fifteenth day of war.

For the last few days, I can't do anything, but I can communicate. I'm always writing something to someone, saying something. As a true refugee, I took almost nothing with me, a couple of sweaters, jeans, a computer, a toothbrush, and that's basically it. We climbed into the farthest part of Transcarpathia. It's very quiet here, but all the people are scared. And my condition, no longer one of despair, but of being stuck, not knowing what to do. I want to move across the border to Europe and get a little stirred up and work there. I want to get out of the being-stuck condition. We're going to move to a house in Poland now.

For the first time in my life, I felt patriotism. I didn't want to leave, I wanted to take the gun and fight. That was my condition.

I don't hate Russians; I understand that there are good people. But the situation, the fact that the world has allowed such a war – it is so stupid. Maybe it seems to us sometimes that it's toy tanks playing war, but these are human lives.

I rush to get out of the country as soon as possible because I really need the movement. Without movement and being aware of what's going on, you find yourself in a vacuum.

I have a protective reaction of the psyche right now: dissociation when you just dissolve. I will send you a video of my favourite antidepressant now – it is my cat.” – Liza

II. Oles, a film director, student at Prague film school who left Prague on the 6th of March (Ukrainian)

He went with the humanitarian car from Prague to the border with Ukraine. He crossed the border on the same day and made it to Kiev.

“I asked the Prague film school for a camera to make a documentary about what I will see. When I told my head of department that I might not be able to get that camera back to the school, he replied, ‘I understand everything. Take the camera.’ The guys from the school packed for me two bags of humanitarian aid with medicine, etc.

When I say I'm going to Kiev, people usually ask me: why are you doing this? I don't understand the reason for this question. I cannot but go there. Either you have already stayed in the country, and you can be useful there at the front, fighting or delivering humanitarian aid. Or you must leave the country and do something useful on the home front. It was my birthday on March 3rd, 2022, and a lot of people asked me how I was feeling. I'm scared, that's a fact. But I'm going there on Sunday.” – Oles

III. Mao, an artist, engineer from Russian provincial town (Russian)

“Hello Nadia, there is complete madness here to put it mildly (I mean in the province). Propaganda in the best traditions of Germany during the time of Hitler, people’s hearts have become callous, car owners put Z’s on cars, support for the Tsar is on the rise again.

I have talked to people during these couple of weeks and it became clear that most of them are ready to tighten their belts and believe that soon everything will return to the old course. Few people understand that everyone is on a train whose locomotive has been on fire for a long time, and that the tracks ahead have long been taken apart.

In general, I am in shock and there is an abyss ahead. Prices in the shop are changing every day, but I think the bottom is still far ahead. Common sense has been flushed down the toilet.

People have stuck their heads in the sand like ostriches to hide from the madness going on around them.

It is only time to pray for a swift regime change in the coming days or weeks. Naturally, there is such a tightening of the screws in the air right now. I don’t know, I am afraid to watch what they are broadcasting on TV, but everyone who watches it has the same view.

It even comes to the point that I talk to my mother, and we discuss how wrong it is to fight or kill, but as soon as you start talking about how the tsar started the war, immediately the

curtains in her brain go down and I cannot get there.

The propaganda in the province is so deep that even someone who yesterday adequately expressed that the war sucks, today is looking for any information to justify it. In general, the stun here is so strong that from informational contusion the common sense goes to the bench. Jokes about denunciations have become commonplace. State institutions, cultural centres, schools, etc. receive daily instructions on what to call and how to call it.

In general, much has become obvious, and from the abundance of horror that is happening now in Ukraine, the brains of even the strong people have changed. In order not to go crazy, the mind begins to look for reasons and justify the events. But the province is for the Tsar – it’s true, sad but true, nonetheless.

But to see the letters Z on the cars was a shock. A lot of people wanted to unsubscribe from me for my rejection to the war. At the same time, when I started communicating all sorts of anti-violence and anti-murder sentiments, people were saying that they didn’t support the war.... The cruellest thing is that many people I have known for a long time and who I thought shared my view, tried to convince me that I was betraying the motherland.”
– Mao

IV. Nadia, dance, performer, movement and voice teacher, the author of this writing (Russian)

Artists from Russia and Belorussia are evoked to make protest art not because it is a trend, but because they can’t stand the open repressions in the countries anymore. Thousands of Russian

and Belorussian artists escaped from their countries recently to Europe and the USA.

February – March 2022, and I am in Prague, it is a safe place where no one is bombing, I have realized that I have lost my political virginity.

I will never be infantile again; I know what the danger of disinformation and propaganda is. I will develop the habit of filtration of information and even more develop my critical thinking.

Being a Russian artist, citizen, who is against Putin's war, I know that I am in a situation of danger to become a political refugee. I could also lose some friends who are not afraid to express their point of view against the war and they participate in the demonstrations. The situation in Russia may get worse and Putin may try to return the rules of brutal force when everything was decided by the army. However, now the main force is soft power (economic benefit, cultural attraction, new technologies).

One famous Russian writer, Boris Akunin, said: "People are like frogs, they are determined by the temperature of the reservoir". That is what is now happening in Russia. Some people are hiding their thoughts, some are trying to escape from the country, some are still protesting. The temperature of the reservoir in Russia and, of course, the more in Ukraine is at a hell level. Millions of times I asked myself, what can I do? I have answered that I need to fight with the fear for my friends and family in Russia and in Ukraine.

I am involved in several volunteering groups now: we collect humanitarian aid, we make cultural projects in support of Ukraine, we are doing therapeutic sessions with soft movement and voice for Ukrainian, Russian, Belorussian, and all European people.

28 February 2022

HISTORICAL MOMENT. This day, 2 years ago (2020), Ukrainian and Russian friends met in Prague in Letná near the monument called Metronome, in place where there used to be a gigantic monument dedicated to Joseph Stalin. Stalin's monument was demolished by dynamite in 1962, many years after his death. The Metronome was installed in 1991 and indicated the symbol of the new era. Ukrainian and Russian friends met on that hill to celebrate life together.

For me, this photo means that the time has come for another Russian dictator to be destroyed. Putin, go away! How long are we going to keep the fear inside? How long are we going to be silent? Everyone wants to get rid of that dictatorship. Now, we are all saying it aloud from all parts of the world.

You can block the social networks but this stubborn knocking on the door of freedom, that crazy alarm, that warm brother's hug will find its way.

Женя Леонтьева and Serhiy Solod'ko, I am proud to know you, I admire your brave, calm, focused, supporting, loving attitude which you are showing during these days of war and madness.

Genya and Serhiy are working with journalists right now in Kiev, delivering the info, translating the texts about the changing situation in the country. Many of the people who are working with journalists are risking their lives everyday while staying in the city and going into the dangerous zones. Their eyes see and ears hear things I can't even imagine. I am sure that all the practices of mediation, awareness, yoga, and breathing are going into action right now. To stay calm, to act accordingly to the situation, to process loads of information.

You and all Ukrainian people are the heroes! Слава Україні!

Russian people want and claim to stop war, to save Ukrainian lives, to be free from Putin dictatorship.

<<

Dictatorship

I began to find myself thinking that we can't even imagine the kind of people who are in charge of these countries. Perhaps these leaders are psychopaths, greedy for power and territory.

As of today, there are 50 dictatorships in the world (19 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 12 in the Middle East and North Africa, 8 in Asia-Pacific, 7 in Eurasia, 3 in Americas, and 1 in Europe).

Vladimir Putin is among them.

This is the background story, for those who don't know it:

"In mid-January, Putin submitted proposals for amendments to the constitution and formed a working group to refine the legislation. On March 10, a Russian Duma deputy proposed an amendment that would reset Putin's presidential term limit clock to zero — a move that would allow him to run for office in 2024 and 2030, and potentially remain in office through 2036. Within a week, Russia's parliament and regional governments ratified the amendments and the Constitutional Court approved the changes. The popular referendum was the next step.

Bundling the amendments as a single package rather than having Russians vote on separate issues suggests concern that Russians might not have supported extending the president's term beyond 2024, if this appeared as a stand-alone ballot question. A recent survey found 51 percent in favor and 44 against this amendment." The Washington Post.

Since these amendments were ratified against the will of Russian people, it became clear that the dictatorship is staying for a long time, and the freedom of speech will stay banned as usual.

When we are reading the news or watching them on the internet, it is a rather intangible experience. However, when the events are happening just next to us and the people who have been in war are talking to us personally, it is a completely different situation. We are starting to be more physically and emotionally involved.

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NADEZDA NA

The things which are really supporting me during the last years, are folk songs.

And now I am constantly listening to and singing the folk songs of the women who went through World War II and survived. Such as Agrafena Glinkina or Olga Sergeeva. They have given us their heart through their voice, through their words, in which even if they sing about death, it is still sung in the direction of life and for life.

I have thought about anti-stress, anti-war voicing experience and came up with this instruction.

PROVIDING PEACE INSTRUCTION FOR ANTI-STRESS, ANTI-WAR VOICING

- 1) Lie on the floor, stretch out your legs, put a pillow under your knees and a pillow under your head (if needed).
- 2) Take a deep breath in and out (3 times), sigh out audibly.
- 3) Place your right palm on the spot where you feel your breath.
- 4) Put your left palm on another place where you feel the breath.
- 5) Begin to hum softly, feeling the vibrations in your body: in your face, in your chest, in your throat, in your back, in your pelvis, in all your bones.
- 6) Continue the relaxed humming until you want to pause and listen to the silence.
- 7) Try to remember any folk song you have ever sung or heard from your parents or someone you know.
- 8) Start singing more lightly, intimately, to yourself, not in a hurry.
- 9) Be with the song, let the song be with you, touch you, cuddle your body.
- 10) Let go of all thoughts, stay with the sound and the body. Imagine that the physicality of the sound is as clear as the palm of your hand touching your body.
- 11) When the song stops sounding in you, just be in silence.
- 12) Through your left or right side, slowly sit up.
- 13) Put your arms around yourself, hugging yourself. Do now whatever your body wants to do.

14.03.2022

Prague

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Journey through darkness.

Being an immigrant from Belarus settled in Czechia for the long term, my story seems to reflect the tragic events of today's Ukraine. The first days of war came as a complete shock to me, just like to the majority of the public. I thought I was having a nightmare and I cried a lot. After that, I felt an urge to be in the same boat as those affected by these events. I wanted to help the people coming to Prague and I ended up working as a volunteer. I started going to the Prague main train station (TRANSIT STAV) where I could use my skills as an interpreter, coordinator, and moral support. Volunteering gave me the opportunity to have deeper conversations with people coming to Prague. I talked to several people waiting for another transport connection. There was one encounter in particular that has deeply affected me. He was a young, 26-year-old, blind man waiting for a train to Berlin. His name was also Andrei. His life so far has been rather grim (he briefly told me some parts of his story). His parents gave him up for adoption and he grew up in a children's home where he met his first love. Later on, his first love died of illness and he lost his sight while working on a construction site when he was 20, so he has been blind for 6 years now. A pretty dramatic fate for one person. I was all the more surprised by his appreciation for life and his desire to live it to the fullest. He was optimistic about his journey despite the fact that he was travelling only with two small bags.

Escaping a war zone is especially challenging for someone like him, a blind person who depends on others' help to get on the right train or bus. He had to trust the people and volunteers who took him over like a baton to his final destination.

To me, blind Andrei represents a metaphor for the despair of the Ukrainian nation which has erupted like a volcano. Just like lava, the nation has spilled all over Europe, and especially the neighbouring countries of Ukraine.



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The world has become so surreal.

My world is being destroyed but it's also becoming stronger.
It recreates itself.

Born in the unconditional peace.

A part of my family and some friends have stayed in Ukraine, they chose to do that.

The world is in opposition. These people kill us and say that we kill them, everything you do and know, they say the opposite.
Here is the difference between a different point of view and truth.

Some of our friends got infected by their lie-virus. They spread it and point at us the same way the occupants do.

When I was small, I didn't understand the difference between the two countries. I'd heavily consumed the colonizer's culture to the point that I didn't know what my culture was. I had no culture, my culture was on the TV, some perverse mix of America's appreciation with Russian narratives. Only during the Maidan, which happened when I was in my formative late teenage years, I actually realized where I was standing. I discovered where my ancestors actually came from, and who they were.

Now my city is covered with anti-tanks equipment. My city, which has always belonged to me in some way; I am at least the fourth generation of Odesans, my great-grandparents came here from the neighbouring not-so-far regions.

My grandparents, the post-war generation, are deeply upset that they survived till another war. I am heartbroken that for the last century, we had no generation without war or repression trauma.

Every day, a knife is damaging my heart, with every piece of news I read. Deep empathy for people I never knew.

I don't know what I feel. It's a mix of happiness, deep sadness, hope, anger, fear, and bravery.

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As a Ukrainian. Notes on mind decolonizing 1

1775 — the destruction of the Zaporozhian Sich and closing of Ukrainian schools at the offices of the Cossack regiment

1804 — according to a special royal decree in the Russian empire, all Ukrainian-language schools were banned

1863 — Valuev Circular prohibits censors from giving permission to publish Ukrainian spiritual and popular educational literature

1876 — Alexander II's Ems decree bans the printing and import from abroad of any Ukrainian literature, and bans Ukrainian stage performances and Ukrainian lyrics in music

1922 — part of the proclamation of the Central Committee of the Communist Government includes the "theory" of the struggle between the two cultures in Ukraine – the city culture (Russian) and the peasant culture (Ukrainian)

1932–1933 — The Holodomor, a genocidal famine in Soviet Ukraine that killed millions of Ukrainians

the 1920s and early 1930s — Executed Renaissance – Ukrainian-speaking poets and writers were arrested en masse and then executed or repressed

1978 — resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of the USSR "on measures

to further improve the study and presentation of the Russian language in the Union republics" ("Brezhnev circular")

2014 — Russia invaded and subsequently annexed the Crimean Peninsula

2014–2022 — war in the Donbas region

24 February 2022 — Russian invasion of Ukraine

The whole world should understand that Russia's war against Ukraine is not just Putin's idea. This is a long and methodical attempt, a centuries-old tradition, an obsession with the colonization of Ukrainian territories, Ukrainian culture, and the Ukrainian language. This is a long history of oppression, humiliation, and contempt for our people and for everything Ukrainian.

It's time to decolonize my country and finally, without any doubt, talk about it in the context of postcolonial studies. As a Ukrainian, I learned a few lessons a long time ago: The Empire will never forgive the resistance of the colony. The Empire will never forgive the independence of the colony. The Empire will never forgive the colony for its free existence. The Empire must die. (All empires must die).

As a Ukrainian, I want the whole world to finally start declaring Russia's crimes loudly and clearly. I want us to speak loudly and clearly about Russia's colonial past and, even worse, about it's present. I want us to fight against this empire. And I want us to stop humanizing the aggressor.

Ukraine is on fire. As a Ukrainian artist, I stand against any dialogue with Russia. Right now, our cooperation is excluded. Now, when rockets are flying above my house, when my loved ones' lives are collapsing, when my country is fighting the empire.

I am offended by the search for dialogue with artists from Russia, which is imposed on Ukrainian artists by international institutions. While the war is going on, we cannot look for any common solutions. Condemning the war is no longer enough. A black square in Instagram stories is not enough, the hashtag #NOWAR is not enough, a pigeon on the avatar is not enough, "not all Russians support the war" is not enough. As a Ukrainian, I don't want to hear any more regrets. You need to fight with us, you need to stand with us, you need to stop being afraid right now.





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As a Ukrainian. Notes on mind decolonizing 2

Eight years have passed since the Russian war in Ukraine started. Twenty-three days have passed since the open Russian invasion of Ukraine happened. There are tens of thousands of Ukrainians killed by Russian bombs, there are evacuees shot by Russian forces, there are newborns frozen to death, kids dying from dehydration in cities blockaded by Russian army, there are women raped by Russian soldiers, there are bombs aiming at shelters, maternity hospitals, train stations, cities burned to the ground, there are bodies of beloved ones nobody can bury for weeks due to constant shelling, there is a genocide happening in Ukraine: a deliberate and inhuman annihilation.

Starting from the 24th of February, there is no way of talking about anything linked to Russia out of this context. Every action concerning Russia bears the burden of Russia's monstrous war crimes. This burden is equal to all demolished houses, all bodies and souls mutilated, all pain, all blood, all tears, and all cold sweat of victims of Russian imperialistic ambitions.

While the population of Ukraine is being destroyed by Russia, there is no space for a dialogue, discussion, or collaboration. There is no possibility of artificial reconciling of Russia and Ukraine that the Western institutions are trying to organize. While the population of Ukraine is being destroyed this very second, this is not the time for solution-searching platforms.

As a Ukrainian, every morning I'm waking up to a quantum superposition paradox, but instead of a Schrödinger's cat, there are my beloved ones at stake. Were they bombed by Russian forces last night, or not? That's how my day starts.

As a Ukrainian, I manifest that this is the time to stop the Russian war in Ukraine. It's time to stop Russian colonial obsession. It's time to decolonize the culture. It's time to decolonize the mind. If you want to give us a hand, then support the Ukrainian identity. Reject the narratives used by Russian propaganda, such as 'Ukrainians and Russians are one' or that we share a 'deep brotherhood history'. There are no brotherhoods in the Empire and Colony relationships. Spread the word about Russian war crimes. Spread the word about Russian war victims. Spread the word about the history of Russian wars. It's a many-centuries-long history of oppression, repression, genocides, and crimes we need to acknowledge to stop its continuation at the present time.

1991–1993 — War in Abkhazia (Georgia)

1992 — War in Transnistria (Moldova)

1992–1997 — War in Tajikistan

1994–1996 — First Chechen War

1999–2009 — Second Chechen War

1999 — War in Dagestan

2008 — Russian War in Georgia

2015 – present — Russian military in Syria

2014 – present — Russian War in Ukraine

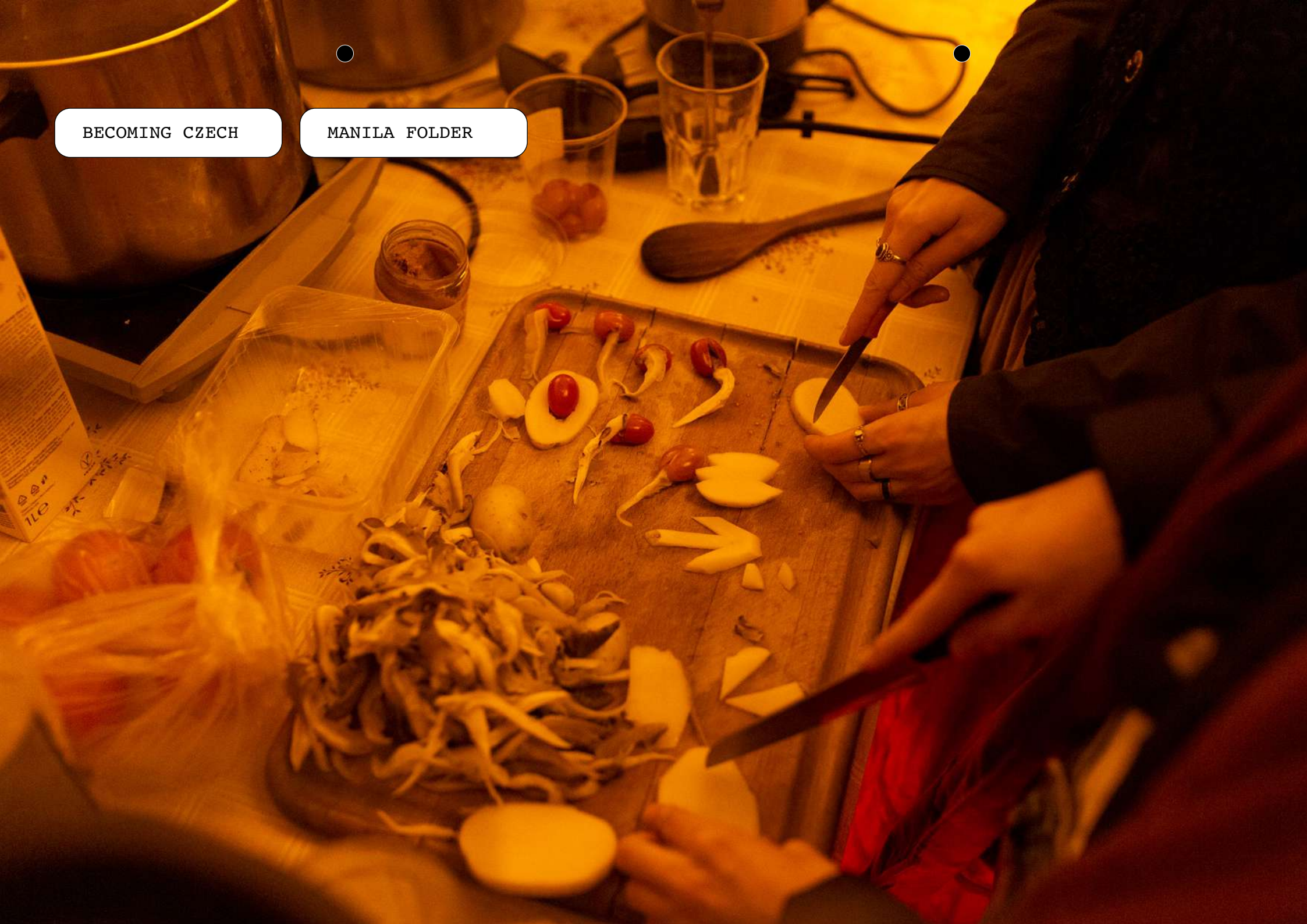
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I have an incredible variety of emotions inside of me right now, but I try not to think about them, because it takes energy that I can spend on helping people whose lives were damaged by the Russian army. But since I decided to write this text, I will try to look deeper into my feelings.

I left Russia for many different reasons, the political situation being one of them. In Russia, it has long been impossible to freely express your opinion. For disagreeing with the official position of the state, you face criminal prosecution. Despite this, a couple of weeks ago I was considering the possibility of returning to Russia after graduation. It feels suicidal under the current conditions.

So now the question of “becoming Czech” has become even more relevant for me. First, I need to understand if I want to become a Czech. Is this a necessary condition for a happy life in the Czech Republic? I cannot imagine a reality in which events in Czech politics will interest me more than what is happening in Russia. Does this mean that I will always live in the past, think about Russia, and will not be able to become a full-fledged part of the Czech society?

I always evaluate my activity in terms of its usefulness to society. For a long time, I was writing articles about football and did not feel that it was useful for anyone. It was a terrible job for me, although it brought in more money than any other. Now, I participate in various social initiatives and get pure happiness

from it. Since I live in the Czech Republic, naturally, the purpose of these initiatives is to help the Czech society, which includes the Roma community, Ukrainian refugees, and ordinary middle-class Czechs as well. Should I expect Czech society to reciprocate? Can I count on it if I also need help one day?

Every year I must confirm that I am in the Czech Republic for important reasons. To extend my visa, I need to prove that I am still studying, I have paid insurance, I have a place to live, I do not violate Czech laws. If one of the criteria is violated, I will be sent back to Russia. There will be no more talk about becoming Czech. All my work can be annulled by the everyday decision of a civil servant. Is it fair? Is it right that the Czech state requires me to be productive and threatens to send me to Russia for idleness?

In the context of what is happening now in Ukraine, all these issues do not seem so important to me. Now, my head, arms and legs serve only to help Ukrainians who are suffering from the actions of my state. I just don't have the time or desire to think about what it's like to be Russian in the Czech Republic. So, I left my questions unanswered. I do not know who will read this text, but I ask you, my reader, to answer the questions written here on your own. If you would like to share your answers with me, please contact me at georgy.mezh@gmail.com

georgy.mezh@gmail.com



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Hello, my name is Arseniy Aleinik, graduate from college in Belarus majoring in illustration-design.

Now I am studying in the Czech Republic at the University of West Bohemia, specializing in multimedia.

My introduction to the Czech culture was sudden. I was not passing the language courses and came here without a good understanding of the language. I could not leave Belarus for language courses because I had to study at the university in Belarus in parallel in order to avoid the army. During the first semester, I was in a vacuum, I understood the Czech language only from the context. Thank God, most of the teachers know English, and the teachers of the older generation spoke Russian to me, and they did it with pleasure. It seemed to me that they liked to remember what they had once learned in their youth. In my group, students from Turkey and Slovakia became my closest friends. Apparently, we were brought together by the fact that we are foreigners here. In general, the situation of a person who does not speak a language well has some unexpected advantages: a standard conversation with native speakers turns, for them, into a game and ordinary questions become a funny wordplay that can be amusing to remember later when you learn the language better. The inability to communicate at a usual pace, on one hand, was very hard for self-esteem, but on the other hand, I began to listen to the interlocutor more. In a conversation, I was often in an inferior position, the other person either started to mock me or wanted to help. It seemed to me that such qualities characterise them very much. You can also always ask again, explaining that you did not understand the question and thus

securing additional time to come up with an answer. In general, the image of a charming foreigner is very convenient. You are always attractive as a non-standard interlocutor. My entry into the Czech community after the first semester was interrupted by the coronavirus, and for half a year I was isolated from society and unable to return home.

It seems to me that in 1 year of life in the Czech Republic, people from different countries become really close to each other because of common experiences. It is interesting that in Belarus I felt like a man of the world, but when I moved to the other country, I immediately became clearly aware of my national identity. Of course, during the coronavirus, it was difficult to absorb Czech culture to a large extent, since I, like most students, communicated only in my Russian-speaking communities. The Czechs, it seemed to me, know how to keep their distance and do not impose themselves on people, and many of my Russian-speaking friends, who have been living in the Czech Republic for 5 years, are quite content with the fact that they communicate only with each other. It is very pleasant because there is no pressure from society that you have to assimilate quickly or leave from here.

During the Belarusian protests of 2020, I felt Czech empathy very much. I attended several demonstrations in Prague and was touched by the understanding and support of the Czech Republic. It seems to me that the Czechs have the common sense of what is happening in the world. In the Czech mentality, I like the logic and consistency, and the desire to calmly analyse events.

Of course, the environment of the university creates an incubator in which all people are initially friendly, which helps foreigners a lot at first. As I have noticed, international students build a very strong connection with the university, they often sign up for master's classes and try to gain a foothold here. After the colossal financial and moral support that my university provided to Belarusians in 2020, I once again became convinced of the involvement of the Czech Republic in world events and realized that it is very important for the Czech Republic today to lay the foundation for good relations with those who came to work and study here.

For me, becoming a Czech is, first of all, adopting useful skills, a way of looking at things as if life becomes easier for you and those around you. I really like that the Czechs value their time. During my life in Belarus, there was always a lack of time, perhaps due to social problems and dangers, I felt that at any moment a calm life could end. After the 2020 rallies, this feeling has intensified. Law enforcement agencies can come to the homes of my friends who stayed in Belarus at any time because of an Instagram story or a Facebook post. Of course, I am sad to write this, but in the Czech Republic, I feel state protection. My example is extreme, of course, because at the moment Belarus is a country that has been occupied by a dictator, but I really like to walk past the police and not be afraid that I might get in trouble. I recently passed my driving license in the Czech Republic and bought a car. When the police stopped me for the first time (I was sober and all the documents were in order), I was still very scared.

However, it turned out that the police simply asked me why I was slow and offered to help as if I didn't know where to go. It was a great relief for me because subconsciously I already imagined in my head all the options about how the police could exceed their powers in Belarus. Here I learned to evenly distribute the work and enjoy the process.

The Czech Republic has become the door to Europe for me. It may sound naive, but I have never seen such a big concentration of different cultures. For me, becoming Czech is to a large extent getting to know the whole of Europe. I heard a lot of indignation from my friends that the Czechs could be too slow. To be honest, at the beginning it seemed to me too, but over time I realized that the Czechs are confident in their future. There is no feeling here that everything can end abruptly. Czechs are also very self-sufficient. I've been living in Belarus for 21 years and sometimes I've heard from adults the regrets about the collapse of the Soviet Union, bitterness about the loss of the once-great Empire. Such conversations create unnecessary anger and resentment for the whole world. For me, becoming Czech is about learning to feel free and calm. Of course, I hope that a revolution will take place in my homeland, but at the same time, I am very grateful to the Czech Republic for the opportunities it gives.

BECOMING CZECH

MANILA FOLDER



In this day and age, an illusion of unity created by a nation state is being disrupted by civil wars, ethnic cleansing, and battles for supremacy fought on the pretext of liberation. The more fuel goes into this warfare, the more people are forced to dislocate and move. These people are more and more often perceived as a “mass” lingering at the borders, or crossing them, and therefore a “problem” that waits for its solution. These people at the borders are seen as a “problem” because their existence crosses the limits of exclusion. The boundary cannot be further extended to exclude them. Their movement in the pursuit of a nation state is creating a counter-cartography.

Refugees, or “illegal” immigrants, residing in the towns on the crossroads of migration routes are trying to make contact with the world. In these inhospitable conditions, new internet cafés serve the purpose of neo-“ghettos”. Digital diaspora in the age of cyberculture gains a new meaning and creates a provocative definition of a refugee as someone “living in the digital world”.

In this new world of digital presence, the virtual has become an accessory of the real; a ghostly simulacrum which acquires materiality and becomes “more real” than reality.

Moving from physical presence to its representation, from “real time” to postponed time, from “effectiveness” to its simulacrum, from live to inanimate.

Nevertheless, the fact that the world has become interconnected does not entail that it has turned into space with no time or location. There is a new kind of motion and dispersal which

actively facilitates new means of representation of a nation state and its citizens in digital culture. In a digitally mediated world, migration and dislocation are still distinctly human phenomena. Migrating voices cannot merely occupy the digital space; they are rather haunting the visual and material areas. Alternative and even counter-geographical relations are being created through juxtaposition of various images and audio data which represent the invisible perspective, and document the dislocated, excluded, and suppressed voices of migrating populations all over the world.

By focusing on the concept of haunting and voice, we can get a clearer idea of the concept of haunting and image. Looking into the “materiality” of voice in relation to seeing allows us to consider a different, “performative” act of seeing. In such an act, sight and listening are seen as crucial in the process of creative interpretation of our surroundings, and building our knowledge of the world.

In one of his books, Jacques Derrida develops the concept of a “ghost” and proposes the idea of “hauntology” (“science of ghosts” or “science of that which returns”) as the opposite of ontology. According to Derrida, “[a] traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts—nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being (“to be or not to be,” in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity. Beyond

this opposition, there is, for the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation.”

¹ In Derrida’s conceptualization, the act of haunting is really about “traces” oscillating between the past and the present, here and there, without being reduced to one and the same.

The term ghost introduces “a supernatural and paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible,” and as such it introduces an elusive modality within material existence. By being partly present and partly absent, partly this and partly that, it leaves a “trace” which marks presence through its absence.¹

A “ghost” appears as a metaphor reminding us of the suppressed absence. This absence can be revived through the “presence” of digital voices which require the audience to create a new listening strategy. A “ghost” represents the “unthinkable” in any mode of thinking, the “invisible” in any mode of representation, and the inaudible in any given spectrum of sounds. It unlocks new space within familiar space, as it resists being enclosed or being brought to a standstill.¹

“Digital ghosts” haunt us in the moments of disturbing encounters; this haunting causes us to question the limits of representation and enter “a certain area of disturbance where things are not always what they seem to be; they are revived by invisible forces working in accordance to their own logic”.

It is possible to reflect on reality also in terms of migration or dislocation; meaning invisible images, suppressed or unheard voices, unestablished or neglected relationships, and unpredictable or uncontrollable forces.

1 - Jacques Derrida, Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and The New International (London: Routledge, 1994)



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Exulanten

Task: Find out how to set the direction of the vector

The pushing state of turbulence caused by the contradiction, the confrontation between two aspects: dissociation and the impossibility to return home, to find a relation to one's origins, roots, to return memories, to find a connection with one's past, and the distinctive desire/need to connect with one's past self, to find one's belonging, to find a foothold.

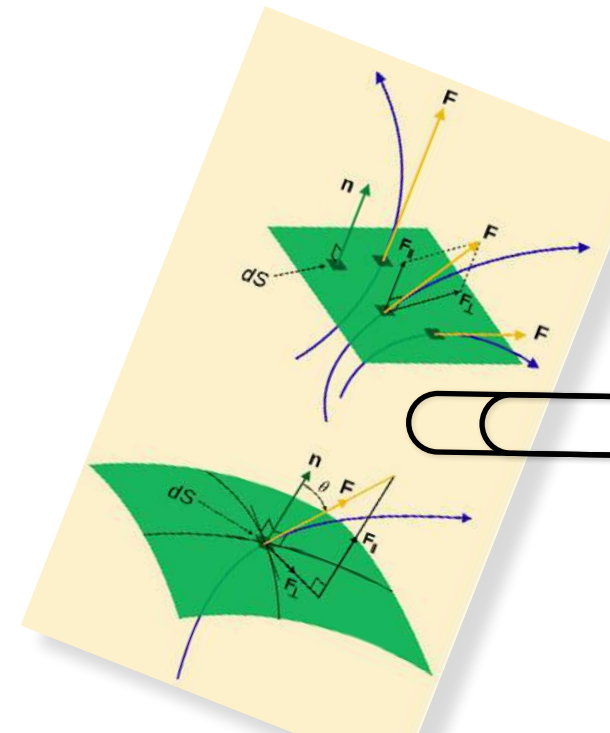
The need appears most likely at the moment of planning a vector of movement: in order to map out a vector, one needs a starting point. It is possible to surf and drift with the current without thinking about a point of departure, but this does not always work.

Often, you are a state of frightening weightlessness and suspension of time, when it is impossible to go back because the connections are lost, and you cannot look ahead because you do not know where you are going. You have to learn to be totally immersed in the present moment, which is a solution of a symptom, but not a settlement of the whole situation. This is often what leads to an intense experience of an almost tangible state of emptiness.

Origins in the form of family do not include states of belonging to something. Aspects such as language, tradition, culture are seen as blurred, merged with something larger, they are almost invisible, and in some situations even acquire negative connotations (language is right-wing, nationalist).

There is no certainty as to where to go. There are not enough points of reference. There is a ceaseless fall happening. It would be good to understand the essence of expansion.

It seems that there are several systems, intertwined, but not connected, autonomous, critically independent of each other. And attention is directed to them in order to take root, to begin to expand.

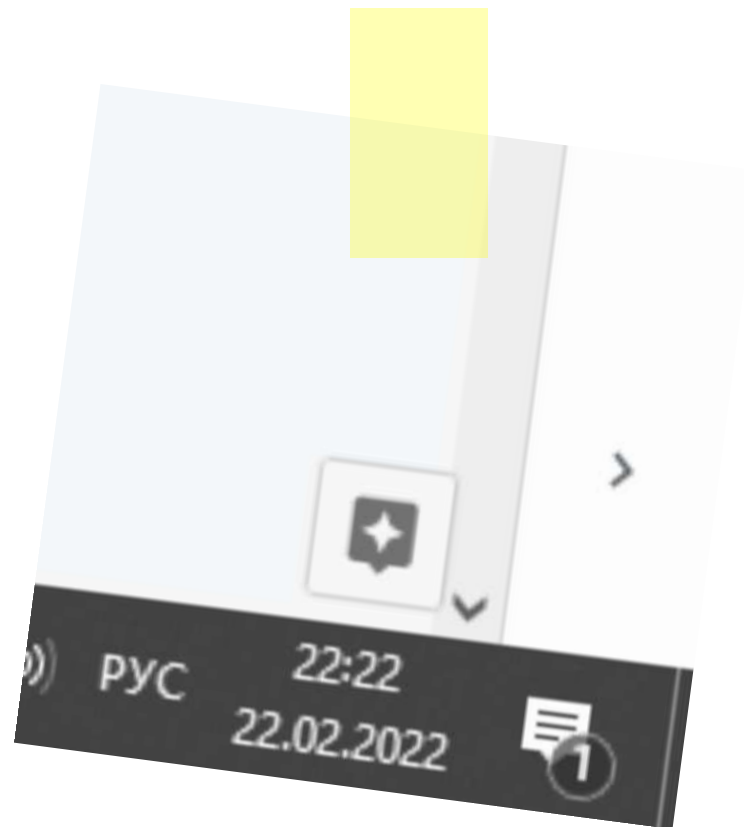


Keywords:

Symptoms / Experiences – Displacement –
Transgression – Dissociation – Detachment –
Void – Exile – Personal – Shift – Flux – Vector
Field

Why it matters:

Another perspective – From the Eastern
European experience – Personal but open to
reinterpretation/reinterpretation – Relevant
situation – No one to say – Few people to
hear – Who to say – Importance of ritual –
Collective habit – Worn and strengthened
bonds – How to perceive ritual today?
(Considering the state of discourse today)





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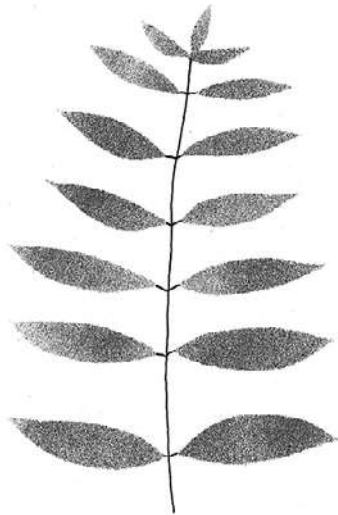


Fig. 1 Pajasan



Fig. 2 Pakiň



Fig. 3 Paštika

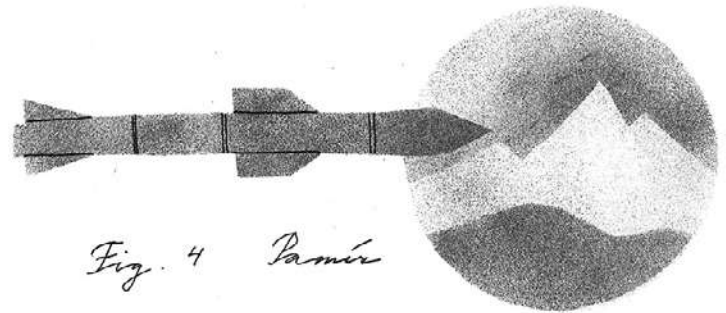
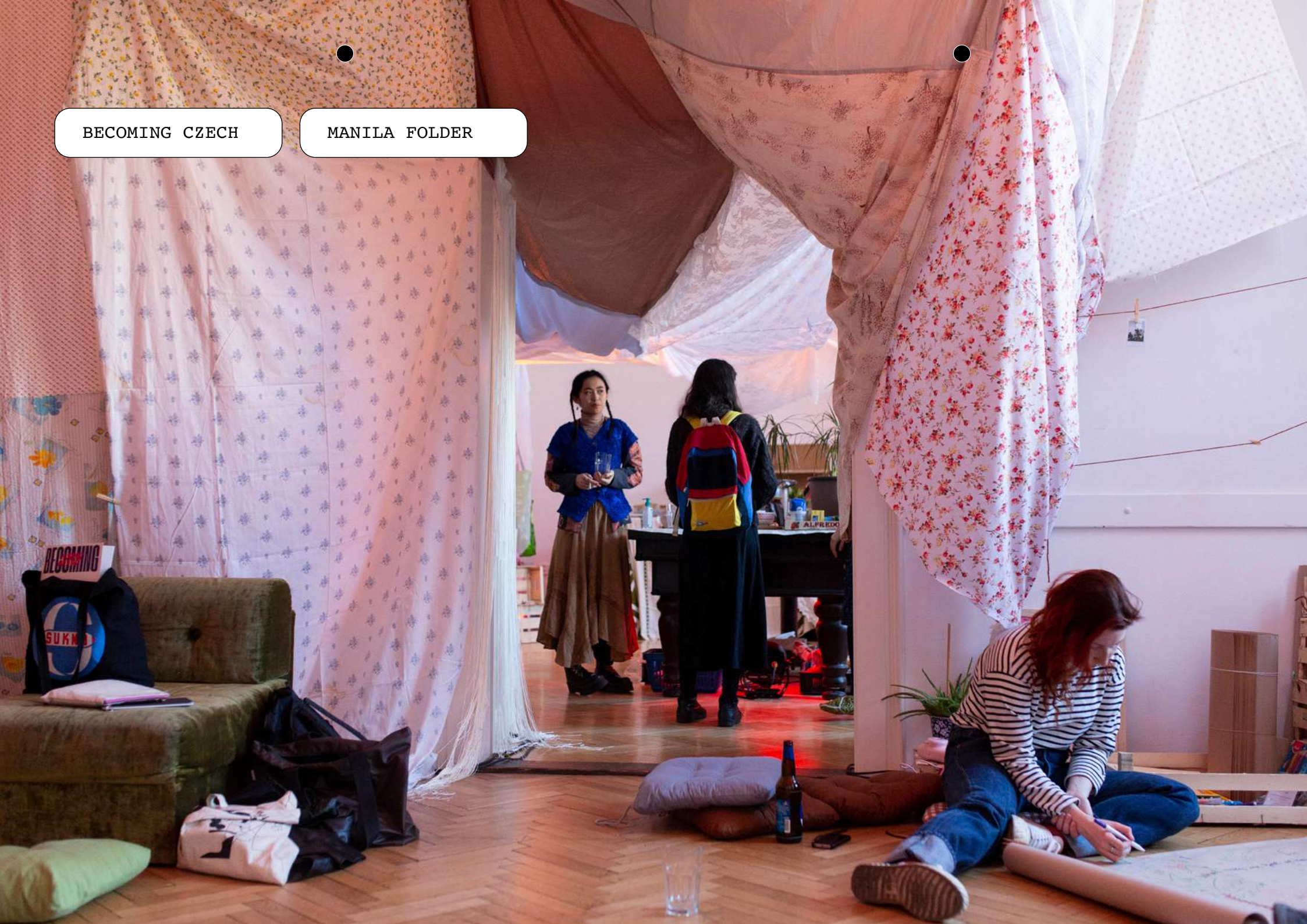


Fig. 4 Pamír

E.P.

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21–22/3/2022

Studio CED, Zelný trh 9, Brno

Terén, Centrum experimentálního divadla

Co-created project combined different art forms and explored the relationship of the first generation of migrants in Brno and the Czech Republic to the themes of national identity, belonging and the broader issues of migration. For the project, Terén and the author of the concept, Lora Krasteva, launched an open call, based on which three artists were selected to participate in the final output – Alma Lily Rayner, Maa Ry Nguyen, Sonya Darrow.

Becoming Czech is the first in a series of artist gatherings to be followed by Becoming Romanian in Bucharest (April), Becoming Alman in Berlin (May) and Becoming British (June). These presentations are happening with the support of Perform Europe project funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union and co-managed by a Consortium of 5 organizations: IETM – International network for contemporary performing arts, the European Festivals Association (EFA), Circostrada, EDN – European Dancehouse Network, and IDEA Consult.

Additional information about the project and photo documentation are available on the Terén website

jasuteren.cz

Curated by: Lora Krasteva
Producer: Claire Gilbert

In collaboration with: Sonya Darrow, Maa Ry Nguyen,
Alma Lily Rayner

Terén: Kristína Čajkovičová, Barbora Doležalová, Matyáš Dlab,
Viktória Citráková, Soňa Borodáčová, Jonáš Garaj, Jozef Fertal,
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