

BELGRADE POSTCARDS

Ranko Bon



This book is about Ranko Bon's childhood in Belgrade, and his many returns to the city he left as a young man. The main protagonists are the people he has loved—his parents, wives, children, lovers. But Belgrade is yet another protagonist of everything he writes. This is hardly an exaggeration. As witnessed by this selection from his writings, it is his city. Wherever he goes, and wherever he stays, he keeps returning to Belgrade. As he himself will readily admit, on occasion he gets outright sentimental about the city of his youth.

Reading, Berkshire

July 2002

PREFACE

This selection of short pieces, as well as the *addenda* that extend them, comes from a much bigger collection entitled *Residua*. It was initiated in 1976, and since 2000 it can be found on the World Wide Web (www.residua.org). Ranko promises never to finish it, though. Well, not willingly.

At first, the writings were collected at the end of the year into books and shared with friends and acquaintances around the world. Collections of writings extending over all years appeared in print on several occasions, the last time in 1996, when the book counted some 1,300 pages. Many of these writings were published since 1976, most often as selections on a particular theme. Originally, they went to philosophical journals. Now, they go to art and literary journals. A good part of Ranko's writings is shared with friends on postcards. He prints them out, pastes them on cards, and sends them around the world. This is why this book is entitled *Belgrade Postcards*.

The writings are presented in chronological order. They trace Ranko's life. That is, his journey through life. He has taught both in the United States and the United Kingdom, where he has been living since 1990. Ranko was born in Zagreb in 1946 and grew up in Belgrade, where he had lived from 1948 to 1970, when he went to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to pursue his graduate studies. He met Darja Mladineo, his first love, in 1962. He married Elise Rudin in 1970, and Lauren Weingarten in 1992. His children, Marko, Dorian, and Maya, to whom *Residua* is dedicated, were born in 1975, 1992, and 1995. Together with Ranko's parents, Branko and Milena Bon, who had moved from Belgrade to Reading in 1993 and died in 2001, these are the main protagonists of his *Residua*. They appear in this selection, as well.

But Belgrade is yet another protagonist of everything Ranko writes. This is hardly an exaggeration. As witnessed by this selection from his writings, it is his city. Wherever he goes, and wherever he stays, he keeps returning to Belgrade. As he himself will readily admit, on occasion he gets outright sentimental about the city of his youth. And thus it is not surprising that the writers from Vracarski Breg are enthusiastic about publishing Ranko's little gems.

Misa Jovanovic
Belgrade
July 2002

LA TOUR EIFFEL (August 7, 1978)

The train pulled jerkily into Zagreb around nine o'clock in the evening. Damp hot air crawled into the compartment. Famished, I went out on the crowded platform to find something to eat.

Acrid stench of innumerable people, glued together by sweat, stumbling aimlessly about: peasants, cripples, beggars, straw hats, guitars, plastic balls of many colors... A girl of approximately twelve emitting high-pitched screams of an imbecile, followed quickly and attentively by her mother. Drunkards, sticky pavement, beer puddles, Germans travelling to the coast, the crunch of broken bottles, musty windows covered with flies... The Balkans. And then, through the damp backs I caught a glimpse of a man carrying a homemade plywood model of the Eiffel Tower on his back. Slightly stooped, he moved elegantly through the crowd, protecting his treasure. The varnished plywood glistened through the haze.

The loudspeakers muttered something, and I hurried back to my compartment to feed on the single egg that I forced myself to buy. A few jerks, and the train was on its way to Split again. "Tomorrow morning I will touch the sea!"

Addendum I (February 1, 1990)

I was born in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, in 1946. My parents met there in the early Thirties, having both moved to Zagreb from the coast. My father was born in the town of Krk, the capital of the largest island in the Adriatic bearing the same name, and my mother was born in Pazin, the capital of Istria. In 1948 we all moved to Belgrade, the capital of both Yugoslavia and Serbia, where I grew up. From capital to capital, ever deeper into the Balkans. The proof of the proposition that Zagreb is in the Balkans also, which would annoy many a citizen of this proud city, is straightforward: all one needs to do is to make a brief visit to the public toilet in the Central Railway Station.

Addendum II (November 15, 1997)

My No. 1 son has been living in Zagreb since graduation from Brown this summer. Many of his stories testify to my verdict, but one of them is especially poignant. One evening he went to a popular night-club.

Two groups of young men were getting ever more drunk and ever more belligerent toward each other. At some point, one fellow smashed a bottle over another fellow's head and then stabbed him in the chest with the remaining shards. There was much blood on the dancing floor and the wounded fellow was dragged out by his comrades. Everyone else continued dancing on the bloody floor as though nothing had happened. After a few minutes the floor was trampled dry, but the dancers' shoes and clothing were splattered with blood. The Balkans.

Addendum III (July 4, 2002)

And now, the clincher as to the "geographic" status of my birthplace. As I was sipping my double espresso in Coffee Republic in Reading, I sent a mobile-phone text-message to a dear friend in Zagreb, telling her where I was. She knows my haunts in Reading well. "Funny," she responded immediately, "I am on my way to my favorite café here." Then she added, knowing my mind, as well: "Its name used to be 'Balkan,' but now it's 'Europa'." The proof definite.

Addendum IV (January 22, 2017)

Pray, who was the "dear friend" from Zagreb who was mentioned in the previous *addendum*? My beloved, of course. We were together when I bought my house in Motovun at the end of the very same month that *addendum* was penned. I was on my way to Istria, the land of my ancestors, so as to be close to her. Through her, I gradually became close to Zagreb, as well. The city of my birth is not exactly to my liking to this day, but that is where my beloved lives. What better reason could there be to return to the Balkans, as well? Destiny, nothing but destiny!

A LUNCH-TIME STORY (August 17, 1978)

My aunt Aurora is quite a character. She invariably chooses the lunch-time to tell us a particularly gruesome story, which she knows for certain will bring my mother to hysteria and tears. She tells us, for example, that last week a pig devoured an infant in her village, some fifteen kilometers from the Romanian border. It was the second daughter of the local doctor, who just arrived there. The young couple was not accustomed to mud and chickens. She elucidates the event in very piquant details, like that only a little blue hand remained, smeared with fodder and blood, that the wretched mother was kissing it whenever she regained consciousness, that she did not let her husband take her treasure away from her, etc. My mother first sinks under the table, changes color a couple of times, sheds a few silent tears, quivers for a while like an epileptic, and eventually starts gurgling a stream of ever louder accusations of her sister's cruelty... My father stops laughing, buries his face in his bowl of soup, and slurps away

vigorously. Aunt Aurora, amazed at this incomprehensible reaction of my mother's and unable to find a sympathetic witness in my father or me, stutters her usual defense of her democratic rights: "One's got to talk about *something!*?" What impresses me about occasions like this is that my mother will never understand that her sister has turned into a peasant pure and simple.

MY OFFICE (April 27, 1981)

There is a photograph in Roland Barthes' *Roland Barthes* with which I can readily identify myself: his workplace at home. A window, two desks, a chair, pencils and pens, papers... The book has disappeared a while back and the details escape me now, but the image is nevertheless clear: light, light, and maybe even too light, but definitively not overbearing, heavy, massive, thick, or otherwise reminiscent of authority. I was delighted at once, for Roland Barthes and I appeared to have had a place in common—an indication of my humanity. Locked away in my office on a sunny spring day I can painfully feel the light penetrating through my remote window, across the city as well as the Atlantic, bouncing off the uninhabited desk into the bright and empty room beyond. A window, two desks, a chair... My deserted home. The news of his death thus exacerbated a permanent longing: a vision of this place and that place covered with almost imperceptible dust—white dust that would invade everything we had ever touched, written, held firmly, or misplaced. Buried alive. The longing is perhaps excessive, or just premature, but it still suggests the dangers of identification.

Addendum (August 12, 1990)

Today I found *Roland Barthes* in my parents' home in Belgrade. I was surprised to discover that my image of Barthes' workplace at home was pure fabrication. First, there are three relevant photographs in the book, not one. Moreover, the photographs depict at least two different rooms. Second, the quality of light in the photographs is hardly worth talking about. In fact, I am now struck by the mustiness of the room in two out of three photographs. Third, Barthes is featured prominently in all of the photographs, whereas I remembered an empty room. Oddly, this is the most disappointing aspect of today's discovery. It is as though I have caught Barthes trespassing on my own turf.

ON INNOCENCE (March 22, 1982)

When I was a little boy, my parents sent me to a summer camp in the vicinity of Belgrade. It was known as the Pioneers' Park. I have no recollection of our daily routine there, but I still remember quite vividly an event of some importance, that perhaps suggests my exemplary behavior at the time. I was chosen, together with a little girl

who was also sent to the camp by her parents, to welcome Broz and his wife, Jovanka (later renamed Jovita by the enterprising, cunning, and understanding Yugoslavs), who were returning from their visit to friendly India or friendly Egypt. This must have been in 1954 or 1955, as I was either eight or nine years old. Anyway, each of us received an enormous bouquet of garish flowers with explicit instructions: as they step out of the train (which was known as the Blue Train), we should run toward them, hop-hop-hop, and deliver the bouquets to the divinity of the opposite gender—the little girl to Broz himself, and myself to the oversized wife. But, when they finally arrived, I committed an error of great significance: unwittingly I ran toward Broz, gave him the flowers, said whatever I was supposed to say to Jovita, and got a kiss from him. Broz laughed, as he most likely understood the nature of my error, while the little girl stumbled behind me. Actually, I am not sure what happened to the little girl and her bouquet. At any rate, this event demonstrates that even children understand the essential nature of power, as well as that protocol is of little importance when one is so close to a divinity. Alternatively, it demonstrates that little boys tend to misunderstand the actual power wielded by oversized wives, who, more often than not, remember such forms of misconduct with great precision and over very long stretches of time. Fortunately for me, Jovita had been overthrown a couple of years before Broz's death, for her vengeance would have been terrible and thorough. I have thus been vindicated by further developments in this divine marriage, which in turn demonstrates the proverbial foresight of the innocent. This innocence, however, must have been rather shallow in my case, as I accepted the very choice presented to me without considering the other available alternatives, such as emigration, assassination, or suicide.

ON THE DIALECTICS OF MAN AND NATURE (*NON, NISI PARENDO, VINCITUR*) (April 13, 1982)

In his glory, man has indeed humanized nature and naturalized himself. This historical process has already touched every ecological niche, every nook and cranny of this planet. The animal has thereby reached a higher level of development and individuation in the world dominated by man—a social being, the true creator of a unified and indivisible universe—even in its natural habitat. This process is operating in the opposite direction as well, which is seldom fully appreciated. Our dependence on nature consequently demands an ever higher level of social consciousness.

The following anecdote will hopefully provide an illustration of this intricate correspondence between man and nature. According to my source, and a very reliable one, a well-known general was recently invited to a hunting reservation not too far from Belgrade, one of many such places in the country where the highest representatives of the Yugoslav party and state can find some deserved rest from the exacting duties of political life. A highly commendable exercise, too—hunting.

The general had invited a colonel, an old friend of his, to keep him company, and the colonel gladly accepted. The two will of course remain nameless. It should be added that this particular colonel, the hero of our story, is a rather rude and simpleminded character, almost Neanderthal in appearance, although good-natured and honest by disposition, while the general is a comparatively mild, even meek, sensitive, fragile, and refined representative of the Yugoslav armed forces. One evening they arrived to their destination together, but they decided to hunt separately. Early in the morning, long before dusk, they left their warm rooms. Both of them were accompanied by experienced guides, who, in their spare time, also maintained the hunting reservation in nearly perfect condition for such occasions. As the wild boar was in full season, the colonel and his guide found a comfortable blind from which it was possible to get a good shot at these impressive animals. After a long period of idle waiting in the twilight, as the sun was rising in the East, pink and invigorating, an enormous wild boar approached them—grunting, snorting, and rummaging through the leaves—ignorant of the impending complications. The colonel raised his rifle, aiming carefully in anticipation of a handsome trophy for his summer cottage on the coast. He was a good shot, too. But, the alert guide unexpectedly started to object very loudly, pulled and tugged at the colonel's arm in panic, and thus simultaneously scared the beast away and prevented our hero from aiming adequately at the retreating target. Fortunately for the colonel, the wild boar escaped unharmed. The colonel was furious, to put it mildly, and demanded an explanation for this unseemly behavior. A while later, when he had calmed down sufficiently to comprehend the guide's compelling reasons, he decided to leave the hunting reservation immediately and to return to Belgrade—distracted and empty-handed. A couple of weeks since, the general had great difficulties reconstructing these reasons from the colonel's abbreviated and unwilling sentences, but the truth ultimately surfaced. Namely, the guide had claimed, huffing and puffing in the colonel's awkward embrace, that this particular wild boar had been earmarked for the President of the Republican Assembly of Montenegro, who, quite naturally, ranked well above the colonel. Strangely enough, judging from the general's subsequent interpretation of his friend's behavior, the colonel's sense of social justice was somehow offended by this unfortunate incident. He clearly could not fathom the complexities of the relationship between men and nature, that is, man and wild boar, as though he had come from another planet, or at least from another country or century. The anecdote has therefore, understandably enough, created a lot of laughter and merriment in the well-informed circles.

Returning to the underlying historical process, we can conclude that, unbeknownst to the wild boar, in this particular case, the life of this species has been predetermined in accordance with the social laws created historically by men. These laws, however, cannot be perceived directly, immediately, or "naturally," but require a considerable degree

of knowledge and sophistication on the part of man himself. Striking blindly at our biological ancestors may undermine the very foundation of our social existence.

ON RATIONAL CHOICE AND AERONAUTICS (July 1, 1982)

There was a room, or rather an old store with a large window and a glass door, facing the street running alongside the National Theater in Belgrade, where teenagers from the neighborhood and an assortment of harmless bums used to congregate in the afternoon. I think that it was a youth aeronautical club of some sort, although no-one who ever came there had anything to do with aeroplanes, gliders, rockets or anything intended to fly or otherwise conquer the sky. Most of the stories recounted there had to do with the staff entrance to the National Theater, where one could always see clusters of ballerinas of all possible shapes and sizes, who appeared to us as symbols of sexual freedom and experience. We were fascinated by their legs and their gaits, which suggested a locker-room proficiency utterly foreign to us. One of the frequent visitors of this club, if it was a club, whom I remember particularly well, was somewhat older than the rest of us, as witnessed, I guess, by his small moustache and his carefully combed black hair, and he thus commanded some attention among the eleven and twelve year old boys, although, or perhaps because, his adventures contained outlandish inventions and embellishments. This fascinating mythomaniac was so deeply committed to his inventions that no-one there actually perceived them as lies. Some of us would mock him playfully when he went a bit too far, but we no doubt enjoyed his enthusiasm and his art. If I am not mistaken, his heroic exploits never involved any of the ballerinas from across the street, and this most likely made his stories less improbable in our minds.

I still remember one of his adventures, which impressed me primarily because of his concluding argument and its rationalistic foundations. This particular adventure is also the only connection between the place, the room with a big musty window facing the street and ballerinas, and aeronautical endeavors of any kind. Namely, he was alone in an aeroplane, his mission accomplished, flying to his home base in the late afternoon. Everything ran smoothly, and he described the peaceful landscape gliding underneath him. A masterful performance, I must add. Glistening rivers and marshes, corn fields, white roads and red tractors... But, all of a sudden, one of the two engines showed some signs of trouble. Fire, if I remember correctly. Yes, it must have been fire, for he would have been able to get home with the other engine if it was something potentially less dangerous. The instruments, he told us, showed clearly that he was losing altitude. As an experienced pilot, he immediately started to think about his options, and to look for places where he could land safely and then call for help. Thus far, all the technical details, at least from the perspective of an eleven year old, sounded so true to life that most

of us were gaping breathlessly at him, suspended. He had the following alternative, he continued: to the right, a toy factory; to the left, a glue factory. The stark choice was presented with sharply pointed fingers. And, he concluded, he decided to crash into the glue factory, because glue was softer. By triumphantly raising his arms and grinning, he demonstrated with his entire body that his choice turned out to be correct: there he was among us, telling us about this predicament. And, truly, glue is softer.

ON BOUNDLESS POTENTIALS (July 1, 1982)

The neighborhood in which I grew up has been civilized since. The open market, the bursting watermelons, the stench of pickled cabbage and fish, the peasant women peeing into the sewer holes, erect, their legs straddling the iron grill innocently and savagely, and the yellowish foam, the remainder, sticking to the grill and a red pepper stuck in it for everyone to witness, and also the horses, the bustle... All gone. There is a school there today. Square, gray, and hygienic, of course. The Russian cemetery is still there, but the concrete block, the monument itself, commemorating the young men and boys who died fighting the Germans in a foreign capital, Belgrade, is also gone together with the awkward red letters, the names, and this once cozy place is now full of flowers and benches, where old men sometimes play chess and talk about their ailments. The musty old restaurant, where all the local celebrities played dominoes, cursed and sang, discussed politics, or whatever remained of politics, and where the peasants ate something or other out of newspapers by themselves in the corner, is also gone. The kids are gone, grown up, domesticated and stabilized. They still live there, enveloped in fat, sitting behind the steering wheels of small cars and fiddling with the switches. The big holes left after the German bombing of April 1941 have been filled, levelled, developed, and crowded with people who like to watch television and say politely: "Good morning." Their kids play basketball, not soccer, in the school yard. The most glorious of all such holes, overgrown with shrubs and ignoble trees, is now a supermarket, full of shiny plastic balls and refrigerators. That is progress, and that is that. I am not bemoaning it, God forbid! Progress is good, as it makes people say, with true understanding: "I wonder why the elevator doesn't work today?" But I remember this last jungle, this pre-supermarket heaven, where people sometimes made love in a hurry behind the tottering fences, where dogs chased each other, let alone the cunning cats, where kids masturbated solemnly and collectively, and where peasants defecated after a long day behind a stand overflowing with cucumbers, peppers, plums, and sour apples... All the palpable progress notwithstanding, I remember this jungle with delight that is perhaps regressive and unwarranted. I can thus still see a boy, the hero of this story, a boy just a couple of years the senior of the rest of us from the same tenement, a boy who enjoyed tormenting the younger ones and especially the squeamish girls, a boy with an

almost brutal face and shaved skull, for his parents wanted him to have strong hair when he grew up, a boy who let us admire his ingenuity and bravery by publicly cutting the hind legs of pink rats, newborn and squirming, their eyes still shut tightly, that he found in the basement of our building among the piles of coal and sacks of moldy potatoes, a boy who demonstrated to us, the real kids, the art of masturbation and who taught us how to effectively compare our virilities among ourselves, a boy who used to live one story above myself and my family, and whose window still gapes into the same narrow courtyard where I had overheard or listened to quarrels, love affairs, illnesses, and the drunken uproar of the superintendent on Fridays and sometimes also on Saturdays. Yes, that boy is directly related to the place that was once upon a time a veritable jungle, although a benign and wonderful one.

This is how this indestructible connection was forged. We were climbing the trees there one day, the rickety and pale trees, a whole pack of us, when this boy, whose name I remember well but choose not to divulge, fell from his branch, head down, with his mouth open in an attempt to let out a screech, and landed into a voluminous turd abandoned there, underneath the tree, by an undoubtedly fat peasant who certainly did not suspect the ultimate consequences of his uncivilized behavior, and then, when this brutish boy got up, for the fall was short and not that bad in itself, and when he realized that his mouth was now full of something terrible, something unheard of, something subhuman, he moaned in utmost panic, afraid to move his wretched mouth and thus worsen his condition, and then, after an extremely short pause highlighted by outstretched and rigid arms and legs, extended as far from the defaced body as possible, he started to run toward the public faucet in the middle of the open market, where some people preferred to wash the fruit they had just purchased before eating it, which, the faucet, was quite far away, and the boy ran with such incredible fear reflected in every muscle and in every jump, and he ran with such heroic energy, leaping and bounding over piles of bricks, over shrubs and fences, vaulting uphill like a tiger, soaring like an eagle, thrusting himself forward like a young and spirited God, his mouth opened wide and his jaws rigid, his moans muffled, until he disappeared from our sight into the open market. This run beyond time, this jungle, and this otherwise pathetic incident, are still the most appropriate images, or representations, of human energy, boundless and inexorable, that I can call upon when in need. The passion of that boy, whose family soon moved from our tenement, still surpasses anything I have ever seen in purity and unity of purpose.

THE AFRICANS (July 19, 1982)

At the confluence of Sava and Danube there lies Kalemegdan. What had been an ominous stronghold for millennia is but a park today. It is commonly divided in two parts: upper and lower. Somewhere between

the two, in the moats of the sprawling fortification, there lies the Belgrade Zoo. My mother, and sometimes my aunt, used to take me there when I was a boy, as it was not too far from the place where we lived: eight or nine blocks along our street, across the streetcar tracks, another block or so uphill through the park, and there stood the green gate of the Zoo. I always wanted to see the two lions, although they were quite unimpressive from close up. The reason for this attraction was that I had listened to their desperate roars every single night, around bedtime, when they would sound like the sighs, groans, and moans of a very sick, very old, and very big man in the distance. The sound has never left me. I can still imitate the monstrous groans almost perfectly, but the trouble is that nobody I know recognizes the poor lions in my interpretation. It just crossed my mind a few moments ago that there must be thousands upon thousands of people from that part of Belgrade who would appreciate my art. They, too, listened breathlessly in the dark, their eyes opened wide, their African hearts pounding with excitement and awe... They, too, grew up very far from their natural habitat.

RED CARNATIONS (July 24, 1982)

It is related that in June of 1968, on the third day of student unrest in Belgrade, a worker approached the two student guards at the gate of the Academy of Visual Arts, handed them a large bouquet of red carnations, shed a few tears, and departed in silence before the two could figure out what to do. It was late at night, when the nearby streets were free from witnesses. The worker disappeared without trace. I heard this story from many people, who all swore to its authenticity, but after the tenth and last day, after the old man's televised speech to the effect that everyone will live happily ever after, after the silent curses that I overheard in the auditorium of the Department of Architecture, where we had assembled for the occasion, and after our mute awakening, this perhaps untrue and yet revealing story, this prophesy and this exercise in wishful thinking, itself disappeared without trace. I have not heard it since. Even now it sounds like my own invention. And I wonder why?

MARX AND ENGELS (July 26, 1982)

The names of the founders of Scientific Socialism are not used very often in Yugoslavia. They have been assimilated pure and simple. Everyone knows these names, but they are of practically no value in quotidian affairs. Marx and Engels Square in the center of Belgrade, for instance, is just that—a mere square. Its name does not have a specific meaning. It is just a name, an address, or a location among locations. The two great men have thus become blurred and indistinct. I can illustrate this contention with two stories, both of which are otherwise quite unremarkable and barely amusing. The first story is

connected in my mind with the confusion of my freshman year in the Department of Architecture at the University of Belgrade. During the first examination period, in January of 1965, when most of the students had not yet learned how to cheat and get away with it, our professor of political economy interrupted her proctoring duties to tell us, with haughty indignation, that a fellow student just asked her to help him disentangle the last name from the first name of this great man: "Which is his last name," he said, "is it Marx, or is it Engels?" The student presumably knew everything else there was to know about political economy, as his essay was already finished. Most of us laughed, as though this was funny. And the second story is connected with the first apartment in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where my wife and I lived from September 1970 to August 1975, during my graduate studies. Sometime in this period we sent a batch of our photographs to my parents. A portion of those was taken in our apartment. When my mother showed them to my aunt, she exclaimed with unguarded surprise: "Look, they have Marx and Engels on the wall!" She pointed at the portrait of Marx between our grinning faces—pink and pink against a white Cambridge wall and a gray poster purchased in London one summer. "But this is Marx," objected my mother, "where do you see Engels?" Her sister was irritated by the misplaced precision: "That's how people say it!" It is truly wonderful how rapidly people assimilate their heritage—along the path of minimum resistance.

FILOMENA'S FEAR (August 31, 1982)

During my military service in a gray provincial town in Croatia, from October 1969 to August 1970, I often slipped out of the barracks late in the evening, when the guard at the main entrance could not see much in the dark. His post was lit quite poorly, as there was a single lightbulb suspended between the pillars that supported the iron gate. At first, the thrill of escaping was perhaps more enticing than the wish to go to the local night club, where dancing and drinking went on until dawn. There was no other place to go to. Gradually and stubbornly I made a couple of acquaintances there, starting with the all-important barman, and the regulars stopped noticing me and my baggy uniform, my enormous boots, my glistening skull, and my odor. Among the regulars there was an attractive girl. Lanky, sensual, neurotic, audacious, and apparently free, she dominated the dancing floor. She was everywhere. And she was indomitable, as I could not discern any pattern in her choice of partners. At long last I approached her and we danced together. Her name was Filomena. The incongruity was so obvious, I thought, that she could not avoid accepting my timid offer. I grew courageous, and before long we felt close. After a couple of evenings, there was no doubt that something special was going on between us. But when I kissed her on the dancing floor, she pulled back and said defiantly: "I am a lesbian!" I did not understand her at first, and she laughed. Eventually, I shrugged my shoulders, and behaved as though nothing had changed. In fact, nothing had changed.

The attraction was real and mutual. One evening, exhausted and rather drunk, I asked her to come out of the club, and sit with me in the adjoining courtyard, through which one had to pass on the way to the club. She looked at me seriously, hesitated for a moment, and then accepted the idea. We went out. For the first time we were alone, although we had spent several long evenings together. Filomena was nervous, and that puzzled me. There was almost no light out there. We both lit our cigarettes, and then I came closer and embraced her. This was my chance, I thought. Her face transformed instantaneously, panic spread through every feature of that beautiful face, and her eyes grew ever larger. Her eyes exploded. She suddenly assumed an animal expression, let out a horrible shriek, jumped away from me, and ran through the gate that led to the street. Everything happened so quickly that I could not but stare after her in utter amazement. Not only had I not experienced such fear in others ever before, but I also could not fathom its connection with anything I had done. Confused and sad, I dragged myself to the barracks through the empty streets. It was very dark and dogs were barking everywhere. I almost got caught by the officer on duty, as I could not concentrate on the intricate procedure of returning to my bed. Her eyes would not go away the whole night and the next day. I returned to the club in the evening. She was there, too. We pretended that there was nothing to worry about. We continued pretending for a long time. For better or worse, we understood nothing. But the compassion I had felt for her since that terrifying evening ultimately eroded her fear, and after a month or so Filomena overcame it. For a while, it appeared that we were in love. I was her first fearless soldier.

Addendum I (March 11, 1988)

In her letter last week, my mother wrote that Filomena just called from her home town. She still lives there, and must be almost forty by now. My father was on the phone, so the conversation was very short. He can never manage more than ten words on the phone. At any rate, Filomena told him that she remembered me fondly. "He was such a clever young man," she reportedly said. She would like to see me when I come to Yugoslavia this summer.

Addendum II (March 21, 1994)

In 1970, close to the end of my military service, I was transferred to Zagreb for a month or so, after which period I returned to Sisak. My uncle and aunt in Zagreb kept some of my civilian clothing, and so I was able to fully enjoy Zagreb's night life. Through a few childhood friends who had since moved from Belgrade to Zagreb I quickly found a circle of people very much to my liking. Marijana was a part of that circle. Through her I met several interesting people, mainly architects and artists. Making love to Marijana made me forget Filomena for a while, but I soon grew apprehensive of the signs that Marijana was falling in love with me, as well as that she was having some secret

thoughts about a long-term relationship with me. When I was transferred back to Sisak, she would come to visit me every weekend. As is usually the case in such situations, I grew colder as she grew more interested in me. Thus my memory of our love-making on wilted grass littered with cigarette butts in the dingy parks of Sisak is not entirely pleasant. I would increasingly often bang her from behind so as not to have to look at the blissful expression on her face. But there is one memory of Marijana that springs to mind as somewhat pleasant: the first and only time I made love to a woman in a car was in her Volkswagen parked in a very steep and dark street someplace in the center of Zagreb. The imagined exposure of the venue gave us both wonderful orgasms.

Addendum III (September 1, 2012)

I just went through the Google Analytics content drilldown for my *Residua* website. I was surprised to find quite a number of search words or phrases in Croatian rather than English. It took me a while to figure out that they actually spell out an entire message. “Hello!” is the first search word. The first search phrase is as follows: “Check the message on Facebook.” Of course, I abandoned Facebook a couple of years ago, but I remain registered on the social network for some strange reason. The second search phrase is the clincher: “I remember every single moment.” “Filomena” is the last search word. Clearly, she must have figured out that I was using Google Analytics, and her message eventually came through loud and clear. I immediately went to check what I have written about Filomena. And I was surprised again when I found out that I had skipped mentioning my last meeting with her. She came to see me in Belgrade just before I left for the States. We made love only once. It was in my parents’ apartment. Since I do not remember almost anything about the event, I am glad that Filomena remembers every single moment. And I am happy that things stay this way.

Addendum IV (March 24, 2013)

Filomena has kept sending me all sorts of messages, but I have kept mum all the while. Let old love affairs remain old love affairs. Bit by bit, she has quieted down, too. The last message of hers appeared on Google Analytics several weeks ago. “Hello,” it goes, “the hardest nut to crack!” It made me kind of proud, I must admit. Congratulations, Filomena!

ALLE MENSCHEN WERDEN BRÜDER (October 1, 1982)

I grew up on the edges of a rather rough neighborhood in Belgrade. The likelihood of being intercepted on the way to or from school and beaten up was fairly high. On one such occasion I was encircled by seven or eight boys, some of whom were considerably older than

myself. I knew there was no way out of the predicament, and I more or less calmly tried to minimize my losses. A younger boy was thrust into the circle facing me, and he quickly grabbed me by the collar: "Why did you beat up my brother?" He looked truly ferocious, as he had to perform to the satisfaction of his merciless patrons. "Who's your brother?" I asked seriously. "All are my brothers," he said and proceeded with his task, while the others cheered and prompted him forward to his well-deserved victory. My mother was appalled by my appearance that day. Almost thirty years hence I made a connection with Friedrich von Schiller, whose poem always had a familiar ring.

Addendum (January 4, 2000)

The rough neighborhood was called Dorcol. Many years after I left Belgrade, I learned that this name came from Turkish: *dort yol* means "four roads," that is, "crossroads" or "intersection." Not a bad name for Belgrade, too, or perhaps Serbia in its entirety.

A RECENT ACQUISITION (January 24, 1983)

My aunt Aurora died in a Belgrade hospital on January 13, 1983. The letter from my parents arrived only today, ten days after she was cremated, buried, and forgotten without pomp. With a delay imposed by transcontinental communications I rebel and reject the verdict. She deserves to stay. Perhaps this makes me the sole bearer of the African cackle—her wisdom and my heritage. Her death will be vindicated only insofar as my own laughter now acquires a new and irresistible shade—the shade of primordial ignorance and disbelief. (Laughter.) Welcome back, aunt Aurora!

Addendum I (November 28, 1984)

This is still nothing but a project. The acquisition is real, though. Primitive laughter, that is, laughter without ulterior motives of any kind, remains at the center of my expectations about my own development. Without it, without the hope of eventual release from my ponderous thoughts and my bloated plans, every moment of my existence would become unbearable. Indeed, my resistance to doubt concerning my daily toil is perhaps increased to the extent that a promise of humorous oblivion appears secured. And this cannot but enhance the drive with which I embark upon so many dreary enterprises. The cunning of laughter.

Addendum II (November 11, 1985)

That laughter is proper to man is a sign of our limitation, sinners that we are. But from this book many corrupt minds like yours would draw the extreme syllogism, whereby laughter is man's end! Laughter, for a few moments, distracts the villain from fear. But law is imposed by

fear, whose true name is fear of God. This book could strike the Luciferine spark that would set a new fire to the whole world, and laughter would be defined as the new art, unknown even to Prometheus, for canceling fear. And what would we be, we sinful creatures, without fear, perhaps the most farsighted, the most loving of the divine gifts?

From Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, New York: Warner Books, 1983 (first published in 1980), pp. 577-578.

Addendum III (December 22, 1986)

What is needed today is not a book *on* laughter (Aristotle, Eco), but a book *of* laughter (Kundera, Zinoviev): a book packed solid with sublime hilarity, ignoble guffaws, oblivious merriment, grotesque joviality, vulgar burlesque, simpleminded slapstick, indolent and proud comedy... In short, what is needed today is a book of exalted humor (Rabelais, Villon). For there is no better antidote to bureaucratic seriousness and technocratic smugness that threaten to eradicate the knowledge and appreciation of our constitutive ignorance and the underlying indeterminacy of the universe we happen to inhabit. Punctuate every sweet hope with a fart! Crush every grand design with a lascivious song of yesteryear! Embellish every consistent thought with a protracted belch!

Addendum IV (October 15, 1988)

In my admonishment about laughter I had in mind someone very much like Karl Kraus. He could both exemplify it and stand to gain by it. But he is gone for good. His city and empire are gone for good. The entire universe to which he belonged is gone for good. I may be the only damned survivor...

Addendum V (December 13, 1998)

The attempts to describe *satori* are always in vain, for words are but symbols coined by the discriminative intellect, and *satori* is beyond discrimination. Sometimes the happy man would burst into a song or an improvised poem; sometimes he merely laughed, and it is to be noted that no other school or religion or philosophy has used, as Zen deliberately uses, laughter as a means to a spiritual end. Roars of laughter, cleansing, healthy, ferocious laughter, are part of the Zen monk's daily life and of those who practice Zen.

From Christmas Humphreys' *Buddhism: An Introduction and Guide*, Third Edition, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962 (first published in 1951), p. 186.

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE? (September 15, 1983)

Since June 1968 I have told many people that one of the most important things I had learned during the student uprising in Belgrade, or perhaps ever, is that sudden and radical transformations of what may be provisionally, but nevertheless pompously, called social consciousness are both possible and, for all practical purposes, unpredictable. The "events" saved me, in a certain sense at least, from judging all the morons out there too harshly, because I had seen so many dead souls blossom in a matter of hours and without any tangible cause. True, the process is to some extent reversible, but that cannot spoil the experience altogether. I have seen this transformation happen only once, but I know that there is no reason to believe that it will not happen again and again, and maybe even around me. Etc. My account is usually dramatized by a lot of agitation—rapid eye movements and all. My question, however, is rather simple: How is it possible that I have thus far failed to record this, reportedly most significant, experience of my life? How is it possible that there exists not a single written trace of it?

To Lorris Mizrahi

CAVALRY (November 7, 1983)

A friend once told me that he just returned from a defense of a doctoral dissertation at the Department of Mathematics, Belgrade University, where he witnessed an incident he considered quite humorous. My friend knew the young man who defended his thesis, and he went there to lend him some support. Everybody was quiet in the room: the doctoral candidate, the audience—composed of a couple of friends and relatives—huddled together in the back, and the three professors, who were making the last minute preparations and whispering occasionally to each other. And then the doctor-to-be started stomping the floor underneath his desk with his feet—at first slowly and quietly, and later on with vigor and enthusiasm. The rhythmical thud filled the room. The three professors raised their heads. They watched him for a few seconds. One of them said: "Yes?" The room was quiet again. "Cavalry," the young man replied. After a brief hesitation, the whole room burst into laughter. The professor who asked the question and the doctoral candidate stared at each other a while longer, but ultimately joined the others. By the way, the friend who told me about this was killed in a bus accident some ten years hence. He was en route from Belgrade to Novi Sad, where he taught calculus in a vocational school for machine operators. His bus collided with a train.

SWEETNESS LOST (October 12, 1984)

I dreamt that I was making love to a beautiful woman, whom I incidentally knew many years ago in college but whom I had never actually touched, and that some five or six other women, her friends, were assisting her in her pleasure with tenderness, devotion, and love. When I woke up, I was surprised to discover that the only thing in my dream that now appeared contrived, and thus almost sinister, was the sincerity of my lover's assistants.

Addendum I (December 31, 1985)

Upon recording this dream, I kept returning to my note for a week or maybe two. Every time I would read it I could relive the dream without much effort. I thus felt that the note reflected my state of bliss quite directly, and that I could always retrieve it at will. But after a while the dream started to pale, and the note gradually wilted in my hands. And now, a year later, it is just so many words devoid of any real significance: a memory of a memory of a memory.

Addendum II (January 17, 1989)

"Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased," Marco Polo said. "Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little."

From Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, 1974 (first published in 1972), p. 87.

Addendum III (April 15, 1996)

Brankica, the woman from my dream, had a pair of gorgeous legs, which were shaped by years of ballet and modern dance. Judging from her blue eyes, she was probably a natural blonde, but she was also addicted to peroxide. Although there was something fragile and pale about her, she was quite pretty, as well. In any event, it is not surprising that she was picked up by the "beautiful people" in Belgrade soon after she started her study of architecture. One would always see Brankica climbing in or out of fancy cars, which were still very rare in Belgrade in the 1960s. At the time I was with Darja, and I had no interest in the beautiful people. But Darja did briefly join this rarefied circle when we broke up in 1969, a few months after I started my military service. Just before I went to the States a year later, Darja and I met on several occasions, and she told me about her new friends and their fabulous parties. Among other things, she mentioned that I would be amazed how easy it was to get into the pants of some of the women I knew well. Brankica, too, came up in this connection. At one of the

parties, Darja saw Brankica receiving one fellow after another in a separate room, where she lay naked on a large bed, her shapely legs spread wide. This lurid image must have informed my sweet dream, but in it Brankica was on top of me, so that her assistants could have better access to her body.

ON MOSQUITOES (July 18, 1986)

People in Belgrade nowadays often complain about the swarms of mosquitoes that spoil many a summer night. The underlying assumption is that the pesticide raids of the good old days have been curtailed due to the economic austerity measures. But such complaints are one-sided. What they tend to neglect is the bulging supply of fresh blood and tender skin in the public parks, where swarms of homeless or roomless Belgraders neck and fornicate at will each night when it does not rain. The mosquitoes are the hidden beneficiaries of the long-term housing crisis, which has anteceded the period of austerity by a couple of decades.

Addendum I (March 21, 1994)

Ruzica, the woman behind this piece, came to my parents' flat in Belgrade to pick up a portrait of my mother painted by her aunt's husband, a well-known albeit pathetic Yugoslav painter, who was having a retrospective in one of the most important Belgrade galleries. The painter was an old friend of my parents, and the portrait was to appear in the exhibition. Ruzica was quite beautiful, but she was a bit odd. There was much feminine affectation about her, but she simultaneously appeared remote and untouchable. This first impression had turned out to be correct.

Although I had another lover that summer in Belgrade, I was immediately attracted to Ruzica and I made an attempt to chat her up. When I escorted her to the elevator I managed to get a nice kiss from her. She also agreed to go out for dinner with me. For a few weeks we would be meeting in her place or mine, we would be going out quite often, and so on, but she would not make love with me. I could do whatever I pleased with her, but fucking was apparently out.

The night before I wrote this piece we were together at Kalemegdan. This had turned out to be our last time together, but we did not know it at the time. I must have fondled her for a few hours before Ruzica finally let me put a finger up her vagina. A minute later she got anxious about this infraction, though. Realizing that her protections were faltering, she would not lie on the grass or sit down on a bench any longer, and I proceeded to suck her nipples and squeeze her thighs under her skirt as we were walking around the park.

It was past one o'clock in the morning when she at last let me insert a few fingers up her vagina again, and we stopped on a deserted path for a finger-fuck. We must have looked quite pitiful in our awkward embrace—me with my hand up her skirt, and she with her hands around my neck. I had an enormous erection as I was rubbing myself against her hip. Very soon she started coming and she simply slumped onto my hand. This caught me off balance and we almost fell to the ground, but I managed to prop her up and to keep her going. All my fingers were now in her, working frenetically in all directions at once. She kept coming for a long time, in waves. Ruzica's orgasm was so exciting that I came, too. This had happened to me only once before, when I was still a virgin and when I was necking with Darja, soon to become my first woman. My orgasm was blissful, too. Later on I discovered that my underwear was all glued together with what appeared to be a large amount of semen. Just as Ruzica was beginning to come, it started to rain. By the time we put our clothing in order and ran to the nearest street to catch a taxi, we were completely wet. Ruzica was angry with me on account of the rain, but she was livid about the fact that I have finally managed to fuck her, albeit with my fingers.

The next morning I established that I was bitten all over by mosquitoes. Ruzica's tender skin must have been covered with bites, too. Either the same day or the next I went away—perhaps to the coast, where I would have joined my parents on my father's sailing boat. When I returned to Belgrade for a week or two before my return to the States, I just did not feel like calling or seeing Ruzica.

As time went by I often thought of her, but I never really wanted to see her again. My thoughts of her would usually drift toward that wonderful orgasm at Kalemegdan. I could feel her contractions in my hand for a year or maybe two. Whenever I would ask my mother about Ruzica, she had very little to tell me. But two years ago I learned from my mother that Ruzica had killed herself. She jumped out of her window on the fourth floor of a tenement building not far from Slavija, one of the important transportation nodes in the center of Belgrade. She died in the hospital a few days later.

Addendum II (March 25, 1994)

My other girlfriend at the time was Suna, a beautiful albeit breastless woman of Montenegrin origin. She was a daughter of very close friends of my parents. She was dark, tall and elegant, graced with a proud face and wonderful eyebrows. She was strong, too. The first time we made love was the previous summer. I escorted her home after a genteel dinner party at the home of some friends of our parents, and I followed her into the lobby of her building just off the Marx and Engels Square. It was quite late at night. Before the elevator arrived I kissed her for the first time. Suna was eager. Even though she lived alone, that night we did not make it to her apartment. Instead, we

ended up fucking on the first-floor landing of a dark stairwell. I was leaning with my back against the elevator cage while she was hanging from it on her hands and her bare feet, her long legs bent in the knees, and she was slamming herself onto my prick, like an ape in heat. It was hot, so both of us were almost naked. Later on, when I was kissing her goodnight, she apologized for her unprecedented behavior. She told me that she had never felt such desperate passion as that night.

A STREETCAR STORY (December 23, 1986)

A man enters a crowded Belgrade streetcar. The passengers notice that his right arm is shaped as though he is carrying something. There is nothing there, however. One of the passengers leans over and whispers into his ear: "Hey, why are you holding your arm like that?" The man looks under his arm in dismay, and says, "Shit, someone has stolen my watermelon!"

A TOUCH OF PRIDE (December 24, 1986)

My father is apparently prone to diarrhea. I remember many occasions when he would, after a long and nervous ring, burst into our apartment in Belgrade, cut across the livingroom with short but brisk steps of a demented geisha, and slam the bathroom door behind him without greetings. Quite naturally, there were several instances when this dramatic performance failed to culminate in a happy-end. Although I have not myself witnessed any of my father's misfortunes, which I certainly regret, I have occasionally heard stories about them from my mother. The most wonderful of these stories is a favorite on my mother's sparse repertoire, no matter how modest she otherwise tends to be about such topics. The story begins with her stock preface: "Oh, let me tell you how terrible this was!" One day when she heard my father's familiar ring she happened to be entangled in something or other, so she could not get to the door as quickly as she normally did. The ringing became desperate. Then it stopped. When she finally managed to open the door, she found my poor father kneeling on the doormat. She usually squeals and whines while she elaborates this scene with a detailed account of his imploring expression, his paleness, and his embarrassed distress. Looking for a handkerchief, she catches her breath, and she adds with a sigh: "Of course, it was too late." This is typically followed by another round of squealing and whining, at which point my father joins her in her blissful giggle. One could almost sense a touch of pride in the way he now laughs about this nearly forgotten incident. More often than not, he looks around the room for approval of their merry company, squirming in his armchair and shaking his head knowingly all the while. And indeed, one cannot but find him most loveable when he behaves like this.

A TOUCH OF ROMANTICISM (August 14, 1987)

Since 1983 I have been living on a regular cycle: nine months in the United States, three months in Yugoslavia. During the school year I am at MIT. My fortress, my steel tower. A mercenary of sorts, I face battle practically every day. Braced in one of my magnificent three-piece suits, I command my forces with relish. Daily exercise brings my every muscle almost to the point of perfection. When it is over, though, I feel exhausted beyond recovery. As soon as my professorial duties have been fulfilled, I join my parents and friends in Belgrade. Proud oblivion ensues: I survived another season! The cycle reminds me of military campaigns of old, which started in the early spring and ended in late fall, as soon as heavy rains made troop movements impracticable. Now I am facing another campaign. In a week I will rejoin the assembling troops. And I feel the kind of excitement I expect any superannuated mercenary would feel at this time. Excitement mixed with sweet fear, involuntary muscle contractions, and something resembling both tenderness and disgust for the still distant enemy. Longing for the damned enemy.

Addendum (April 5, 1998)

Things are different now, but not fundamentally. I still live on a regular cycle: half a week in Reading, half a week in London. While in Reading, I face battle every day. A mercenary of sorts, I command my forces with relish. Come Friday afternoon, though, I feel exhausted beyond recovery. As soon as my professional duties have been fulfilled, I join Lauren and the children in London. Proud oblivion ensues: I survived another week! Everything is the same, or perhaps similar, except that my parents now live in Reading, and that oblivion is hard to reach with the rest of the family in London. The similarity with military campaigns of old is thus sadly lost. Still, there must be some mercenaries today who regularly commute to their little jobs around the globe.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY X (November 29, 1987)

As I am becoming progressively more detached from the world that surrounds me, I find myself wondering increasingly often about the road that has ultimately led me to my present state of mind. In all likelihood, there is no single road that brought me here, but each one of the hypothetical parallel roads should be investigated separately to avoid confusion. Here I will explore my growing involvement with space architecture.

The last few years I have returned to one of my old flames—design of human habitat in space. I was barely twenty when I became fascinated with design for the so-called hostile environments. My undergraduate thesis, concerning a settlement under the sea, was the first step in that

direction. Conceived in 1968 and executed in 1969, it was a reaction to the demise of the student uprising, which took place in Belgrade in June 1968. By the way, I was quite active in the June uprising, and felt very disillusioned by its aftermath. My thoughts about life in space no doubt have their roots in this disillusionment. In the winter of 1968 I also started thinking about graduate education in the United States. The connection between planning and design of settlements in space and this country was rather obvious—I dreamt of becoming NASA's architect. A provincial dream perhaps, but still a dream.

However, as soon as I arrived to the Harvard Graduate School of Design in September 1970, it became clear that the time was not right for the realization of this dream. The political climate was not conducive to the exploration of space architecture, both because of the leftist character of the academic milieu, which favored social issues and eschewed all technology, and because in the post-Apollo era NASA was already abandoning many spectacular projects for lack of public support. My studies and my career took me into new things, and for nearly a decade I have had few opportunities to think about space. From architecture I moved to city and regional planning, and ultimately to economics. After several detours, I became a building economist, thus closing the gap separating my interests in architecture and economics.

A couple of years ago there suddenly and unexpectedly appeared an opportunity to return to space architecture. At length, in the fall of 1985 a number of MIT students of architecture from the Building Technology Group expressed a strong desire to do some "high tech" design. Many of them were from the Third World, but they felt unimpressed by the virtues of cow-dung housing of the "small is beautiful" variety, which were extolled by a number of teachers supposedly sensitive to the needs of developing countries. Their dream was perhaps somewhat provincial, too, but a dream it was nonetheless. Lacking sufficient faculty support, the students chose the entrepreneurial road characteristic of MIT: they formed a workshop, chose a leader among themselves, and set out to design a deployable structure for a traveling exhibition hall. Briefly, a deployable structure opens and closes, like an umbrella, and thus it typically has many intricate movable parts. The workshop squarely addressed the problem in requisite detail and came up with a credible collection of technical drawings. The design attracted some attention. Several teachers from the School of Engineering, including the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, showed interest in the students' work. The initial success led to their growing dissatisfaction with the Department of Architecture, and especially with the Building Technology Group, of which I have been a member since 1983, when I joined MIT.

So, under some pressure from student dissatisfaction I decided to take them up, and proposed a new workshop with a clear space orientation—redesign of NASA's space station. The structural system

soon emerged as the focal point for the workshop. NASA's structural system consists of struts and hubs assembled on orbit by an astronaut crew. This is known as an erectable structure. I thought that a deployable structure could find a good application in space, especially because the assembly of erectable structures in space is a very costly proposition in terms of labor costs. In particular, according to the information we had at the time, one hour of construction work on orbit would cost at least one-hundred thousand dollars per person.

My proposal found fertile ground: three students came to see me soon and offered to serve as leaders of the workshop. That was sufficient to start the ball rolling. After a lengthy preparation period that spanned the summer months, the workshop took place in the fall of 1986, and was quite successful. Many teachers and researchers from MIT were willing to join the workshop as lecturers and advisers. Our final presentation was attended by a good number of faculty and guests from aerospace industry, and the project soon turned up in several MIT publications. Thus I decided to continue with the workshop, and make it into an MIT tradition.

By the end of the first workshop I saw a clear opportunity for myself in this endeavor. Although it focused on education through design, it did have a small but significant research component. Several students pursued some aspects of the workshop design in their master's theses, and thus provided a basis for future research in building technology.

This fall my workshop has designed the campus facilities of the International Space University, another student initiative inaugurated at MIT in April 1987. Our design placed the campus facilities at a lunar base, which could be built in the first quarter of the next century. The design features a triangular pattern of tunnels, excavated using *in situ* rock melting technology, admittedly at the bizarre end of technology available today. The final presentation of our accomplishments is scheduled for the end of the term, some two weeks from now. I have again invited a large number of people, and I expect a good turnout. If everything goes well, next year the workshop will be dedicated to a Mars base, one step farther from Earth.

In the long run, my main concern is colonization of space, rather than science and technology as such. I have a strong sentiment against excessive government involvement in space exploration and development, basing my hopes on the same old cowboy spirit that put this country on the map. The spirit of enterprise, I believe, is a key ingredient in our mastery of the "last frontier." Of course, many people have already speculated about this, but my objective is to work toward a building technology that will be conducive to the needs of small groups of individuals who will be pushing the frontier forward. As a building economist, I desire to push the building costs in space as far down as possible, so that space colonists depend least on governmental support. Cost reduction is undoubtedly the most

important item on the agenda of those concerned with space exploration and development.

As I have become increasingly involved with planning and design of space stations, bases, and colonies, I have also lost interest in world affairs at an ever-increasing rate. An example of this is my indifference to terrestrial architecture in general. Which is the cause and which an effect in this chain it is impossible to say, and it is very likely that the two processes reinforce each other. Be that as it may, I am certain that I will become ever more disinterested in daily troubles of this planet. If I become politically involved in any way, this will be only in support of some kind of space venture in the years to come.

Addendum (February 12, 2000)

When we discuss my recent fascination with New Zealand, Lauren sometimes hints at our age difference. “Were I close to retirement,” she likes to say, “I might consider such a move.” Today I reminded her of this piece, written when I was forty-one, only four years older than she is now. “But,” she reminded me in turn, “you did not have a family back then.” I did not have the heart to remind her of Marko and Elise.

ON LOVE MAKING (June 3, 1989)

Early this morning I feel like boasting: our love making is no less than divine—when we make love, we make love, and *vice versa*, when we make love, we make love.

Addendum (March 27, 1994)

This was written in Cambridge, but we soon left for Yugoslavia, where we spent most of that summer. A good part of that period we were in Belgrade, which Lauren had turned out to love for the ubiquitous scabbiness and manginess of the place. We would make love as soon as we would wake up; we would make love after lunch, when my parents would take their afternoon nap; and we would make love before going to sleep. Often enough we would make love in the dark streets and pissed-up doorways of Belgrade. This we would do almost in jest, to mark with our juices the places we liked, like street cats. In spite of several horrible fights, I remember this period as quite blissful. As soon as I would tell Lauren I loved her, I would get an erection; as soon as I would enter her, I would feel my love swell in my heart. In fact, this had remained with me until quite recently, but now we make love so rarely that I do not even know any longer how I feel about her. Indeed, this afternoon I do not feel like boasting...

GROWING UP JEWISH (November 19, 1989)

Since 1983 I spend most of my summers in Belgrade and on the Yugoslav coast. When in Belgrade, I go out every evening. There are many places I like, but my favorite place is the Pen Club, next door to the National Theater. The owners and many guests of this Belgrade establishment know me since childhood, when my parents occasionally took me there. They were regulars for several decades. The Club is a lively and crowded place. You cannot sit alone for too long—someone you know will join you and start talking about anything under the sun. This is how I gradually learned that many of my acquaintances were surprised to learn that I was not Jewish. When I was growing up, my last name and my performance in school were apparently taken as sufficient proofs of my origins. People kept quiet about it on account of war atrocities, I suppose. The truth started surfacing only gradually, many years after I left Yugoslavia for good. I was amused by all this at first. It took me several years to realize that I had been shaped by the behavior of people who perceived me as different and thus alien. It took me several years to realize that I, in fact, grew up Jewish.

DOBERMANNVILLE (August 18, 1990)

By and large, I like dogs. I am occasionally disgusted by the canine subservience to human bosses, but my sympathies still tend to be with the "weaker" species. Perhaps the only kind of dog that makes me ever so slightly uncomfortable is *Dobermannpinscher*. There is something weapon-like in these creatures. They are beautiful in the way Parabellum pistols and Messerschmidt fighter planes are beautiful. Although I do not know anything about the history of the Dobermann, I am almost certain that this dog was designed to kill humans. Be that as it may, this summer I have noticed that Belgrade is swarming with Dobermanns. Some of these animals must have been around for a few years, but I am quite convinced that their population has been growing at an extraordinary pace. I cannot repel the thought that this is yet another expression of the mounting Yugoslav nationalism. In the case of Belgrade, the Serbs are apparently "arming" themselves against their assorted national enemies—primarily Albanians and Croats, but also Slovenes, Macedonians, and Hungarians. As tensions between national groups are growing and instances of open aggression are multiplying, Dobermanns are being acquired in ever larger numbers to ward off the evil spirits. Who knows, maybe the entire country is now swarming with these alarming creatures?

THE PROUD CAT (September 8, 1990)

I dreamt I was walking in the direction of my first home in Belgrade, in Jovanova Street, just across the old green market which was later

replaced by a prison-like elementary school. My parents brought me there from Zagreb, my birthplace, when I was two years old. We moved to my second home, in Kosovska Street, where my parents live to this day, when I was eighteen. By that time I was not a child any more. At any rate, I dreamt I was approaching the intersection of Jevremova and Visnjiceva Streets when I saw a magnificent cat. My dream was about this cat, not my old haunts.

The cat was huge and well kept. He was gray. His paws and belly were snow white. He was strong and very much aware of his power. I noticed him only when he made an awkward move sideways upon noticing an enormous German shepherd down the street. The cat's navigational correction attracted the dog's attention, too, and he trotted leisurely toward the cat. The cat did not run away. He stood his ground and hissed at the dog in warning. Then he growled quite ferociously. His paws were ready for a strike, his back low to the ground. The dog watched him from above with quiet determination, keeping his muzzle at a safe distance from the cat's paws. He was waiting for an opportunity to grab the cat by his back and snap his spine. The cat could quite easily jump to the side and run away, but running away was apparently out of the question. The cat was too proud.

I was not the only one on the street who was absorbed by this confrontation. More and more people stopped to see what would happen. A few windows opened, too. Unfortunately, my attention had to be temporarily diverted to something that was pulling at my leg and making strange sounds. I looked down and saw that a goat had somehow become entangled into my feet and was lying prostrate besides me. A goat! I have never seen a goat in Belgrade, but dreams are dreams.

At length, I set the poor goat free and looked up to see what had happened with the gray cat. The duel was over, though. All I could see was that the German shepherd was being led away by his owner, who finally appeared from somewhere, and that the limp body of the cat was draped over the dog's back. As I expected, the cat's spine was snapped with a single strike. By this time many people were standing about and watching the cat's exit. Many windows were now open. And it was clear that all these people thought they wished the cat had run away in time.

ON SMALL FRY (January 29, 1991)

When I was a kid, I remember having occasional problems with smaller kids from the neighborhood who would not stop pestering me even after I would give them several measured beatings. What do you do with a kid who finds some pleasure in physical punishment? Although a few knocks would not cause you any trouble, a more

serious assault could get the kid's parents involved, and that could lead to difficulties with your own parents. It goes without saying that you could not let a kid pester you for too long without seeming to be a fair game for other kids. After some experimentation, I developed a method that worked quite well with the small fry: I would spit the little nuisance right between his eyes, and more often than not he would quiet down in a few minutes. At that time I was a master of precision spitting, too. Later on in life I looked for a way to "scale up" my old method, but without any tangible success.

BELGRADE-LONDON (February 24, 1991)

Relief and guilt combined ever since takeoff, for the South Slavs are on the internecine war path again. It is a questions of days, weeks. My parents' frailty only adds to my anxiety about the fate of what used to be my country.

TWILIGHT (April 22, 1991)

Belgrade is quite wonderful in the early evening, when the streets are flooded by strollers and when expectations are at their peak. For less than an hour of twilight, one is drunk with possibilities that crowd behind every corner. By nightfall, the river of time shrinks back to its course, and one heads to one's destination with relief and a trace of resentment.

Addendum I (July 21, 1992)

The present tense in this piece is irritating. The fact that it was written during a brief visit to my parents in Belgrade is irrelevant.

Addendum II (March 26, 1994)

By this time I was already quite resentful of Lauren's increasing sexual disinterest in me. By the summer of 1990 it was clear that the passion was beginning to ebb; by the end of that year, the drop in our sexual activity was obvious and painful. From about then on, we stopped making love every day. That evening in Belgrade, where I was without Lauren, I must have been "cruising," as I would have done many years ago, when I was living in Belgrade. But my loyalty to Lauren was too great at the time to do anything about my increasing need for a woman.

ISTANBUL-LONDON (June 2, 1991)

Although the grind of cultural tectonic plates is sometimes deafening, Istanbul seems to be thriving on the fault between Europe and Asia. In

Belgrade, where I grew up, the crunch is barely audible, albeit unmistakable. At long last I can be certain of its origin.

CRUMBS (February 27, 1992)

Years ago I heard from an eyewitness that Tin Ujevic—one of the best known Yugoslav bards between the two world wars—once dedicated the following poem to an ageing lady who kept pestering him for it in one of his favorite Belgrade haunts:

*Trte mi te nate
Nate mi te trt
Pa kad dodje smrt
Trt*

I am afraid that my translation is somewhat too neat:

Bummers me onto you
Onto you me bums
And when death comes
Crumbs

As far as I know, this poem has not been recorded or published anywhere. A pity, too, because it is one of the best poems of its kind in the Serbo-Croatian language. Be that as it may, it is the only one I know by heart.

Addendum (January 5, 2016)

Pray, who was the eyewitness in this story? It was Stevan Bodnarov, a Serbian sculptor and painter of renown who was a close friend of my parents for many years. Born in 1905, he died in 1993, the year my parents moved from Belgrade to Reading, Berkshire. He was a bohemian to boot in his youth, and that is how he became close to Ujevic, another bohemian of renown who lived in Belgrade between the two world wars. To the best of my recollection, one of his favorite haunts was the Three Hats, one of the oldest restaurants on Skadarlija, but it could have been the Two Deer just across the street. At any rate, Bodnarov was with Ujevic when this felicitous poem was hatched. And he loved to tell about it whenever an opportunity arose. Sadly, I do not remember who the old lady was, but it is safe to bet that she was someone to be reckoned with in her youth.

THE ART OF HOMELESSNESS (February 14, 1993)

Dorian is not yet eight months old and yet he has been to the States twice and to Italy once. In a month or so we will take him back to Italy, and soon afterwards we will go with him to France. This

summer, just before his first birthday, Lauren will go with him to the States once again. By the end of this year he will have visited Hong Kong, People's Republic of China, and perhaps Indonesia. I delight in Dorian's travels because I hope that he will be spared from having to establish his roots anywhere on this planet. With some luck he will learn that home is here and now. I am confident that we can teach him the art of homelessness, but I am afraid we will never become wise enough to teach him the art of rooflessness, let alone the art of coatlessness.

Addendum (April 17, 1993)

Speaking of homelessness, my parents have been living with us in Reading since early March. They have managed to get a six-month visa from the British authorities, but I would like to keep them here indefinitely. Beside the current threat of civil war in Bosnia, which may affect Serbia itself, I do not see any future for them in Belgrade or anywhere else in Yugoslavia that was. Our new house in London will make it possible for my parents to think of our place in Reading as their own home. This may sound overly optimistic in view of the fact that neither of them speaks English and that both of them are in their early eighties, but optimism is our only choice. At any rate, Dorian is now exposed to a rich mixture of Serbo-Croatian, Italian, French, German, and English—the language of homelessness.

GROWING PAINS (May 28, 1994)

My best childhood friend, Dragan, was appreciably smaller than me around puberty although we were the same age—in fact, he was a couple of days my senior. His father, a greengrocer, had a neat explanation for this irksome inequity: Dragan was not growing as fast as he normally would because he had the bad habit of going to the toilet directly after his meals. Therefore, all the good stuff would be thrown away before the body could grab hold of it. Just after the liberation war and the socialist revolution in Yugoslavia, an architect's son had to be challenged on all fronts. I still remember my friend's growing pains before his father would finally allow him to relieve himself. But, after a few years of his father's treatment Dragan did catch up with me!

THE ONLY CLOUD (May 29, 1994)

As I age, I realized today, my childhood memories will be bringing me ever closer to Belgrade. Mountains of watermelons in the green market across the street, and our tenement building crammed with lanky children my age, and catfish nudging their way through the fishmonger's musty tank, and a quaint Red Army cemetery in a wilted park down the street, and sweating peasants carrying dented buckets

loaded with young cheese... Although I now feel that I would not wish to see it ever again, I am very fond of my early memories of Belgrade, most of which are suffused with smells and sounds and sights unique to this place. Stuffed peppers or pickled cabbage on many a kitchen stove, and damp cellars flooded with gleaming coal, and bright light dancing in young leaves of trees trapped in cramped courtyards, and doves gurgling on rusty windowsills, and children crying or laughing during boisterous family meals, and cats sneaking behind leaning fences, and crumbling mortar hanging from every wall, and the clock-like sound of horses in the street... Like most European cities devastated by war, Belgrade was full of hope in the late Forties and early Fifties. Everything was open to us, the heirs of peace, the builders of a new world. The traffic-free streets where football was played all day or night, and cavernous building sites ideal for games of all kinds, and overgrown parks where unexploded grenades could still be found, and crowded schools with Tito's pictures in every whitewashed classroom... We who were born just after the war were privileged to have only the future and nothing but the future. The past was dead and soon to be forgotten. But the only cloud that floats across these memories is the realization that such bliss may be conceivable only after major blood-lettings and much butchery, and after rivers of blood spilt for some soon-to-be-forgotten cause...

IN PRAISE OF WRITING (June 24, 1994)

I often complain that my memories begin to fade as soon as I record them. But, as always and everywhere, the trick is to turn things around. On the true path, one should gladly shed one's memories, too. If one can let them go by writing them down, this is but a praise of the means toward a worthy end.

Addendum I (August 17, 1994)

A few days ago my father came up with the same idea when I was teasing him about his increasingly bad memory. "Memory is but another burden," he chuckled. Although he is otherwise most sensitive about the sundry signs of creeping senility, in this case he serenely welcomed it. And I felt proud of him.

Addendum II (December 6, 2000)

If memory is but another burden, my father is now rid of it. He remembers nothing, absolutely nothing. He does not know who my mother is, who I am. He barely knows who he is. Perhaps the only trace of the self that is still there is the knowledge of his name. From time to time, but not always, he looks up and peers into your eyes when you address him by his name. The very last name, if not the last word, his mind is still capable of discerning from the surrounding mist.

A TOTALLY USELESS THING (July 29, 1994)

When I was a kid, the Belgrade Gypsies had a remarkable way of saying that a thing was useless by itself, without some other thing—its natural complement and companion. Namely, a totally useless thing was "like a woman without a cunt." Was this bit of Gypsy wisdom a mirror of their adopted environment, or was it rooted in their ancient homeland in India, where even a whole woman seems to be considered of no use to anyone?

"GOOD CUNT" (September 25, 1994)

Whenever I see a sexually appealing woman in the street I whisper to myself in Serbo-Croatian: "*Dobra picka!*" This means "good cunt" in direct translation, but this expression never crosses my mind in English. When I actually translate it into English, for my own internal use again, the expression becomes somewhat hygienic: "Good looking woman!" The incongruence between the two expressions suddenly surfaced today. How can I explain this semantic gap? Why do I start with Serbo-Croatian and then switch to English? "Good cunt" is not derogatory at all in Serbo-Croatian; it is a form of sincere, heart-felt praise of a woman. Indeed, it is emphatic: "Oh, what a delightful woman!" It is an expression of joyful envy: "Who is the lucky fellow who fucks this wonder of a woman?!" Why does it sound so bad in English, my own English? The only conclusion I can reach is that people in the English-speaking world do not fully appreciate a good cunt.

IVO ANDRIC (January 19, 1995)

My mother was very fond of Ivo Andric. She was especially charmed by his gentle demeanor and his almost boyish shyness. It appears that he had enjoyed talking with her, too. One summer many years ago in the Writers' Club in Belgrade my mother told him that she was reading his *Bridge Over Drina*, for which he later got his Nobel Prize. She loved the book, but she was shaken and puzzled by his naturalistic description of putting a man to the stake: "How could you write about something as grizzly as that?" It took a long time and much expertise to drive a pointed and greased stake through a man's body without harming his internal organs, so as to ensure that he would live propped up on it for a few interminable days. "You know," he smiled modestly, "this was written during the war." Later on he wrote about this conversation in a book of recollections, but he did not mention my mother by name.

HIGHWAYMEN (February 13, 1995)

My mother once told Ivo Andric that she was very worried about me because she caught me and a friend of mine torturing a cat. We put it in a bag, hung the bag from a clothes-line on our kitchen terrace, and spun the bag until the poor creature started to voice its discomfort at an ever higher pitch. "You should not worry," he said, "my mother and my aunt, with whom I grew up, thought that I would end up as a highwayman because I once put a cat into the kitchen oven." Then he smiled: "Of course, they pulled it out in time."

NADA THE FIRST (September 5, 1995)

There have been two Nadas in my life, but today's reveries draw me toward the first one—say, Nada the First. She has been the third Nada in my life, as well, but that will take some explaining. She must have been about eighteen when I met her the first time around, in 1969. I was twenty-three. I do not remember how we met, but I know that she was my last girlfriend before my ten-month military service in the Yugoslav Army. Perhaps I picked her up in a Belgrade café a week or two before my departure; perhaps we met the very last day of this fabulous period. All I remember about Nada back then was that she was quite giggly and spindly. She had huge eyes, too.

The last day in Belgrade I had a great party in my parents' flat in Kosovska Street. I invited everyone I knew and told them to bring along anyone they knew. The place was so crammed that two or three people ended up standing in the bathtub, while the bathroom hosted at least fifteen people. It was glorious. I have never seen a place so crowded.

When everyone left, Nada and I huddled in my room. We must have been pretty tipsy by then. I remember that she was sitting on my bed and that I was kneeling on the floor in front of her. My reading lamp flooded the scene with bright light. Her eyes got bigger and bigger. I lifted her dress and pulled down her underpants. Then I pulled down my pants and presented myself to her in all my glory. I remember her dilated eyes and her lanky legs spread wide. I remember her girlish crotch and her shoes, which appeared to be a size too big for her. I pulled her to the edge of the bed. When I was about to enter her, she started pleading with me to spare her. She was still a virgin, she whispered. It made no sense to take her one day and abandon her the next, she argued meekly. She did not resist, though. Her legs still gaping, my cock already between the lips of her vagina, she kept looking straight into my eyes and appealing to my reason. In the end I agreed with her. In the end I saw it her way. I pulled up her underpants, pulled down her dress, stood up, lifted her from the bed, and gave her a big hug. She shed a few tears, and I escorted her home. For an hour or two we were in love. We promised to write.

We met again in Belgrade in the summer of 1985 through some friends we had in common. Most of the summer we were together—two summers after my second Nada, whom I had met in 1983 at the Adriatic coast. Nada the Second was quite a woman, too, but that is another story. The second time we met, Nada the First was in her thirties. She knew many interesting people in Belgrade, and she became my guide to the cultural life of the city.

Nada taught me a new trick in bed, too. She could come only if I would remain almost completely immobile in her for a very long time. We would make love in complete darkness. We would move a millimeter at a time, at the very edge of our senses. Slowly, slowly she would reach a powerful orgasm. Nada's lovemaking was most exciting, and I would grow very big and hard in her. Lying on top of her, I would feel the slightest movement of her pelvis and her thighs. After a while our genitals would become so finely tuned to each other that our shudders would register as bold thrusts and deep pokes. It took us more than fifteen years to get there, but in the end we did get there. Nada the First was the queen of suspended animation. And that is how I will always remember her.

FEDERICO FELLINI (October 3, 1995)

I think I am not exaggerating when I say that Federico Fellini is my contemporary I respect and appreciate most. The only reason for my hesitation is that I feel uneasy about the very notion of choosing the best and the most wonderful among my contemporaries. However, this preposterous choice occasionally forms spontaneously in my mind, without any conscious decision or guidance on my part. In fact, I am presented with a *fait accompli* that remains to be justified. Why Fellini? All I can say is that he is the only man who has managed to present the human species with all its warts and wrinkles, but without the slightest trace of bitterness or disgust or malice—not even shame! More, he has managed to love the human species without the slightest trace of sentimentality. This is at the very root of humor, good humor. And this is what I would wish to emulate if I only could. To wit, my unwelcome choice bears a trace of envy, the cold shadow of all superlatives.

Addendum (February 15, 1997)

A letter from a dear friend arrived today from Belgrade thanking me for a copy of my book. She swore she compared me with Fellini long before she chanced upon this particular piece. I immediately wrote back that I was enchanted by the compliment. Nevertheless, I wonder if I will ever live up to it.

A GOOD BLOW-JOB IS WITHIN REACH OF EVERY WOMAN
(October 7, 1995)

The first time I saw Elizabeta I did not speak to her. This was at a Belgrade party, where I went with another girlfriend, sometime in the Summer of 1985 or 1986. At the time, I did not even know Elizabeta's name. She was talking with a friend, and she appeared unreachable, but I was transfixed by her beauty and her demeanor. She appeared brazen in her femininity. In the Summer of 1987 I was invited to a dinner party in Belgrade, and Elizabeta was among the guests. This time she seemed to be interested. The next day I got her phone number from the friends who had invited me for dinner, called her, and we agreed to meet that evening. When I jokingly peeked into her blouse a few hours later, she dismissed me with a cool smile: "What's the rush? Soon enough you'll see everything!" I fell in love with her then and there, and we stayed together most of that summer.

Elizabeta was working in a small theater in the center of Belgrade. The place had a vaguely provincial look about it. The foyer, which the theater shared with a cinema, was always plastered with black-and-white photographs from current shows, and Elizabeta was in many of them in her underwear. She was the beauty in many a show—in spite of, or perhaps because of, a certain roundness below her waist—and she was apparently quite popular with the clientele. Her Baroque hips and legs were a bit of a disappointment for me at first, but I was so infatuated with her that her shape mattered ever less.

Like so many of my girlfriends in Belgrade in the 1980s, Elizabeta would sneak into my room with me after my parents would go to sleep. More often than not, the two of us would come home by the time all the lights had already been turned off. After a few hours of lovemaking, sometime in the early morning, she would take her leave. In the meanwhile, we would go naked to the toilet to pee or to the kitchen for a drink without any concern about my parents, who would rarely get up in the middle of the night. Come to think of it, they probably knew what was going on and left us in peace.

One of the reasons Elizabeta would go to the toilet would be to spit out my semen. Only once she squirted it out from the window of my little room, and I still remember the resounding splash it made when it reached the concrete pavement of the narrow courtyard seven floors below. For some reason she would not discuss with me, Elizabeta would not swallow my semen, and that did hurt me at the time. I was in love with her, and she appeared to be somewhat casual about our relationship and its byproducts.

Elizabeta's blow-jobs were sublime. No other woman has ever made me come this way without my help, but my nights with Elizabeta would often end with a blissful blow-job. Her technique was not surprising in itself, but it is surprising that other women do not chance

upon it more often. To wit, she simulated the vagina by liberally smearing the shaft of my penis with her saliva and by using both hands as extensions of her mouth. My penis would slide freely in and out of her mouth and through her hands, which offered me stimulation from three independent but coordinated sources. Her mouth was most lively, but her hands provided active support, as well. It would not take her long to make me come, and by that time in the morning my orgasms would be carefree, my job having been completed already. Of course, the only blemish in Elizabeta's performance was that she would immediately get up and rush to the toilet with her live mouthful. That was inelegant, to say the least, although I do cherish the memory of her plump tail bounding toward the door in the purple light of the dawn.

Recording my recollections of Elizabeta is a pleasure in its own right, but another reason for going into all the detail of our lovemaking is, if I may say so, educational. A good blow-job is within reach of every woman, and I hope that my rendering of Elizabeta's technique will add a little of interest to the sexual education already on offer.

Addendum (April 13, 1998)

Elizabeta's favorite way of making love was to straddle me and rub herself furiously against my cock. She would sit upright and thrust her entire body back and forth. It was amazing how energetic she would become in that position, as well as how fast she could move that plump rump of hers. In fact, she would rub herself at such a pace that I would soon grow numb between my legs. Although I never had any trouble satisfying her like this, I would often be somewhat apprehensive about the actual condition of my member. Not feeling my erection any longer, I would wonder for a while whether she was getting what she needed. I would thus feel relieved when she would ultimately reach an orgasm and throw herself on my chest. Still, I enjoyed her reckless rides because of the zeal she invested into them.

MY AUNT AURORA AND ELEVATORS (October 14, 1995)

Elevators were rare in Belgrade when I was a kid. When we moved in the mid-1960s from Jovanova to Kosovska Street, my Aunt Aurora would not use the elevator for a few years. Fourteen flights of stairs and creaking bones finally broke her resolve, but she remained suspicious of the damned contraption until her last day. A decade earlier, elevator riding was a favorite pastime among Belgrade kids. The faster the elevator, the more attractive it was, but the height of the building was an important consideration, as well. Having lived in the provinces most of her life, Aunt Aurora was behind her times. She was not alone in her discomfiture. Even in the 1970s one could see a bewildered peasant holding up a whole crowd in front of an escalator. By the time of my last visit to Belgrade in April 1991 such provincial

scenes became unimaginable, but the influx of rural people from Bosnia and Croatia might have changed the picture. Inexplicably, this very possibility fills me with longing. In the last analysis, my Aunt Aurora was not such a fool.

MY MASTER'S DAUGHTER (December 9, 1995)

Sometimes my dreams are so fragmentary, so discontinuous, that I am not sure whether or not to record them. I had such a dream some ten days ago, and it is only today that I have decided to put it into words. There are only three scenes to the dream. In the first I am sitting or crouching at the foot of the bed of my private pupil, who is asleep. She is lying on her back, and her feet are protruding from under the covers. Her feet are so beautiful that I am suddenly overcome by a desire to touch them. At the same time, I am appalled by this desire. I am overcome by fear, as well. For I find myself in a position akin to that of a Greek slave in a Roman house, where my main duty and concern is the intellectual development of my pupil, the master's daughter. She is about fifteen. She is tall and slim. She is poised and serious. Her hair is dark, curly, and long.

In the next scene my pupil and I are skipping around a large pine tree on an enormous terrace attached to her quarters. The terrace is not paved. It is covered with pine-needles, and pine-cones are strewn about. We are holding each other by the hand. We are naked. My pupil's youthful breasts and my penis are bouncing around with every skip. I am elated, but I am also fearful that I will soon sprout an erection. In my position, that would be unconscionable, disastrous.

The last scene seamlessly emerges from the previous one. As we are skipping around the pine tree, my pupil and I turn down a path and then up a wider road that passes by a skating rink. Suddenly, everything is covered with frozen snow, and there is a whole crowd walking along the skating rink, as well. One of the people in the rink is my high-school friend, Vojin Tosic. He waves at us with a big smile as he skates past us. By my side I discover our joint friend, Dusan Obradovic, whom we used to call Duca. I know him since the first grade. He is talking to me in a loud voice and pointing toward Vojin. Behind us I see a friend from my undergraduate days, Milan Brkic, known to all as Brka. As always, he is amusing those around him, and I exchange a few words with Duca about Brka's humor. By that time my master's daughter and pupil vanishes completely, and I wake up.

As soon as I woke up, I tried to piece my dream together, but I failed again and again. As it was long before morning, I was prepared to get up and record the dream before I started forgetting it, but I could not remember enough of it to justify getting out of bed. In the end I gave up, but the images from the dream kept coming back persistently enough for this belated attempt to capture it in a few paragraphs.

THE BIZARRE END (July 26, 1996)

People rarely confide in me about their sexual predilections and fantasies, but the story I have once heard from a fellow student of architecture in Belgrade undoubtedly falls at the bizarre end of human sexual behavior. This fellow and his girlfriend, whom I have never met, would start by covering their bed with many blankets so as to make it air-tight; they would then crawl underneath this pile and massage each other's bellies until they would squeeze out all the intestinal gases; and they would end up banging away in this combustible atmosphere. They must have enjoyed the inherent danger, for a single spark would have been enough to blow them up, the bed and all.

REAL PLUMS (September 12, 1996)

When Marina Abramovic visited the reincarnation of Salon de Fleurus on Spring Street in New York's SoHo she was so puzzled by what she saw there that she was at a loss for words. For a long while she just stared at the sepia paintings taken from photographs of Leo and Gertrude Stein's salon in Paris, the peeling *fin-de-siècle* furniture covered with musty doilies, a few gloomy lamps casting long shadows across avocado and magenta walls, the threadbare carpets piled high with dusty books... All the while an old Parisian recording wined and crackled from an ancient radio set. The acrid odor of mildewed upholstery completed the picture. In the end, she asked Goran Djordjevic, the Salon director and her old friend from the Student Cultural Center in Belgrade, whether the plums exhibited in a chipped porcelain bowl perched on top of a grimy chest of drawers were real or not. He told her they were real.

Addendum (May 14, 2000)

Goran tells me from time to time that the fruit in question were not plums but grapes. Perhaps I am indeed wrong here, but I got my story from Goran himself. Besides, I prefer grapes to plums anyway. Perhaps his memory had failed him, either when he first told me about Marina's visit, or when he first read my rendering of it. Sooner or later, we will have to ask Marina about her visit, assuming that she still remembers the fruit in the chipped porcelain bowl. Perhaps she will come up with figs or pears?!

A MORNING SCENE (November 15, 1996)

Lauren and Maya are still asleep upstairs. Dorian is lying in bed in the room next door and coughing from time to time. My parents and I are sitting around the kitchen table. "The little one's cough worries me," my mother shakes her head with a pained expression on her face. "It is

...," my father cuts in, gazing at his watch intently, "it is exactly six minutes to eight!" I push my half-empty tea cup toward the middle of the table, check the knot on my tie once again, and start getting up: "Time to go!"

OH, HOW WILLING! (January 3, 1997)

I bumped into her at a street corner not far from the National Theater. We presumably knew each other, but not too well. She was glad to see me, though. She spoke with a distinct Belgrade accent, which I enjoyed hearing after so many years abroad. Judging by her tight, bright-red, shiny, smooth, soft, silk dress that reached well below her knees, it must have been summer. Her hair was reddish-brown, short, and cut unevenly at the edges. She had an open face, bright eyes, and full lips. Perhaps she had a bit of red lipstick, too. As we started walking down the street, she stepped in front of me and I grabbed her by the waist from behind. Giggling with her as she leaned backward toward me, I slid my hands down her hips and stopped at her thighs. She was naked under her dress. Her flesh was firm but supple, giving. Glancing at her smallish but shapely breasts over her shoulder, I noticed that her dress was a size too big for her in the bosom. I asked her what she was doing that evening, and she told me that she was free. She was all smiles and twinkles and gurgles. We agreed to meet at my place in Kosovska Street around eight. Oh, how willing are the women of our dreams!

INAT (February 16, 1997)

Many people in Serbia will tell you that much of the national character of this tortured land can be compressed into a single term—*inat*. It stands for a proud refusal to listen to reason, an unwillingness to consider one's own advantages or disadvantages in view of one's will and choice, a contempt for calculation in the face of higher ideals. Having grown up in Belgrade, I often find myself adopting a stand that gives me pleasure in spite of my better judgement, but the word behind this sentiment has so many nuances that it is practically impossible to translate. Today I learned that *inat* is a Turkish word with a straightforward meaning: "stubbornness."

Addendum (November 4, 2002)

The plot thickens. Today I learned from a Sudanese friend that "stubbornness" is *aynad* in Arabic. Given the Arabic pronunciation of the letter *ayn* at the beginning of the word, the best way to render it in English would be *inad*. Most likely this is the root of the Turkish word, as the Turks borrowed freely from the Arabs. In Arabic, according to my friend, stubbornness and defiance go well together, as well.

ON THE ORIGIN OF LOVE (August 10, 1997)

According to an old Serbian proverb, which may be of Turkish origin, love was invented by the mob to get cunt for free.

WATERMELONS EVERYWHERE (August 19, 1997)

I am not sure whether these images came to me while I was dreaming or while I was staring at the ceiling last night, but I revisited fragrant summer days in the green market on Jovanova Street in Belgrade, where I grew up. I saw watermelons everywhere. Even the poorest would not eat the entire fruit, but only its “heart.” To get to this coveted part of a ripe watermelon one needs to drop it gently onto a hard surface, so that it bursts open, thus separating the sweet core from the rest along the seams provided by the abundant seed. By noon, empty market stalls were strewn with spectacular remainders of eviscerated watermelons left to the swarms of sparrows, bees, wasps, and flies. Watermelon prices were so low that the carnage was spectacular, indeed. The fountain in the middle of the market completed the picture. Having eaten one’s fill, a watermelon heart or two or three, one would spread one’s legs, wash one’s hands and face, and continue on one’s way through the summer heat. Soon afterwards, the last blessings of these formidable fruits would provide some relief to parched parks and help settle the dust in bombed-out buildings left gaping after the war.

A SUBTLE COMBINATION (August 19, 1997)

If I would dare pin down the smell of doorways and stairwells of Belgrade of my childhood, I would go for a subtle combination of damp coal, sour cabbage, coffee, peeling paint, apricot jam, stuffed peppers, and cat piss—in short, the perfume of life. But I would not dare pin it down after so many years and so many other cities that cram my mind.

MY GENERATION (February 12, 1998)

I must have been fourteen or fifteen when I covered an entire wall of my room in Belgrade with awkward Cyrillic characters from the law book of a medieval Serbian king: “The one who steals from another shall have his right arm cut off.” In the background I painted an ungainly cross stretching across the entire wall. I can still see the white text and the red cross, but the reason for putting them on the wall escapes me now. The only thing I am certain about is that there was not a trace of irony in this gruesome display. My generation must have been mesmerized by power as such.

FORTY DAYS, YEARS (March 22, 1998)

Today I tasted a traditional Turkish sweet that transported me directly to my childhood in Belgrade. But the memory is incomplete, and I cannot connect it to anything in particular. The Turkish name of the sweet means nothing to me, nor does the Muslim custom of serving it forty days after someone's death. No matter how much of it I bolted down, the mystery remained. The taste of fried flour, sugar, and oil is on the tip of my tongue, but my tongue is suspended in mid-air—some forty years after my childhood.

Addendum (April 6, 1998)

I sent this piece pasted on postcards to several friends who would appreciate Turkish cuisine, including Elvan Erdin, at whose house I tasted the sweet. Today I received her response pasted on another postcard. The semolina sweet, called *helva*, is so much a part of the Turkish way of life that it often goes with letter "H" in children's alphabet books. Suspended in mid-air as it still is, my prodigious tongue has instantaneously travelled from London to Belgrade to the heart of Turkish culture!

1968 FROM WITHOUT (March 25, 1998)

As the anniversary of world-wide student unrest draws nearer in different parts of the globe, I bump ever more often into 1968 in the media. For me and many people my age from Belgrade and several other Yugoslav cities, the thirty-year mark will come in June. Of course, the anniversary means absolutely nothing to me. I will see June come and go with utter indifference. All I feel is bewilderment at the fact that thirty years have passed since those ten heady days. All I feel is bewilderment bordering on disgust. This is not because so many years have passed, I hasten to add, but because I fear they have not. What survives from 1968 are timeless scraps of recollection that float aimlessly through my mind. Nothing has passed and nothing ever will. Time is not like the proverbial river, but like a sluggish, ponderous bog that occasionally boils up, swells, and spills driven by wind and rain. Everything just swirls about, twists around. Everything keeps returning and it always will. Yes, all I feel about those ten splendid days thirty years ago is bewilderment bordering on rage.

ME, ME, ME (March 30, 1998)

Yesterday I saw a couple of episodes of a television series made in Belgrade in the early Eighties. At the time, the series was eagerly watched across the land, but this was the first time I saw any of it. It must have been screened after my return to the States in 1979 and before 1983, when I finally got my green card and was free to visit

Yugoslavia every summer. Anyhow, I have known both the director of the series and the lead actor since school days. One fine summer night I made love to the wife of the fellow who wrote the script together with my friend, the director. As she confessed years later, the woman who served as the series' art director of sorts was pining for me while we were studying architecture together. Everywhere the camera turned I saw myself. I saw the place where I played basketball and the place where I played ice hockey for years. I saw the house where one of our maids had lived, and where a terrier I used to have for a few months ended up on a chain after repeatedly escaping from me on our walks. I saw an outdoor café where I sat who knows how many times with friends, girlfriends. The last time I took a girlfriend there was only a decade ago. Yes, wherever the camera turned I saw only myself. The series itself left me completely cold.

THE FRONT DOOR (April 4, 1998)

The building on Jovanova Street in Belgrade where I grew up was probably built in the 1920s, and maybe even later. We lived on the third floor. There was one more floor toward the street, but above our apartment, which looked the other way, toward distant Danube, there was a huge attic, which all the tenants used to dry their laundry in bad weather. The front facade, covered with artificial stone of good workmanship, was quite elaborate. There were either two or four massive pillars running from the first to the third floor. The back of the building was featureless, though, suggesting that the building might have been built as late as the late 1930s. However, it is also possible that our side of the building was bombed during the war and rebuilt just before we moved in on our arrival from Zagreb in 1948. I vaguely remember hearing about a fire-bomb that destroyed much of the building, but I am not sure about it now. The front door of our building appeared to me quite old, but this was probably due to the lack of maintenance. It was made of massive wood, which was rarely if ever painted or varnished. The door had two wings, one of which was always fixed, except when a big piece of furniture had to be brought in our out the building. Each wing had a narrow window glazed in translucent glass and covered with an iron grill from the outside. The windows opened inward. When the door was locked, as it always was after dark, you could open one of the windows to see who it was out there who was banging like mad late at night, as there was no other way to come in if you forgot your key. From time to time everyone in the building would wake up before someone would go down to investigate. More often than not the culprit would be a drunken neighbor. I remember that door and those windows with shiny brass handles so well because I often spent hours behind them waiting for my parents to return home, usually from the Writers' Club, some five or six blocks toward the center of the city. On occasion I would wake up in the middle of the night and call for them, and, not finding them in their bed or anyplace else at home, I would sneak

down the unlit stairwell to the front door so as to wait for them as far out along their path as I possibly could. Standing in the dark hall clad in artificial marble and listening for every sound from the street, I would pray for them to return. Like an abandoned dog, I would whimper in despair. As soon as I would hear them, see them, I would bolt upstairs ahead of them and jump into my bed, pretending that I was fast asleep. Everything was well by then. Exhausted but overjoyed, I would presently fall asleep, perhaps even before they approached my bed to check whether I was properly tucked in.

GRMA MOGES (June 28, 1998)

My thoughts sometimes wander to the days when I was studying architecture in Belgrade. One fellow student occasionally comes into focus when my mind's eye scans our class. He was from Ethiopia. Tall, handsome, well built, gentle, elegant, he was a pleasure to behold and be with. I especially remember his exquisite hands and fingernails. But there is a story that comes immediately to my mind whenever I think of him. At the beginning of a school year a bunch of us were recounting our summer adventures. He told us about the bliss he experienced immediately upon return to Addis Ababa after the end of the previous school year. He sat in the sweltering sun in front of his suburban house, put a big chunk of butter on his head, and then savored it as it melted and trickled down his face, neck, shoulders, chest, belly... This would be utter torture for most of his listeners, but he considered it pure, unadulterated ecstasy. However, the fact that I could not remember his name would always spoil this recollection. Yesterday I asked an old friend and colleague of mine from those days who passed through London on her return to Belgrade from a conference in Birmingham, and she had no difficulty remembering his name: Grma Moges. My joy was boundless, but I immediately asked for a piece of paper and a pen, for the name meant nothing to me after untold years.

LIKING (October 5, 1998)

Growing up in Belgrade I developed a liking for Albanians from Kosovo. They would come to the capital as seasonal laborers and return home during the summer, when they would work their fields with their families. In the city, most of them hauled bulky and heavy stuff on flat carts with two large wheels and long handle-bars; they lived in filthy and crowded cellars without water, toilets, or even electricity; their diet was mostly vegetable oil poured straight from the bottle over hefty slices of steaming white bread; and they wore tattered coats, the cheapest of rubber shoes moulded in one piece, and white skull-caps of coarse felt. They spent as little as possible of their meagre earnings so as to be able to buy land, cattle, and wives, or to maintain growing families back home. They were quiet and

unobtrusive, hard-working, reliable, and capable of performing any kind of manual task with an almost animal determination and endurance. As our street ran along one of the largest open markets in the city, many of the Albanian laborers were our immediate neighbors. From the window of my room I could see the entrance into one of their dark caves in the basement of the next-door tenement. My mother treated them with great respect, and all the Albanians who had ever worked for her, usually hauling coal from the cellar to the third floor, where we lived back then, adored her and went out of their way to be of service to her. She would use the plural form of “you” when addressing them, and they, unaccustomed to such linguistic extravagance, would invariably respond by referring to themselves as “we.” You could not but develop a liking for these poor people. Or so I thought until I gradually realized that many of my friends felt, or learned from their parents to feel, quite differently toward them but preferred not to talk about their feelings. Immediately after World War II one simply did not talk about some things. It took me years and years to realize that most of those who had shared my liking for the Albanians were, just like me and my parents, newcomers to Belgrade and Serbia. The strife was not ours, as it were, and we were thus oblivious to its germs everywhere around us.

MILENA (October 6, 1998)

I am supposed to fly to Belgrade next Monday, assuming the situation there will not get worse in the intervening period. Military intervention in Kosovo is not very likely, but it is not impossible, either. However, only yesterday it crossed my mind to call the Embassy of Yugoslavia in London and ask whether, as a British citizen, I could get a visa at the airport in Belgrade. I was told that I had to get the visa before my trip, but that it was too late in the day to get it. So I went today, and I got the visa in just a few minutes in exchange for thirty-three pounds, which had to be paid in cash. As she was returning my change, a cheerful young woman who took care of me was addressed by someone else behind the counter. Her name was Milena. “Oh,” I beamed, “your name is the same as my mother’s.” She beamed back, this time with a coquettish twist: “Of course!”

ANY DAY NOW (October 12, 1998)

Among other old friends who expected me today in Belgrade, I called Sonja and Milan Brkic, known to all as Brka, one of the funniest guys I have ever met, to tell them about the change of plans because of NATO’s bombing threat in connection with the crisis in Kosovo. “My plane was cancelled,” I told Brka. “Well,” he consoled me, “there will be many planes any day now.”

A DEFINITE MEASURE (October 18, 1998)

I have a definite notion of a good party. More precisely, it is a definite measure, for it is purely quantitative: the minimum density should be between one-and-a-half and two people per square meter gross—including corridors, closets, and other ancillary spaces. Below this density something is simply missing. One of the best parties I have ever thrown was in Belgrade either before I went to the army in the summer of 1969, or before I first went to the States in the summer of 1970. My parents had a large apartment by Belgrade standards: it had three small bedrooms and a large living room, and was about ninety square meters all told. At the party in question there were close to two-hundred people. It was so crowded that they spread everywhere. Even the bathroom was crowded, as there was another toilet in the apartment. There must have been some twenty-five people in the bathroom alone. Three of them were in the bathtub. If I remember correctly, they were playing cards. By the way, the density in the bathtub itself was a bit above one-and-a-half. A pure delight!

Addendum I (November 7, 1998)

I sent this piece to all the people I invited to yesterday's party. There were about hundred-twenty invitations going to some hundred-sixty people. Last night there were at least hundred-fifty people at Hereford Road. The part of the house used for the party measures about ninety-five square meters gross. This includes the kitchen counters and appliances, the stairs, the toilet, and the like. So, the density achieved was a bit above one-and-a-half per square meter, the required minimum. It goes without saying that the party was a great success.

Addendum II (May 21, 2001)

As the part of the house at Abbot's Walk in Reading that can be used for parties is only about one-half of that at Hereford Road in London, I need about seventy-five people to reach the minimum density. Reading is a small town, but I do expect a good crowd from London, too. My parties on the first Friday of the month are about to begin, and I will soon get a feeling of the density I can achieve. At any rate, I should send this piece to all the people invited to the party on the first Friday in June, or at least those whose electronic-mail addresses I have, so as to give them an added incentive to join the fray in some ten days.

L'HOMME PERDU (February 25, 1999)

This morning I went to spend an hour with my father at the Battle Hospital. He looked much better than when he was brought there yesterday afternoon. "How are you doing?" I kissed him on the cheek. "Well," he mumbled and waived his hand vaguely, "it is a bit difficult

to deal with these people...” To my surprise, he was quite coherent. “I came here by train,” he added nonchalantly. Oops. “Listen,” I sat down, “you are in hospital because you are not well.” He looked perplexed: “In hospital?” I tried to explain the sequence of events that led to this predicament. “So,” he concluded grimly, “*l’homme perdu!*” He rarely uses French expressions. “No, no,” I protested, “these people are doing their best to help you.” He stared into a corner of his room for a while. “And then we are all going to return to Belgrade, aren’t we?” he offered tentatively. Oops. “You will be here for a while,” I tried again, “but mother and I will be visiting you whenever we can.” He stared into the same corner a while longer. When I kissed him goodbye, he looked up: “Am I coming with you?”

BOMBAY (March 25, 1999)

Belgrade humor is peculiar, often gentle and brutal at the same time, but I appreciate it instinctively, viscerally. I am simply over the moon by the new name Belgrade bums have given their city: Bombay. This I heard yesterday around noon, hours before the bombing began.

DETAILS, DETAILS (April 18, 1999)

The apartment in Jovanova Street in Belgrade, where I grew up, is still clear in my memory. I have longed to commit it to writing, so as to be able to return to it and hang other memories to the disposition of the apartment. Here goes. I think it was on the fourth floor, but I could be wrong here. It could have been on the third floor instead. One entered it on the left side of the landing, where there was only one door. There were two smaller apartments—or, rather, a large one divided into two—on the right side. The entry hall was quite spacious. I believe the ceilings were pretty high, but this may have to do with my age at the time. To the left of the entrance door there was a low shelf for shoes, and straight ahead, to the left of a glass door, there was a coat rack. In addition to the entrance door, there were three doors that led out of the hall. The one to the left led to the kitchen balcony and thence to the kitchen itself. The balcony had a terrazzo floor and was covered with reinforced glass mounted on a light steel structure. It gave onto a lightwell and a blank wall of the building next door, which was a floor or two lower than ours. From the kitchen, which received light through a window giving onto the balcony, there were two doors. One led to the left into the maid’s room, which I occupied for several years before we moved to Kosovska Street in 1965. This long and narrow room had a window looking into the lightwell, as well. The other kitchen door, which was straight ahead, led to a corridor connecting the kitchen, the pantry, the dining room, and the bathroom. Looking into the kitchen from the balcony door, there was a wood-burning stove to the left and a gas-burning stove next to it. Further down the same wall there was a large credenza, which I think was

rather old. If I am not mistaken, my father's parents had it when he was growing up. It was painted white. Its top was clad in glass, and it had two or three drawers in the middle. For some reason, this piece of furniture plays an important part of my childhood memories. In the middle of the kitchen there was a sturdy table and four or five stools. Returning to the entry hall, the door to the right of the entrance led to a small toilet. It must have had a sink, but I do not remember where it was. It was covered with white ceramic tiles half-way up the wall. There was a small window looking over the long shed where coal and wood was kept for the winter, as well as the neighboring building. That building, too, was a floor or two lower than ours. The glass door that went straight ahead from the hall led to the dining room, which had a large window to the right. There was a ceramic stove in the corner to the left of the door, I think. Every room had to have a stove, and I cannot imagine where it could have been placed if not in that corner. Straight ahead there were two doors, which were partly occluded by a heavy curtain running along the entire wall. I think it was pale-green. To the right was a glass door that led to a sitting room with a large window looking toward the Danube. Unfortunately, at some point the view was barred by a new apartment building, which was much taller than ours was. There was a tall ceramic stove in the corner to the right of the door. It was orange-brown. I can still remember its smooth tiles, its smell, and its soothing warmth in long winter months. The left door led to my parents' bedroom. It, too, had a large window giving toward the river. Throughout my childhood, the bedroom and sitting room windows were covered with chicken wire, because my parents were afraid I would fall out. When I was small, I slept with my parents in a cot to the left of the glass door. They slept in a huge bed. Again, there must have been a ceramic stove in this room, as well, but I do not remember where it was placed. To the left of the bedroom there was a door that led to a small dressing room and thence to the bathroom. The only thing I remember about this place is my mother's dresser with its mirrors and its bewildering perfumes. The dressing room had a small window facing the same way as the one in the bedroom, but the window in the bathroom gave in the same direction as the kitchen balcony. The bathroom was on the long-and-narrow side. On each side it had a door, one to the dressing room and another to the corridor. The sink was underneath the window, which was placed quite high, and the bathtub ran along the opposite wall. To the left of the dining room there was a door to the corridor that led to the kitchen, the pantry, and the bathroom. The floor of the corridor was covered with terrazzo. It had no windows, and thus it was quite gloomy. On the other end of the corridor there was a small pantry with another small window. Early on, before my parents bought an electric refrigerator, to the left of the kitchen door in the corridor there stood an enormous ice-box. Huge ice bars wrapped in burlap were supplied every so often by men who delivered it on horse-drawn carts. Now, the disposition of the apartment is quite clear in my mind, but my memory is rather poor when it comes to the paintings, which my parents had brought to Belgrade from Zagreb, and which are now in

Reading. The arrangement of paintings in Kosovska Street is etched in my memory so clearly that I cannot recollect their arrangement in Jovanova Street. For the time being, at least, the walls will have to remain blank.

WHINE AND BOOM (May 17, 1999)

Today I bought a compact disk with Gypsy music from Macedonia, Kosovo, Greece, Romania, and Turkey, collected in the field by Wolf Dietrich (Topic Records, World Series, TSCD914, 1996). I already have one of his compilations of Turkish folk music (Topic Records, World Series, SCD908, 1994), and I was thus sure of my choice. All the recordings on the new disk involve a combination of two instruments: *zurla* and *tapan* (Macedonian), *zurna* and *davul* (Turkish), or *zournas* and *daouli* (Greek). The former is a wind instrument with a shrill and reedy sound, and the latter is a large drum with two skins beaten with two sticks of unequal weight. Eager to hear again the whine and boom I used to crave as a child, I rushed home. As expected, time shrunk at once. Except that I have rarely heard these instruments from close up. Back in Belgrade, the magical sounds would be carried my way by the fickle wind from the heart of Dorcol, some four or five blocks east toward the banks of Danube, where Gypsies had lived. To fully enjoy my new disk, I will have to turn the volume down, retire to some far corner of the house, and then open my mouth wide so as not to miss a beat.

JOINING (December 9, 1999)

While I was growing up in Belgrade in the Fifties, the muffled sounds of Sunday mornings included the rhythmic thud of carpet beaters. Every courtyard had a horizontal pole over which carpets were draped for a regular beating. The billowing dust and the plump and ruddy maids walking up and down tenement stairs with rolled-up carpets under their arms were a part of the Sunday scene. Among the carpets hanging on the walls of my room in Reading there is a wicker carpet beater, a wolf among sheep, which I bought in the open market in Zagreb only a few years ago. It is almost Celtic in its convoluted and braided design. No-one who comes to visit me can fathom its purpose. In Britain, carpet beaters were replaced by vacuum cleaners long before my visitors were born. By and by, I, too, am joining the refuse of this formidable century.

THE FRONT DOOR REVISITED (February 1, 2001)

From time to time I throw myself headlong into my childhood in an attempt to fetch something, bring something back, save something from oblivion. I never can tell when this urge will strike next, but the

result is far from unexpected. Almost without exception I fail to find anything worth fetching, bringing back, or saving. My mind usually falters at the front door of our apartment building on Jovanova street in Belgrade. For some reason I always end up in front of that heavy wooden door with a grilled window in each narrow wing. I walk up to it, but I almost never pass through it. I can see the door in plain daylight, but it is shut as though it is night already. The glass in the two high and narrow windows is opaque, uninviting. I cannot see into the dim lobby. If the door is open and I walk through it, which happens only rarely, I get stuck in the lobby with its red and black marble. The stairs going up are the last barrier on my way. There are five or six terrazzo stairs only, but they are cold, foreboding. Actually, I sometimes do get lucky and I reach the first landing, where two rows of bulky wooden mailboxes hang from the wall to the right. One of the mailbox doors is broken or missing. The apartment building is quiet. It seems to be deserted, too. To the left, the stairs going up are dark, as are the stairs going down to the cellar and the courtyard. If I do not manage to pass through the front door, I loiter for a short while in front of it, on the pavement, where I cannot see anything but dusty asphalt and a granite step of the threshold. There is no-one around. The street is empty. The many small shops to the left and right of the door are closed, their windows mute. Defeated once again, I turn around. Empty-handed, I return. Broken-hearted, I treasure my sole trophy—the heavy wooden door.

JUGOSLAWIEN (July 14, 2001)

After my mother died, I discovered in her correspondence a load of postcards she and my father had kept over the years. Many of these went decades back. Ever since I found them, I have been sending them to Bob Collén with my texts pasted on the back. Every now and then I hesitate before sending one of these precious cards, but they ultimately all go to Bob. Last week I paused for a few seconds before sending a postcard sent to my parents from Paris by Tasa Mladenovic, one of their oldest friends from Belgrade and a Serbian poet of renown. If I remember correctly, it was from the 1970s. Two or three weeks ago I hesitated before I sent a card sent one summer to Marko by his grandmother, who then lived in Dallas, Texas. This must have been in the early 1980s. And today I vacillated for a second or two before sending a postcard sent to my parents from Germany by Darja in February 1969, while we were still together. When I affixed the stamp, it covered a part of my parents' old address in Belgrade, most of which was already covered by my text. When the wet stamp touched the end of the word *Jugoslawien*, the fountain pen in which it was written smudged a bit. Suddenly I realized that the ink was last wet when Darja wrote this word more than three decades ago. A few seconds later the card was in the mail box, ready to start its long journey once again. But that ink will never be dry again.

BUSINESS OR PLEASURE (September 10, 2001)

In a recent electronic-mail message, Elise asked whether I was going to Belgrade for business or pleasure. "You must have told me," she added, "but I forgot." She assumed it was not the former, but she could not suppress a chuckle at the latter. In her mind, pleasure and Belgrade do not exactly match this day and age. "Actually," I responded, "I am going back to bury my parents." I wrote these words without thinking, quite automatically, but I miraculously hit the nail on the head. Elise liked my answer, too. And so has everyone else I have shared it with ever since. My friends and my parents' friends need me, and I need them, to close the story. All those hugs and pieces of cake and tears and glasses of wine and kisses and peals of laughter will finally do the trick. So that my parents can rest in peace in our own minds. "Give them a hug and a kiss for me, too," asked Elise. I promised I would. Yes, she knows what I am talking about.

STILL AWAITING (September 14, 2001)

Most of the buildings in Belgrade that were bombed by NATO two years ago are still awaiting repair or demolition. Walking around the city this morning, I realized that a significant number of these buildings were designed by my professors at the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade. Which only goes to show that I was blessed with good teachers.

MASTER BEDROOM (September 15, 2001)

When I wrote to all my friends in Belgrade about my plans to come in mid-September, Misa Jovanovic, the lawyer who had sold my parents' apartment to a Yugoslav fellow living in Canada, wrote back that I could stay in the apartment as long as I wished. "Think of your old place as yours," he wrote. Yesterday morning Misa and I met for the first time, and he showed me around the place. It looked rather different mainly because of the way it was decorated, but the only major difference was that the wall between my parents' rooms was knocked down, yielding a large master bedroom. This is where I slept last night. When I told Misa this morning that I was thinking about coming to Belgrade every year at least once for a couple of weeks, he told me that I could stay in my apartment as often and as long as I wished. The owner comes rarely, and he would be happy to adjust his plans if need be. "As I told you," Misa said, "think of the place as your own."

DYING FOR VICTORIES (September 16, 2001)

Around six this afternoon Yugoslavia defeated Italy in an international volleyball championship. I think it was the European Cup, but I am not sure. Although it is almost midnight, the sounds of celebration are still echoing through the streets of Belgrade. Gunshots can also be heard from time to time. Not so long ago Yugoslavia won international waterpolo and basketball championships. Those two were World Cups, I think. The celebrations were equally boisterous. Yugoslavs are dying for victories.

DANAS (September 27, 2001)

The most progressive newspaper in Belgrade, *Danas* or *Today*, yesterday published my first article in their very last column, Postcard. Most articles that appear in this column have a literary ambition, too. They are always accompanied by a photograph, often from an actual postcard. The text I wrote on September 19 and sent a day or two later *via* Misa Jovanovic, my new friend who is close to the newspaper, was about the Reading Lion, which stands defiant in the middle of the Forbury Gardens not far from my home. The statue can actually be seen from my windows. The twist in the article is in the last paragraph, where I ruminate about the Berkshire officers and soldiers who had perished in vain at the end of the Nineteenth Century while defending the British Empire in the Afghan mountains. The parallel with the upcoming war in the same mountains is not mentioned, but it is rather obvious. Encouraged by the speed with which my first piece had appeared in print, as well as by the praise from Misa and his friends close to *Danas*, some of whom I recently met, and many of whom have already published in the Postcard column, today I sent him another article, this time about Tate Modern. The piece begins by apparently lauding the project and the genius behind it, Nick Serota, but it ends by questioning what David Lee aptly calls Serotaland. The twist in the last paragraph is somewhat less subtle than in the first article, but I still hope it will be considered worthy of publication. Be that how it may, now I have returned to Belgrade intellectually, as well. When I called several friends whom I had visited recently to tell them about my piece, which I did yesterday as soon as I learned from Misa about its publication, a few of them had already read it.

Addendum (September 30, 2001)

Yesterday I sent to Misa my third piece for the Postcard column of *Danas*. I felt that I needed at least three articles to claim a spot in the newspaper. This one is about the Ridgeway, a Neolithic road that crosses the road from Reading to Oxford, which is most likely of Roman origin, and stretches for some one-hundred and forty kilometers between Avebury and Ivinghoe Beacon. The piece ostensibly focuses on the way stone-age roads were placed to allow the

travellers to look down, rather than up, at potential threats, but the main message is that people in these parts have not destroyed ancient monuments along the Ridgeway even though they have perceived them as strange, pagan, and perhaps even dangerous. For instance, large stones along the way are known as *sarsens*, which comes from the word Saracen. A nice piece, I think. I hope the three articles will indeed secure my intellectual return to Belgrade. Once all three are in print, I will think about the best way to shape my contribution over the next few years.

ALBANIA REVISITED (October 13, 2001)

A few days after my father died earlier this year, the leading Belgrade newspaper, *Politika*, published a glowing obituary written by a well-known architect and architectural critic. The article focused on my father's best known building in the very center of Belgrade, known to all as Albania. The building originally housed one of the largest banks in Yugoslavia, but it inherited its name from a famous inn it had replaced. My father was only twenty-four when he got this project in a competition. It was completed in 1938 and was the tallest building in the Balkans for several decades afterwards. More important, it was a pride of Modernist architecture in the region. Now, many of my friends from Belgrade sent me the article as soon as they spotted it. I was moved by it, of course. However, a discussion about the authorship of Albania soon followed in the letters to the editor of *Politika*. This debate began immediately after Albania was completed, and it was never properly settled. Namely, the man who oversaw the execution of the project claimed it was actually his. The very mention of the fellow's name was enough for my father to go berserk. He was thus never able to give me a coherent account of what had happened and why this issue was not settled from the very start. My mother kept a cool head about the whole thing, and loved to tell me exactly what had happened and why. She returned to this subject quite often, too, especially as she gained in age. It was clear she wanted me to remember all the pertinent details in order to be able to intervene at some point. Luckily, the discussion in the pages of *Politika*, which I followed *via* friends in Belgrade, ultimately led to a proper resolution. A man who knew exactly what had happened settled the matter in his letter of September 24. Ever since, I felt it was time for me to add a few words. I felt I had to say how this issue looked from the inside of the family, as it were. And this is what I did today. I wrote the letter that my mother wanted me to write all along. I hope the editor of *Politika* will publish it, for it adds a personal dimension to the whole story. The only thing I did not put into the letter was that, having finished it, I could not stop sobbing for a long time. That would have been a fitting end to the letter about this very emotional issue, which had disturbed my poor father—and through him my mother, as well—for some sixty years. If I only had the guts.

Addendum (October 18, 2001)

I just learned from Misa and Nena Jovanovic, who helped me deliver the letter to the editor of *Politika*, that my letter appeared today. I immediately checked the newspaper on the Internet (www.politika.co.yu). The letter looks pretty much as I have written it, except that the two last lines are missing. There I said something to the effect that my mother must have reminded me of the facts pertaining to Albania so many times because she wanted me to write just such a letter one fine day. Those two lines add a human touch to the letter, but I am happy enough with the printed version, too. My job is done.

LOVE, PEACE, AND BROTHERHOOD (February 11, 2002)

Over lunch with a colleague and friend, I mused about my extraordinary self-confidence. I began by telling him that I have never met anyone as self-confident as myself. And then I came up with three reasons for this happy affliction. The first is the unconditional love and trust in my abilities that I got from my mother, and through her from my father. Their love and trust are still with me even after their death last year. Next came the fact that I was conceived immediately after the end of World War II, when optimism about the future reigned supreme. This was the time when another war was utterly unthinkable. The last was that I grew up believing that my generation would build a world based on communist principles. That new world was never meant for my country alone. Summing up, my self-confidence stems from three fundamental principles: love, peace, and brotherhood. As fundamental principles go, these are pretty solid!

A TYPICAL MAN (June 16, 2002)

Soon after I arrived in Belgrade, I walked out of my parents' old apartment, where I will be staying for a whole week, and I stepped into a hot June afternoon. Walking about central Belgrade without any plan, I found myself in front of Albania, my father's masterpiece. Once upon a time it was the tallest building in the Balkans. "Hello, father!" I smiled without thinking. Deep down, I am a typical man—sentimental to boot.

THE FULL GLORY OF FALLING BEHIND (June 16, 2002)

On so-called Little Kalemegdan, the part of the biggest Belgrade park overlooking New Belgrade across Sava River, this hot Sunday one can witness the full glory of falling behind: people playing and dancing for themselves. A clarinet, an accordion, and a small drum, perhaps the last remnant of the Turkish musical tradition in this proud city, are

playing while toothless and sweaty people in shabby clothing are dancing around them. The grinning onlookers occasionally replace the tired dancers. When I was a child, the very spot was used every Sunday for the same purpose, but the Turkish influence was a bit less subdued back then. The clarinet was not yet replaced by the traditional flute, called *zurle* from Turkish *zurna*, and the accordion was nowhere to be seen. Only the drum was always there.

THE STREETS OF BELGRADE (June 17, 2002)

It has been hot and humid in Belgrade. Rain brings some relief every few days, but mugginess returns within hours. This morning's shower has suffered the same fate. By the early afternoon, the humidity is back to "normal." This is perhaps as it has always been, but I am quite taken by the way young people, and especially women, respond to it now. Predictably, they shed their clothing much more readily than ever before, but they also dress with a great deal of care. Many of them are real beauties, too. The streets of Belgrade are thus very like a fashion show. Except that it never ends.

Addendum (June 20, 2002)

When I tell my friends about my surprise at the way women now dress in Belgrade, I am told this is so in many parts of ex-Yugoslavia. Dressing with care is a form of passive resistance to the horrors brought by so many wars.

FRONT, SIDE, AND BACK (June 18, 2002)

Misa Jovanovic gave me negatives of three photographs taken shortly before I finished my military service in Yugoslavia and left for the States in 1970. I was twenty-four at the time. He found the negatives in a book he got from my father before my parents left Belgrade in 1993. I had them developed today. They show me from the front, from the side, and from the back, like Donald Duck. I had my hair shaved clean a few days earlier. This was not required, but was done for the shoot. Years ago I had the film developed to show only my head from the three sides. I need to find someone who will do the same thing again, for this is the best likeness of myself in my own mind. To wit, when I think of how I look, I see the three photographs next to each other.

Addendum I (August 16, 2002)

The galleys of *Belgrade Postcards*, which is supposed to appear in print in a couple of months, waited for me in Reading. Misa, who put everything together, eagerly awaited my first impressions. I had asked him to put the old triptych, which Marko had reassembled on his

computer, on the back cover, where there is his blurb about the book. However, I did not find it there. "You know how much I love myself!" I protested at once in a mobile-phone text-message. I hope this superfluous admission will persuade him to put my pictures in their rightful place.

Addendum II (November 24, 2010)

Misa obliged, of course. In addition, this piece and the first *addendum* extending it appeared in the final edition of the book, which came out in late 2002. And I never fail to point at the triptych on the back cover when I show the book to a friend. Ranko Bon as Donald Duck! But it is now representing me at a show about to open at Calvert 22 Gallery in London. Although my main exhibit there is the *Residua* website, for my *magnum opus* is presented as a piece of art in its own right, the triptych also figures as a piece of art on the gallery's website. Given that the three pictures were taken only six years before I started writing my *Residua*, the match is rather fitting. What is six years by comparison with thirty-five over which this piece of art has unfolded?! More important, the felicitous match is likely to stick for quite a few years.

"SLIP INTO SOMETHING ELEGANT" (June 19, 2002)

Thus an inscription in large black lettering on the bright-yellow blouse worn by a lame old woman I walked past close to the Main Post Office in Belgrade. She looked at me in surprise when she noticed that I was reading the text on her chest. Most likely she has no idea what it means.

TWO ALPHABETS (June 20, 2002)

I asked an old friend I met by chance in Belgrade to write his address and phone number in my notebook. When we parted, I noticed that he had written his name in Latin alphabet and his address in Cyrillic. The two alphabets are difficult to keep apart in his mind. Had I never left Belgrade, chances are I would not even notice his error.

SLUSHY (June 20, 2002)

Goran Djordjevic, who runs Salon de Fleurus in New York, has turned out to be in Belgrade during my visit. "How are you managing this heat?" he asked me on the phone this morning. I explained that it was just fine with me after the wet and cold in England. He laughed. David Wilson, who runs the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, told him last winter he was thinking about coming to

Belgrade. Goran told him it was quite slushy. "That's what I want!" exclaimed David, who had had enough of Californian balmy weather.

STRAW HAT (June 21, 2002)

In search of a book a Yugoslav friend from London wanted me to find, a new dictionary of Serbian swears and curses, I was walking with Nena Jovanovic through the Belgrade corso. At some point I spotted a young woman with an enormous straw hat. It was so large that it floated up and down as she walked. "Like a ray!" beamed Misa Jovanovic later on, when I told him about this encounter. "Look at that hat," I nudged Nena. The young woman spied our exchange as she passed by. I turned around to appreciate the hat's floating motion, but she turned around herself. When our eyes met, she gave me a wonderful, playful smile. I smiled back. "That's Belgrade for you!" I turned back to Nena, who was bemused by my enthusiasm.

POSTSCRIPTUM VII (July 3, 2002)

When I was in Belgrade last month, Misa Jovanovic gave me a few more books from the series he has been publishing together with his friends, many of whom have contributed to the Postcard Section of the newspaper *Danas*. His book about Rovinj or Rovigno in Istria was the first in the series. He sent it to my mother almost a year before she died. Both of us read it immediately and enjoyed Misa's prose, as well as his account of Belgrade writers and artists who made this gem of a city their summer home. Since then, he has published another book about Cubura, the area of Belgrade where he grew up. The format and feel of the books is very much to my liking. Perhaps this is not surprising, as they come under the collective name that is very close to my heart—Postcards. Thus I offered to Misa to add to the series a selection of pieces about Belgrade from my *Residua*. He was enthusiastic about the idea of publishing my writings, and in English, and we immediately set out to shape the book. Now I have a selection of more than some eighty pieces written over a quarter of a century. He has written the preface, which links this selection and my book on the World Wide Web. *Belgrade Postcards* is the agreed title of the book. Sometime this summer the book will go into production. My job largely finished, every now and then I pick up the manuscript, open it at random, and re-read a few pieces from it. More often than not, I end up struggling with tears.

Addendum (March 24, 2013)

Whenever I think of sundry selections from my *Residua*, such as this one, Misa pops up in my mind. And I cannot believe that he has been dead since 2007. Six years already! I have been in touch with Nena ever since, it goes without saying, but I simply cannot believe that

Misa is no more. Death is such a strange thing, indeed. It is nigh impossible. Our friends keep living in our minds no matter what. We can even talk to them, laugh with them, and exchange occasional greetings. And this book is a sufficient proof that Misa is very much alive. And very well. Greetings, old friend!

Sundry Afterthoughts

“OUR” BELGRADE (April 15, 2003)

When I wrote Rada Ivekovic, who now lives in Paris, that I will be going to Belgrade, she wrote back asking me to send her greetings to “our” Belgrade. This morning I walked around the part of the city where we both lived as kids. I first went to Jovanova 33, where I lived with my parents from 1948 to 1965. There I found only two names I knew well: Jovicic and Rodic. Then I went to Rige od Fere 20, where Rada used to live with her brother and parents. There I found four names I knew since childhood: Papo, Makiedo, Soldatic, and Govorusic. My parents were friends with all these people, and I was friends with all their children. Most of my parents’ generation is gone, and most of my generation is abroad. God only knows who now lives in these apartments. Which is why I suppressed the first impulse to ring all these bells.

THREE HATS (April 15, 2003)

I am having lunch in one of the oldest Belgrade restaurants, the Three Hats. I started coming here when I was a teenager, but I have never paid any attention to the three hats attached to the façade. From left to right, the first is a black bowler, the second a red top-hat, and the third a white panama. Black, red, and white—my favorite colors. Since puberty, I presume.

GRILLED INTESTINES (April 16, 2003)

After the promotion of my two books, as well as all the other books produced to date by Vracarski Breg, we went to a nearby restaurant famous for its grill, “Mlava.” The whole evening will stick out in my mind because of that dinner. For the first time in about two decades I had grilled intestines—a high point in my writing career. In Belgrade, the dish is known as *crevca* (read: tsrevtsa), the demunitive form of *crevo* or “intestine.” Ah, the faint taste of shit!

BEING CUT OFF (April 17, 2003)

Sitting in a café across the street from the National Theater I noticed one small thing about Belgrade: its sky is not thundering with airplanes so typical of London and Reading's sky. And this is only an insignificant benefit of being cut off.

RANKO AND DARJA (April 17, 2003)

Judging from many stories I have heard from old friends, and especially those from my highschool days, my name is inextricably bound with Darja's. We are known as "Ranko and Darja" by many. Like "Marx and Engels" of old. In so many minds, we are one and the same. And there is nothing either of us can do to change our destiny.

STRAY DOGS (April 18, 2003)

Belgrade is full of stray dogs. A whole pack barked like mad around the Parliament late into the night yesterday. This morning I saw two of them at a pedestrian crossing close to the National Theater. Both were mongrels, but their German Shepherd ancestry was dominant. Confused by many people and cars, they appeared unsure of what to do. The smaller dog started walking across a couple of times, but then returned to its mate, who had failed to follow. On the third attempt it left the larger dog on the other side and crossed gingerly with the last group of pedestrians. And then it plopped itself on the pavement facing the other side of the street, waiting patiently. I left before the larger dog made its move, but it was clear everything would end up well. The dogs knew what they were doing. Belgrade is their oyster.

REAL, UNREAL (April 18, 2003)

For the time being, people in Belgrade have too many real problems to go for unreal ones. For the time being, once again. The political and economic outlook is apparently improving.

KOSOVO (April 22, 2003)

When I arrived in Belgrade more than a week ago, I saw that the old drinking hole down my street, called "Kosovo" after the name of the street, was being refurbished. Yesterday was the opening night, but I did not stop to check the place out. The huge crowd spilling onto the street bode well. This morning I decided to try it out. When I walked in, I realized that all the youngsters working there were somewhat hesitant about my presence. "Are you open?" I asked one of them. He turned to another waiter: "Are we open?" As it turned out, they were

kind of open, and I ordered a double espresso. “How do you call this place?” I asked when the coffee arrived. “Ice Bar!” As chance would have it, I was their very first customer. Old Kosovo is no more. For the time being, the name of the street is not in question.

SOMEWHAT WORSE (April 23, 2003)

Gypsies are despised in Belgrade. This has always been thus, and yet I fear it is somewhat worse after the nationalist frenzy of the last decade. Still, Gypsies make a living here. A contradiction by any stretch of imagination. Ah, Marxism!

THE CHILD AND THE CROWD (April 24, 2003)

A Gipsy child of about three crying desperately in the middle of a crowded Belgrade square. The mother is nowhere to be seen, perhaps strategically. This may be a part of the child’s education. Which is perhaps why no-one moves a finger to help the hapless child. Besides, this may be a part of the crowd’s education. The child and the crowd are not meant to ever meet beyond those few coins that will connect and divide them forever.

BETWEEN YOUR EARS (April 24, 2003)

Most, if not all, mysteries have to do with a trivial fact that everything that there is can be found between your ears. There, everything is connected with everything else in flesh and blood. Neurons and synapses galore. Thence life after death. And ghosts. God, too. Or the world as one. The trivial fact is so trite and tired that it escapes notice. And it always will, as witnessed by your sudden discovery. Your sudden rediscovery, that is.

Addendum (May 28, 2003)

My childhood friend, Dragan Jovicic, died of heart-attack on the very day this was written, as I just learned by electronic mail from his wife, Mira. It was just after two o’clock in the morning. He died in his sleep. He was buried a few days later, on Orthodox Good Friday. Three days my senior, Dragan was more of a brother than a friend. We were inseparable for years. He and his family lived in the same building, on the same floor. My memories of Jovanova Street in Belgrade are inextricably bound with him. He will live as long as I do, as I just wrote back to Mira. Now there is one more ghost in my attic, but the attic is vast and warm. Welcome, Dragan!

FORCED PERSPECTIVE (April 24, 2003)

Everyone smokes in Belgrade. Well, nearly everyone. And everywhere, including indoor public places. Large spaces look larger than they are because people far away appear farther than they actually are when seen through thick curtains of smoke. At least the first few days or weeks, before one gets used to the forced perspective.

SUNNY AND EMPTY STREETS (April 26, 2003)

On a sunny Saturday morning Belgrade looks a bit worse than on a dark and drizzly working day, like so many days I have witnessed the last fortnight. This is a bit surprising at first, before one considers one's expectations with due diligence. Sunny and empty streets reveal so much more that is acrumble in this impoverished city. So much more that will take a generation or two to put right...

“JOY” (April 27, 2003)

Starting at midnight, the celebration of the Orthodox Easter went into the wee hours. Curious, I watched it on television. The commentator of the church proceedings, taking place in the newest and largest church in Belgrade, kept repeating that Christ's resurrection was the most joyous event in Christendom. The word “joy” was on his lips all the while in spite of the glum faces of the priests and the assembled believers. There was not a trace of joy in the whole thing. Prompted by the abused word, I could not but conjure in my mind the most joyous event in an African village, drums and all. Christians of all persuasions have much to learn from pagans—including the meaning of the word “joy.”

FRAMING (May 22, 2003)

I got my first diploma, an undergraduate degree from the University of Belgrade, in 1969. My second, a master's from Harvard, came in 1972. And I got my last, a Ph.D. from MIT, in 1975. For all these years they all lingered in a large red envelope, which I got together with my Harvard diploma. After so many international moves, it is a miracle the envelope is still with me. Today I took it to a framery near my home in Reading. A couple of months before my retirement, framing the diplomas is just fun, whereas it could have been construed as showing off until recently. Or am I worried no-one will take me seriously in Motovun?

THAT DRAWER (May 25, 2003)

When I was last in Belgrade, I visited my parents' remaining friends. Some of them I saw twice. Gordana Ristic was among them. Her husband, Milorad, died last year. Both times she showed me the albums of photographs she had been making for her son, her daughter-in-law, and their son. So far, she has made a dozen or so, and the pile is growing. Not at all well, she spends a lot of time selecting the photographs, arranging them on each page, and typing everything she remembers about the people in them in the spaces in between. Her main motivation is to give her grandson, who has lived abroad most of his life, a sense of his roots. From time to time she shed a tear as would she flipped through the pages of her albums. When I was leaving for the second time, she asked me to send her a few pictures of my parents, among the dearest friends she and Milorad had ever had. There is a place reserved for them in one of the albums. I promised to send them to her, but I somehow managed to do nothing about it. Until today, that is. I went to the bedroom that used to be my father's, opened a cabinet drawer stuffed full of family memorabilia, and quickly selected three photographs. The first is from a boat trip in the Adriatic just after my parents were married in 1936; the second is of my mother in Reading in 1995 or 1996; and the third is of my parents sometime in 1998 or 1999, not long before he ended up first in hospital and then in nursing home. Even before I closed the drawer, I was already weeping.

ODD OR EVEN? (May 31, 2003)

When I played the old odd-or-even game with my pals in Belgrade, I must have been old enough to have pubic hair and young enough not to realize there could be less painful ways of playing it. The game must have been played for something or other—a sweet, a drink, a favor, or a cigarette. One of us would dig his hand into his underpants, pluck out a few pubic hairs, pull his hand out, and offer his clinched fingers in challenge: “Odd or even?” Once the wager was made, the count was very thorough. Come to think of it, I must have been old enough to remember this silly game at all and young enough not to remember more than its bare essentials.

BELGRADE IN SPRING (October 29, 2003)

Tomorrow evening I was supposed to take a bus from Rijeka to Belgrade. The ride would have taken the whole night. The bus from Motovun to Rijeka would not have taken more than an hour and a half, but I would have waited for my connection in Rijeka for more than three hours. In short, the trip would have been on the arduous side in cold and wet weather, which is supposed to stretch through the weekend. Having gotten a bug of some kind last weekend, which has

developed quite nicely since then, I ultimately decided to postpone the trip. I hate changing my plans, though, and health is not a great concern of mine, but last night was horrible. I could barely sleep. I could neither breathe nor swallow my saliva. The fever struck at some point, as well. To round it off, I got diarrhoea. The king of diarrhoeas, that is. Even before I got up this morning, feeling weak and rather small, I started looking for another time to visit the city of my youth. How about the spring? There will be much more light by then. It will be warmer, too. I could stay for two weeks, and not only one, as I planned this time. Yes, Belgrade in spring is not to be missed. In the end, I feverishly persuaded myself to postpone my trip, bug or no bug.

SHAMANS' HILL (April 3, 2004)

Toponyms lose their meaning through use. It takes an act of courage, as well as a leap of faith, to probe into their secrets. The better we know the name of a place, the greater the courage and the faith required. Take the name of my publisher in Belgrade, a toponym of a city quarter known to all: Vracarski Breg. *Vrac* stands for “witch doctor,” “sorcerer,” “medicine man,” or “shaman.” *Vracara* is the female form of the same noun. *Vracarski* is a plural form of an adjective that can be rendered as “of the shamans.” *Breg* stands for “rise,” “knoll,” “mount,” or “hill.” Shamans’ Hill, in short. Now take the writers assembled around this imprint. Shamans one and all. What a felicitous choice for the publisher’s name, it crossed my mind only today, two years after Vracarski Breg had published my first book.

IN PRINT (August 16, 2004)

This morning I wrote a short piece for the Postcard Section of *Danas*, the best newspaper in Belgrade. So far, I have published six short pieces in it. But this one is special. Very special. It is about Motovun. Actually, it is about Ljubica Handjal, our clandestine mayor, known to all as Grandma Ljubica. Or just Ljubica. Our heart and soul. I am so excited about the piece, I can hardly wait to receive a copy of the newspaper with my postcard in it. Actually, I can hardly wait to see Ljubica’s face when she spots her name in print.

Addendum I (August 28, 2004)

Today I learned that my piece about Motovun appeared in *Danas* two days ago, on August 26. I went to the newspaper’s website and found the article after some fiddling. To my disappointment, the picture I sent with the text does not appear on the website. It is the very same picture from the cover of my *Istrian Postcards*, published in Belgrade about a year ago. Anyhow, I immediately wrote to a few friends in Belgrade to ask for the original copy of the newspaper. Our mayor deserves the real thing for her bulging records.

Addendum II (August 30, 2004)

As it happened, Ljubica learned about my article before the original copy could reach me. The subject came up as we were sitting at Klaudio's with a bunch of friends. She was a bit concerned at first. Of course, she wanted to know what I had written, and so I printed out the text stored in my computer and took it to her place earlier today. I explained that the newspaper itself would be with her in a week at most. Although Ljubica was quite busy, she presently sat down to read the article. I sat quietly across the table from her and watched her eyes move across the page. The text contains a bit more than four-hundred words—that is, a bit less than a full page. It takes a couple of minutes to read. As she read, she kept chuckling. Her timid smile turned into a wide grin. Even before she thanked me for my kind words, her happy chuckles were my reward.

Addendum III (September 29, 2004)

At long last, two copies of *Danas* arrived from Belgrade. In fact, there were four in the parcel, but I will come back to the other two copies in a moment. The parcel was sent by Velja Ilic, a friend from Belgrade who has a house in Motovun since the early Seventies. He is a journalist—reportedly a good one. This time around, he was my link with the editorial office of *Danas*, as well. Anyhow, Ljubica got her copy minutes after I picked it up from the post office. In the meanwhile, a whole bunch of people had read it at Klaudio's, including one of Ljubica's grandsons, Daniel. And everyone was well pleased. She was tickled pink, of course. Back to the other two copies of *Danas*, though. They contained my second postcard about Motovun, which was about the first mention of the town at the Rizana Assembly in 804. It appeared in print last weekend, on September 25-26. I used this opportunity to mention the ticklish fact that one of the several reasons for the medieval assembly was to complain to Charlemagne's hand-picked representatives that his governor of Istria, a certain Duke Iohannes, had let too many Slavs onto the peninsula. Following their sheep, they were coming across the border of the Holy Roman Empire in droves since the beginning of the Seventh Century. One copy of *Danas* with the second postcard I kept, as well, and the other I sent to Mariano Maurovic *via* Dragan Vivoda, who works in the municipal office next door to Mariano's own office crammed with books and papers about our little town. Mariano organized the current exhibition at Hotel Kastel celebrating the first mention, which will remain open for a few more days. By the way, Dragan was the first man I met in Motovun. And he just happened to be at Klaudio's this morning.

DISPLAY OF MANHOOD (October 6, 2004)

I dreamt that I was sitting at the desk in my study when one of my sons came quietly through the door behind me and sat on the bed or sofa to my right. I think it was Marko, but it could have been Dorian, as well. He was about ten. Without a word, he pulled down his pants and socks, which were thick and yellowish in color. Then he pulled down his underpants and spread his legs open to reveal a fully erect penis. It was an endearing, if a bit ridiculous, display of manhood, I guess. His prick was longer than I would have expected, which made me almost proud, but it was quite thin. It bulged in the middle, though. His balls were small. They looked like marbles. My son then slowly pulled down his foreskin, which was still tight and unaccustomed to such things. The head was small and undeveloped, also. This wordless display is all I remember of my dream. When I woke up, though, I started making connections between the dream and my childhood in Belgrade. The study looked quite like my room in Kosovska Street. The only boy aged about ten that I might have seen displaying himself in this fashion would be Dragan, my closest childhood friend. We were the same age. He died last year. When we were around ten, we did play with each other on a few occasions. However, at that time I lived in Jovanova Street, where my room was entirely different in shape and disposition of furniture. If there is any recollection to this dream, it is a total and complete jumble.

Addendum (October 7, 2004)

Having realized that my last dream may have had to do with scrambled childhood memories, I went to my *Residua* website. Without much ado, I searched for Dragan's name. It came up in four pieces written between 1986 and 2002, two of which have to do with recollections of several fumbling explorations of our bodies. Well, our burgeoning manhoods. Convinced that I had written a bit more on this subject than I had found on the World Wide Web, I searched through my own *Residua* files, including all the pieces that are not yet in the public domain. Sure enough, I found five unpublished pieces, as well as several unpublished *addenda*, bearing Dragan's name. Not surprisingly, all of these have to do with masturbation. A few of the pieces are about occasional fantasies of masturbating together with another man, thus repeating my first sexual experiences with Dragan. Embarrassing stuff. Or is it? The overwhelming feeling this search has brought in its wake is embarrassment with my own untoward embarrassment. Why am I hiding something so natural? And so common. Many people must have had similar childhood experiences that would long linger in the recesses of their minds—boys with boys and girls with girls. After all, our sex lives often begin years before close encounters with the opposite sex. Why hide such memories from others, many of whom are likely to share the embarrassment? Most embarrassing, indeed.

OLD ALYOSHA (November 3, 2004)

On his way from Belgrade to Paris, Alyosha Kispredilov dropped by Motovun. He says he likes to drive. The last time he remembers seeing my then girlfriend, Darja, and me was at the New Year's party inaugurating 1963, the year he left Belgrade for good. He says he has a good picture of Darja and me at that party. After more than forty years, we would not have recognized each other. Even after several hours together, I could catch a bit of old Alyosha only fleetingly. Before he left, he showed me some recent pictures, including a few of his old friends from Belgrade. He hoped I would recognize some of them. "I think I recognize this face," I pointed hesitantly at a gray fellow, "but I cannot be sure." "Hey," he chuckled, "that's me!"

CURLERS (February 25, 2005)

My old friend from Belgrade, Jasna Kronja, shared with me only a few years ago a little secret of my first girlfriend, Darja, who was also Jasna's close friend. They are still close. It is not a great secret, but it surely is a telling one. Together with Jasna and her then boyfriend, Rade Kronja, who later became her husband, one winter in the late Sixties Darja and I went to Kopaonik, a skiing resort not far from Belgrade. By the way, Jasna and Rade were studying architecture with me. We were inseparable. Anyhow, we had quite a bit of fun that winter. This was my first time on the skis, as well as my last, as it happened, but I turned out to be pretty intrepid. As Darja was somewhat unsteady on her skis, and as she was a bit afraid of steep slopes, I would often go to the top of the mountain by myself and hurtle down like a banshee. I was unstoppable. Quite often, she would wait for me in the lodge, where we all shared a big room. Now, Jasna told me that Darja had her and Rade watch for me through the windows of the lodge whenever she would put curlers in her hair. And this she did often—almost every day. She was afraid I would get quite angry if I ever caught her using them. And Jasna kept mum about this for some thirty years. She was a tad uneasy about it even a few years ago, when she decided to spill the beans. But Darja's secret tells much more about me than about her, of course. As a young man, I must have been a real oaf. But curlers are anathema for me even now.

TO BE, TO BEAT (May 1, 2005)

Jasna and Rade Kronja, old friends from Belgrade, came to see me in Motovun. They stayed for a few days before continuing to Ljubljana, where they both have not-so-distant relatives. The best joke they told me cannot be translated into English, but here goes. Someone asks a Gipsy boy what he will be when he grows up. He will beat his wife, he answers. The joke works perfectly in Serbian and Croatian alike. As well as Slovene, but only just. Hey, "to be" and "to beat" are not

that far from each other in English, either! An Indo-European joke, this.

ONCE A GLOBETROTTER (May 20, 2005)

For two or three days now, I have been looking at every little thing in my house with a new pair of eyes: will I need it while I am away, or will I not? I will need only a few things, I know full well, but some of them will be quite essential, like the mobile-phone charger or the contact-lens cleaning liquid. I must not miss any of these essential things. In addition, I will need two pairs of underpants, three pairs of socks, three T-shirts with short sleeves, one pair of shorts, one pair of sandals... I keep going through the list over and over again. In short, I am a bit anxious about the impending trip. After more than a year of not budging from Motovun for more than a day, I will be away for ten full days. Ten full days away from my enchanted hill. Once a globetrotter, now I am a hick.

THE LAST NEXT TIME (May 24, 2005)

This time around, I wonder when I will return to Belgrade again. Will there be a next time, though? Is this not the next time already? The last next time, too.

SILICONE LIPS (May 24, 2005)

A few tables away in a busy Belgrade café across the street from Hotel Majestic, a pretty woman in her mid-twenties is exercising her silicone lips. Puffed up, they cannot be missed. Greased by an eager tongue, they are in constant motion. Expressions change every few seconds, but the range is rather narrow: boredom, impatience, exasperation, annoyance, disgust. Disgust comes up most often, and to a great effect. Those silicone lips are a real marvel, for my poor stomach is churning already.

THAT WAGGING TAIL (May 25, 2005)

It is close to midnight. I am on my way to Vojin Tosic's across the street from Kalemegdan, where I am staying for a few days in Belgrade. Just off the main drag, which is still bustling with people strolling up and down, I spot a smallish dog sprawled on the pavement under a dark and musty shop window. Its back leaning against the wall, its legs are stretched out toward the street. "Ts-ts," I call gently as I walk by, "ts-ts." The dog raises its head half way, opens its eyes and perks up its floppy ears, looks me over sleepily, and starts wagging

its bushy tail. Dust rises from under it. It is hard to tell how happy that has made me. That wagging tail.

KABUL (May 27, 2005)

Friends ask me how I find Belgrade. “Kabul,” I answer. Most of them are miffed. They point at many recent improvements, including newly painted façades in the center of the city. “Belgrade is Belgrade,” they argue with some conviction. Of course, none of them have been to Kabul. Neither have I. And so I concede their point. Quite gladly, too.

BONI (May 27, 2005)

I went to a grocery store to buy some bottled water for my trip from Belgrade to Zagreb. Seven hours in the train is liable to make you thirsty. Anyhow, I was already at the till when I saw the plural of my family name printed large on the packaging towering to my right: “Boni.” Most likely the phonetic spelling of Bonnie or Bonny, it turned out to be the commercial name of toilet paper produced by a company in Belgrade. Delighted, I bought a package for my trip, as well. Trains in these parts often have none.

ZAGREB, BELGRADE (May 30, 2005)

How do I compare Zagreb and Belgrade? The city in which I was born and the city in which I grew up. The city of my future and the city of my past. The city of this and the city of that. Well, I do not compare Zagreb and Belgrade at all. Not at all.

THE CIRCLE (June 2, 2005)

Zagreb, Belgrade, Cambridge, Ljubljana, Cambridge, Reading, London, Reading, Motovun, Zagreb? Nah, the circle closes with Motovun. And it is a much bigger circle, too.

A CERTAIN BRANKICA (June 6, 2005)

I receive a largish postcard from Trieste. It shows a splendid aerial photograph of Grado some way toward Venice down the Adriatic coast from Trieste. The postcard is written and signed by Ivana Golubovic. Bata Stojkov, whom she says I met at MIT some thirty years ago, signed the card, as well. He must be visiting with her. They are reading my *Belgrade Postcards* (2002) and *Istrian Postcards* (2003), which they must have found in Belgrade. They loved a story about a

certain Brankica, they say. Perhaps they know her, too. It must be a spicy one from the former book, and they must have found my current address in the latter. Ivana's Trieste address is on the postcard, as are several of her phone numbers. To reciprocate, I send her a postcard showing me in the uniform of the Yugoslav Army. It is from thirty-five years ago. On its back I paste "That Wagging Tail" (May 25, 2005), one of the pieces recently written in Belgrade. That is where Ivana and Bata must be from, as well, but I cannot remember either of them. Their names mean absolutely nothing to me. Even that certain Brankica now escapes me almost entirely.

SWEARING (June 13, 2005)

When people come to visit me, I am delighted. I am exuberant. And I swear a lot. The less well I know them, the more I swear. No fooling around, either. I am most vulgar with those from Yugoslavia of old. They know their swears. If they are from Belgrade, I swear the most. If from Zagreb, quite a bit less. And if from Ljubljana, I swear the least, if at all. But I am always vulgar, vulgar. Vulgar beyond compare. It is a ruse of sorts, of course. Those who see through me, I love. Or at least respect. And those who do not, I can safely let go. And forget for good. Not a bad ruse, this. It saves me a lot of trouble as years go by. By and by, only a few people will come back to visit me. Only those fucking few I love and respect. In the years to come, I may stop swearing altogether. To my visitors, I may then appear like a saint.

HOW OFTEN (October 4, 2005)

How often I drift in my mind all the way to Jovanova Street. To the hulking tenement in which I used to live with my parents. How often I squeeze through the massive wooden door to the gloomy marble hall behind it. How often I drift up the murky stairwell all the way to the door of our apartment. To the door that remains stubbornly shut just like all the other doors on all the landings on my way up. How often I drift down the stairwell to the empty street again. To the vacant green market across the street. To the forlorn parks and playgrounds nearby. How often I drift in my mind from the dismal streets around Jovanova where my friends used to live—Visnjiceva, Jevremova, Kapetan Misina, Simina, Dobracina, Dositejeva. From the desolate neighborhood in which I grew up—Dorcol. From Belgrade abandoned even by ghosts like me.

ANNA DANDOLO (December 4, 2005)

Every few months I find myself searching my files for something or other I am convinced I have written, but find nothing. I usually spend

quite some time searching and searching, absolutely convinced that I have somehow mislaid that precious something. In the end I conclude that I must have only intended to write about that something, but that I have somehow failed to do so. This is what has just happened to me once again.

Today I searched my *Residua*, both on my computer and on the World Wide Web, for mention of Anna Dandolo, doge Enrico Dandolo's granddaughter. Not a mention of her anywhere, though. And here is the story, which I find quite formidable. In or about 1204, the year Enrico Dandolo took Constantinople by diverting the Fourth Crusade to the capital of the Byzantine empire, Anna Dandolo was married to Stefan Nemanja. He was at the root of the mighty Nemanjic dynasty that five generations later produced Stefan Dusan, the paramount Serbian king. He died shortly before the Turkish incursion into the Balkans. His father, Stefan Uros III, was begotten by Stefan Uros II, who was begotten by Stefan Uros I, one of the two Nemanja's sons with Anna Dandolo. The other son, Predislav, later became Saint Sava, the paramount Serbian saint. Stefan Nemanja himself became Saint Simeon, another Serbian saint of note. In short, some of the key figures of Serbian history are direct descendents of a Venetian princess. And a Dandolo, no less. More important, Serbian and Venetian histories are inextricably intertwined. Before 1204, both Serbia and Venice were in Byzantine vassalage, whence the "political" marriage in question.

The story comes from a credible source: Chapter 2, "The Dynasty of Sacred Roots," from Sima Cirkovic's *The Serbs*.^[1] By the way, Cirkovic is an Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of Belgrade, as well as a member of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. His book is considered to be a model of objectivity, too. The source is more than credible, indeed.

But why is this story so important to me? Why did I search for it so anxiously today? Why am I putting it down with such gusto? Partly because I like to tease my Serbian friends about their past, of which they usually know next to nothing in spite of their purported interest, but mainly because the Fourth Crusade is still as alive for me as though it took place only yesterday. In my heart and soul, I am a vestige of times past. A throwback. Nay, a troglodyte.

Footnote

1. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 34-76.

CRACKLING (January 21, 2006)

After I woke up this morning but before I took my morning bath, my thoughts drifted to our bathroom in Jovanova Street in Belgrade. The

first bathroom I remember. These memories reach to my second or third year in the late Forties. Actually, my thoughts drifted toward the contraption that was used to heat the water in the bathroom. A large copper cylinder was mounted vertically on top of a squat stove made of moulded iron. It must have been an industrial product, but I do not remember seeing another one like that anywhere in Belgrade, for it must have been rather old. If I remember correctly, the cylinder was the color of copper, and it was quite shiny, while the stove was painted silver. It was semi-spherical on top. The stovepipe went right through the middle of the cylinder. This was a way of conserving energy, I suppose. The spout above the bathtub jotted out close to the bottom of the cylinder. It was massive. The shower came out of another pipe running parallel with the cylinder and then bending over the tub. The showerhead was on the large side, too. I do not remember exactly how hot and cold water were mixed, but there were several knobs on the cylinder. They were made of shiny white porcelain. The stove, which stood on four richly-ornamented legs ending with befanged paws, took wood and coal. Every bath involved a few hours of careful stoking of the fire. Afterwards, the ashes had to be removed and disposed off. Metal garbage bins were in the basement. There was a large wooden trunk for wood and coal on a small balcony next to the kitchen, and it had to be refilled a couple of times a week from the storage in the basement, as well. When I got bigger, I occasionally carried heavy buckets to or from the basement, but this was the job of our maid. She lived in a small room off the kitchen. As taking a bath was quite involved, we bathed once a week only. All of us, including the maid. I think it was Friday, but it could have been Saturday, too. I do not remember being especially fond of bathing when I was a child, but the crackling the fire in the bathroom now surfaces as something quite wonderful. Blissful. Even magical, I dare say. Which is why my thoughts drifted toward that old bathroom soon after I woke up this morning.

CONSOLING MYSELF (February 9, 2006)

“Old man,” I challenge myself every so often, “let’s remember something from childhood.” And my mind’s eye immediately produces the yellowish façade of the apartment building on Jovanova Street in Belgrade in which I used to live together with my parents. But that is where my memory stalls. “Anything else?” I prod myself forward. At best, I can see the door of the building, as well. Sometimes I can see the edge of the grocery store to the right of the door. But that is all. The neighboring houses are blank. The sky is blank. The street is blank. There are no people anywhere. And no children, who used to crowd the streets like pigeons in the early Fifties. “Bah,” I give up, “maybe another time.” On each such occasion I end up consoling myself that memories like these cannot but well up with age.

OUT OF THIS WORLD: A LETTER TO LUDVIK VACULIK
(March 21, 2006)

Your letter of March 15, 2006, very much surprised me. As well as delighted me, of course. Liza Braunschweiger did promise to pass to you several of my short essays about you and your fellow dissident writers from Czechoslovakia of old, but for some reason I never imagined you would write back to me. Thank you very much indeed.

Perhaps the main reason for my surprise is that I associate you with another era and another world. As well as a very different me. Back in 1968, I was in my early twenties and full of what I took to be revolutionary fervor. I was quite active in the student uprising in Belgrade, but, just like many of my fellow students, I was further to the left than the Yugoslav party and state at the time. My own dissident writings of the Seventies and Eighties leaned heavily toward a model of socialist society that seems so very utopian today. Although I could have gotten a few years in jail for what I was writing then, my youthful courage now seems so out of place. Indeed, out of this world.

I do hope that you will visit us in Motovun some time soon, and that we will have an opportunity to talk at length about the ways of joining the two worlds that seem so far apart at present. The world of yesterday and the world of today. The world of youth and the world of maturity. As you can imagine, Liza and I would do our best to make you feel comfortable in Istria.

THE MYTH OF KOSOVO: A LETTER TO *THE ECONOMIST*
(March 21, 2006)

“As the Serbs have reminded the world over the past fifteen years,” you write in connection with the reverberations of Slobodan Milosevic’s demise in Serbia, “everything would have been different had they not lost the battle of Kosovo to the Ottoman Turks in 1389” (“Aftermath of a Dictator,” March 18, 2006). This is a myth. In the words of a leading Serbian historian, Sima Cirkovic: “The idea that the ‘fall of the Serbian Empire’ took place at the battle of Kosovo is fundamentally wrong, because the state continued to exist for a further seven decades and experienced economic and cultural revival” (*The Serbs*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 85). Still, this is the most potent Serbian myth, and it would take careful historical analysis to understand why. As well as how it has impinged upon the actual historic events in Serbia and the Balkans in the past fifteen years.

IN SPITE OF HIS GRAY HAIR (March 26, 2006)

I was sitting by the fireplace at Benjamin's when a fellow walked through the door. I gave him a quick look. "Hey," an inner voice sounded, "I know this guy!" But then I gave him another look. "Nah," the voice cut in, "this guy is too old." In spite of his gray hair, the fellow walked straight toward me. I got up when I realized I really knew him. It was Vlado Kreacic. I know him since highschool in Belgrade. We were quite close while we both worked in Ljubljana in the late Seventies, as well. Anyhow, we last saw each other in the States in the early Eighties, about a quarter of a century ago. We hugged like old friends. "Well," the inner voice chipped in almost apologetically, "you must look quite a bit older, too."

DARE (May 23, 2006)

Mirko Gabler brought me from the States an old issue of *Dare*, a cheap gossip magazine the size of a postcard, which purports to debunk Tito's many marriages and extramarital affairs. A collector's item from March 1953, the black-white-and red magazine is a pleasure to leaf through. The trigger for the article about the Yugoslav dictator's love-life was the first public appearance of his last wife, Jovanka, whom he had just married. The occasion was a reception in Belgrade for Anthony Eden of Britain in September the previous year. According to *Dare*, Tito was quite a peacock, but Jovanka still stole the show. Tall, slim, and dark, she appeared in daring décolletage. She was twenty-eight at the time, while Tito was already sixty. The black-and-white photograph of the couple from the reception is stunning, indeed. Jovanka is positively radiant, her teeth flashing left and right, while Tito shows his age. Sadly for him, she turned into a pear-shaped matron in a few short years. She was in her mid-thirties by the time I reached puberty in the late Fifties, but she still looked rather like a fat, old aunt to me. Not even dictators can have it all.

THOSE THIRTY SECONDS (December 17, 2006)

I was not yet six in 1952 when I got a prize for painting from *Shankar's Weekly*, an Indian national newspaper. I do not remember how my paintings got to the international competition in India, though. I was not yet seven in 1953 when I received the newspaper's silver chalice with my name inscribed in it. The then minister of education, a woman whose name I cannot recall any longer, presented it to me at an assembly of first graders in my elementary school in Belgrade. The event was momentous enough to be filmed for the national news, which were presented before movies in all theatres across Yugoslavia. However, the minister decided in the nick of time that I was too young for such an honour. She was concerned that it might go to my head. My parents eventually received a metal box with thirty seconds of tape

meant for large theater projectors. No-one had such a projector at home, of course. Many years later, sometime between Tito's death and the beginning of the civil war, a friend of my parents who worked for the national television company, transferred the film to video tape. My parents did not have a video recorder, either. Mauro Sirotic, the greatest film buff in Motovun, transferred the film to a compact disk only a few days ago. And so I just saw on my computer screen those thirty seconds filmed fifty-three years ago. In the first scene I am playing ball with three other kids. I cannot remember a single one of them. Judging from a quick shot of a blooming cherry-tree, it was spring, which explains why I was wearing shorts and knee-high socks. In the next scene I am walking down Jovanova Street and entering into my apartment building. There follow a few scenes of me painting at home. The last scene shows the minister handing me the chalice and shaking my hand in front of the assembled children. Only then I produce a big grin exposing my missing teeth. The four front teeth on top are all gone. Sweet. And sad. For my mother would have known how my paintings got to India. She would have known all the kids playing with me by name. She would have known the minister's name, too. She would have been able to explain every scene in finest detail. Second by second.

NO TOMORROW (August 27, 2007)

I met a tall woman in her late fifties in the middle of Borgo. "We are looking for Ranko Bon," she said. A hunched woman with a cane and a huge straw hat was picking her way down the street some way behind her. It turned out to be a teacher of mine from highschool in Belgrade. I could not remember her or her name, but she claimed to remember me well. She read my two books published in Belgrade, as well. "She is ninety-four," said her daughter under her voice as we slowly walked to the hotel terrace, where I was going when we met. The old lady was fascinating, too. "I must apologize for my ceaseless jabbering," she kept repeating from time to time. Her eyes were bubbling with infectious joy. She talked about everything around her with enthusiasm bordering on ecstasy. "Look at the color of the sky between the leaves," she sighed fervently at some point as she craned her crooked neck upwards. When they left after an hour or so, I realized that the mother had reached without even trying that special state of mind mentioned longingly by so many poets: she was living as though there was no tomorrow.

SUCH A LIST (January 8, 2008)

Propelled by an inexplicable urge, I just grabbed a piece of paper and jotted down the names of all the places where I had lived so far, two of which came up twice: Zagreb, Belgrade, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Ljubljana, Cambridge, Reading (Berkshire), London, Reading,

Motovun. This was not the first time that I had drawn up such a list, either. But then I found myself correcting the list in two places, and for the very first time. First I remembered that I was in the military service close to the end of my Belgrade stint. About eight months of the service I had spent in Sisak, an industrial town not far from Zagreb, and two months in Zagreb itself. And then I remembered that I had spent three months on a sabbatical in Hong Kong soon after I moved to London. Now, these corrections made me surprisingly happy. Indeed, I felt kind of jubilant. When it comes to lists of such vital importance, errors of omission are nothing if not pernicious.

THE EGALITARIAN PERIOD (January 17, 2008)

Jozo Brandic is six years my junior. Sitting at Tomica's, we are reminiscing about the egalitarian period of Yugoslav socialism, when we were both quite young. "I remember one trip to Belgrade," he says. One of his brothers got seriously ill, and he was sent to one of the best hospitals in the country, which was in the capital. "My father took me, too, so I could help look after my brother." They came to a large waiting room full of people. "When the doctor appeared, he didn't ask who's first." Jozo pauses and turns toward me: "Instead, he asked who's from where." When he was told where each family was coming from, he decided on the order of examinations. A family from Macedonia went in first. Jozo's family, coming from Bosnia, went second. And people from Belgrade had to wait longest. "The doctor knew we had many train connections to catch on our way home," Jozo concludes with a big grin. "Yup," I nod, "but it was all over by the early Sixties."

GOLF IN BELGRADE (March 19, 2008)

I dreamt that I was visiting a golf course in the center of Belgrade. It was completed about a year earlier, and it became hugely popular in a very short time. I was a member of an international team of golf-development advisers. Everyone from the team was stunned by what we found in Belgrade. The golf course was teeming with people, mostly kids. It looked like an anthill. Older players could hardly move through the crowd of boisterous kids wielding their clubs with aplomb. As the golf course was built in a large public park, many people were strolling about and watching others play. Apparently, the sport became one of the favorite pastimes in the city. Our team's hosts were delighted by everything they had to show us, and they proudly explained that the annual membership fee was no more than four dollars. The enormous number of members covered all the costs of the golf course. Now and then, one of the hosts would climb onto a small platform and speak into a microphone with enthusiasm bordering on ecstasy. Most people on our team were so bewildered by everything around us that they kept mum. In the end, I asked to be given the

microphone. After all, I grew up in Belgrade. The first thing I wanted to propose to our hosts was that the annual membership fee be raised at least hundredfold. Unfortunately, I woke up before I had a chance to speak and see the consternation on their faces.

KEY WORDS OR PHRASES (March 30, 2008)

Every website sports a list of key words or phrases. This is what search engines look for before delving deeper into the meat of the site. Although the search process is a bit of a mystery even to the most ardent denizens of the World Wide Web, these words or phrases are indispensable. My *Residua* site is no different. And here is my list as it stands on this very day:

Ranko Bon, Motovun, Montona, Cave Art, Abstract Art, Entoptic Forms, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevich, Bon Yoga, Bon Buddhism, The Economist, Zen, 1968, Marx, Hegel, Postcards, Venice, Altered States of Consciousness, Shamanism, Tantra, Adorno, MIT, Belgrade, Sufism, Mysticism.

At first blush, there are few surprises here for those who know me. As always, the key is in the connections between these many words and phrases. The only problem is that it takes almost two-million words to discover all the connections in my writings, and the number of words is growing by the day. But do not despair, dear reader. With a little bit of luck, you may solve the mystery even before I do.

Addendum (December 10, 2014)

From time to time, I think about this list of key words or phrases, which has not been changed for more than six years now. Some strike me as outdated. For instance, my letters to the editor of *The Economist* are history by now. Adorno is ever farther from my heart, as well. And altered states of consciousness have not been on my mind for several years in a row. Similarly, some new key words or phrases beckon every now and then. Climate change comes to mind at once. Zagreb would be a welcome addition to the list, as well. And so would be Proust. But I am not even close to deciding on any of these changes. Every time I try to nudge myself in that direction, I recoil at once in fear bordering on panic. Why rush? How to be sure of any changes? In short, chances are that the current list will keep going for many more years. This is an important decision that will take a while longer to come to fruition. Besides, now I have nearly three-million words to think about. Dear reader, are you still there?

GOOSEBUMPS (May 27, 2008)

A fellow called me from Belgrade. Judging by his voice, he was on the young side. Expecting another call, I picked up the phone, which I rarely do if I do not recognize the number. He told me his name and said that there would be a meeting on June 4 to celebrate the student uprising in Belgrade forty years ago. He mentioned the names of several organizers of the gathering, all of whom I knew well. “I got goosebumps all over my body,” I told him at once. “All I wanted was to let you know about the whole thing,” he laughed, “but I will soon send you the invitation by electronic mail.” Travel and lodging expenses will be covered for some fifty invitees, he mentioned. I promised to come if at all possible. “As you can imagine,” I added, “1968 means a great deal to me...” My voice trailed off at this point. Although I hate to travel, next week I may indeed hug my old mates. After all these years, I may not recognize any of them, but the old spirit will be there, I am quite sure. And there will be goosebumps all around.

Addendum I (May 28, 2008)

In the end I decided not to go to Belgrade next week. Too many schedule conflicts to resolve in too little time. But I sent this piece to the fellow who called me, together with my request to share it with the organizers of the gathering. I also promised to come to Belgrade on June 4, 2018. The fiftieth anniversary of the Belgrade uprising I cannot possibly miss. In fact, it is already in my calendar, so as to avoid possible schedule conflicts in ten years’ time.

Addendum II (June 4, 2008)

It is no great surprise that Belgrade comes to me quite often ever since I woke up this morning. Not today’s Belgrade, where I could have been as I write these words, but that of 1968. One memory that pops up every now and then is of a large slogan I wrote in red paint on white cloth together with Milan Brkic, my closest friend at the time and a fellow student of architecture: “Don’t trust the press!” We hung it on the balcony of the university headquarters, which we took over for the ten days of the uprising. This was the first slogan hung anywhere on the building, too. It must have been the second day of the uprising, and the first day of newspaper lies about it. After forty years, I still do not trust the press or any other media, albeit for a different reason than before. Back then, the press had to toe the line drawn by those in power; today, it has to toe the line drawn by the *hoi polloi*. The latter is perhaps even worse.

ISTRIA MINUS VENICE (November 22, 2009)

Nebojsa Popov and I go a long way back. About ten years my senior, he was prominent in the student uprising in Belgrade in 1968. Soon afterwards he lost his job at the University of Belgrade together with a bunch of other professors who got too close to the students. We were quite close in the 1970s, when we both attended meetings of hopeful rebels close to Zagreb. Anyhow, a couple of years ago we met in Motovun quite by chance. He told me that he was still editing a newspaper in Belgrade, as well as that it would be great if I would contribute something about the student uprising in time for its fortieth anniversary last year.

This is what I did, and *Republika* published a collection of my pieces about a year ago. I now receive the newspaper regularly. Each issue is embellished with interesting pictures. It was paintings by James Whistler in September and those by Diego Velázquez in October. The November issue is embellished by color photographs by a certain Vera Vujosevic. “Istria,” I mumbled to myself as soon as I opened the newspaper. Most of the fourteen photographs in this issue are of buildings with bright façades from coastal towns like Rovinj, Porec, and Labin. I can imagine that such pictures strike many a reader in Belgrade as rather exotic after the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia.

As I was going through the November issue this morning, dipping into several articles on my way, I focused on the color photographs once again. “Venice,” I mumbled to myself all of a sudden. Indeed, every single building pictured in *Republika* looks as though it comes straight from the Serene Republic itself. This is hardly surprising, for much of coastal Istria had been in Venetian hands for centuries, but I was still taken aback by my discovery. It was a real discovery, too. To wit, Istria minus Venice would be like... Well, it would be like a cultural desert, as a matter of fact.

MANY A SMASHING PARTY (September 21, 2010)

I have thrown many a smashing party over the years. It all started in Belgrade, where I acquired the habit. As well as the matchless touch. It continued in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ljubljana. Cambridge, again. London. Reading, Berkshire. By and by, I brought the parties to Motovun, too. But this is where the joy of throwing them ended a couple of years ago. Just as they turned really smashing, once again. And now I find myself at crossroads. Shall I continue with the old tradition, come what may, or shall I abandon it once and for all? Does Motovun deserve to be remembered as the town of party poopers, or shall I help it rise above its pathetic record in spite of everything? Fighting tears, I truly wonder. At the moment, the last smashing party seems best remembered for its peerless glory. Period. Habits be damned, no matter their enviable vintage.

MANY, MANY YEARS AGO (October 29, 2010)

On their way to Slovenia and Hungary, Jasna and Rade Kronja will pass through Zagreb this afternoon. I am not sure about their plans, but they may even stay overnight. We are old friends, and I am happy to see them. Many years ago, we studied architecture together. Preparing for their visit in my mind, I revisited Belgrade of our youth. I walked to our university building, which housed civil and electrical engineering, as well. I strolled through its wide and tall corridors. The faces of many of our common friends and colleagues came to me as I went along. That was many, many years ago, I realized. In fact, we all met in 1964, when we started our studies. We graduated some forty years ago, too! And then it flashed through my mind that I might have hard time recognizing Jasna and Rade later today. I panicked for a moment. But I calmed down as soon as I remembered that I last saw them the last time I was in Belgrade. That was five years ago, if my memory is not playing tricks on me. Phew!

ARCHITECTURAL PRINCIPLES (April 15, 2011)

In the late Sixties, during my undergraduate studies in Belgrade, I used to be subscribed to *Architectural Design*, one of the leading architectural journals at the time. It was quite radical, too. At some point I sent a letter to the editor in which I proposed a small set of principles of architectural and urban design. I think there were only five of them. Among other things, I proposed that most buildings were so poorly designed that they should be shielded from view by vegetation. Therefore, the tallest building should not be taller than the tallest trees that could shield it from view at a particular location. The letter got published, but I cannot find it among my old papers any longer. At any rate, it came to my mind as my bus was trundling through Zagreb yesterday afternoon. No matter how radical I was as a student, I was far from radical enough. Rather than most, all buildings should be shielded from view by vegetation, that is. The exceptions are so few and far between that they can be safely skipped when architectural principles are concerned. Of course, the Croatian capital is entirely free of such exceptions.

YU (June 20, 2011)

After a long pause in our correspondence, this morning I wrote to an old friend in Belgrade. When I tried to send the message *via* electronic mail, it bounced. “Domain not found,” the problem was tersely explained. And then I noticed that the electronic-mail address had “yu” as the domain name, which used to stand for “Yugoslavia.” The same two letters were used in many other contexts, including car stickers that were obligatory when crossing national borders. And it was used in Serbia long after Yugoslavia had fallen apart. Thus I

added a few more words to my message and sent it to my friend by snail mail. “Our country of birth does not exist any longer even in the virtual world,” I wrote wistfully. A quick search on the World Wide Web shows that the domain name can still be found in many country listings, but it is actually defunct. The very last death of Yugoslavia, I guess.

A RELATIVE OF SORTS (August 19, 2011)

Ljiljana Samokovlic is in town since a few days ago. She has come to a wedding of a relative from Belgrade, a young woman who now lives in New York. The wedding is scheduled for tomorrow. Ljiljana is staying with Katica Ferluga, an old friend, but we keep bumping into each other all over Motovun. Each and every time we meet, we end up by gabbing for a long while. And about everything under the sun. I am delighted to see her, and she apparently enjoys seeing me, as well. We talk like old friends, and I keep learning about Motovun as it used to be in the early Seventies, when both Ljiljana and Katica came to town with their husbands, both of whom are long dead. Anyhow, I was with Ljiljana when she met with the bride’s mother, who just arrived for the wedding. “Living in the same house makes you a relative of sorts,” she quipped when Ljiljana introduced me to her. “Exactly,” I agreed enthusiastically, “exactly!” Indeed, there is no better explanation for the close relationship that both of us are experiencing. And we became relatives almost exactly nine years ago, when she sold me her house.

AFRICANS (August 21, 2011)

As mean people would say in Belgrade of my youth, it is so hot that not even Albanians would want to fuck. By the same token, my beloved and I must be Africans.

A BLISSFUL CHILDHOOD (May 2, 2012)

Today is my father’s hundredth birthday. Back then, there was neither electricity nor running water on the island of Krk. He must have had a blissful childhood.

Addendum (May 3, 2012)

I cannot complain about my own childhood, either. Not in the least. In spite of occasional shortages, there was electricity and running water in Yugoslavia just after World War II, but there was little else of the modern world. Both in Zagreb, where I was born, and in Belgrade, where my parents moved when I was a toddler, there were plenty of children, though. Swarms of them everywhere one turned. And they

were free to frolic among the ample ruins to their hearts' content. Toys were few and far between, but the children knew how to make their own out of scraps of wood or metal. Comparing my childhood with that of my children, I have always felt sorry for them. They could not even imagine the bliss I had lived through. But not to worry. Electricity and running water are hardly forever.

OUT OF NOWHERE (June 13, 2012)

The New York Times has come up today with an article about Marina Abramovic's current show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and a documentary about her life that appeared during the show. Eager to see what was said about her start in Belgrade in the Sixties and Seventies, I read the entire article. "The child of anti-Fascist partisans who were national heroes in Tito's Yugoslavia," I read at some point, "she joined the European avant-garde of the Sixties and Seventies, and gained a measure of fame for the fearless, sometimes violent way she used her own body in her performances." And that was all on the subject. The fact that Belgrade was an important center of avant-garde art at the time is not even hinted at. Joseph Beuys, a frequent visitor of the capital of Yugoslavia in this period, is pushed out of the picture, as well. Abramovic appeared out of nowhere, as it were. I only wonder whether this is the fault of the person behind the documentary, or her own invention. She is an artist, after all.

THREE BOOKS (July 14, 2012)

I got a great compliment from Mauro Sirotic when we met close to my house earlier today. Several years ago, I gave him a copy of my *Istrian Postcards*.^[1] He told me that he keeps it together with the bible. Whenever he feels like a story, he opens one of the two books. Having read a story or two, he closes the book he happens to have selected, and puts it back in its place. "Either book does the trick for me," he chuckled. I was so pleased that I immediately went to my house and brought him a copy of my *Belgrade Postcards*.^[2] He was delighted. "As far as I am concerned," he said, "Belgrade is the best place in the world!" Whenever he feels like a story, now he will have three books to choose from.

Footnotes

1. Belgrade: Vracarski Breg, 2003.
2. Belgrade: Vracarski Breg, 2002.

DONALD DUCK AND I (October 4, 2012)

Over the years, my 1970 triptych has become a signature of mine. Next to each other, the three sepia photographs made at the end of my military service in Yugoslavia show me from the front, side, and back (“Front, Side, and Back,” June 18, 2002). The triptych is my best portrait ever. I used it while I was temporarily on Facebook, as well. Whenever people ask me about it, I explain that Donald Duck was my model. While I was growing up in Belgrade in the Fifties, I like to point out, everyone was familiar with the triptych that hung on a prominent wall of Walt Disney’s cartoon character’s home. It would pop up every now and then in stories about Donald Duck and his extended family, in which Daisy Duck and the three ducklings appeared most often. And it was funny each time it popped up. But few people nowadays remember the triptych on the wall. For most of them, it goes too far back. Thus I just tried to find it on the World Wide Web. To my surprise, there is no trace of it even when I search through the oldest images available, which go to the Forties. Could it be that the Donald Duck connection is nothing but my own invention? I rather doubt it, but the confusion still bothers me no end. When it comes to authorship, Disney’s artistic precedence is quite precious to me. While I was growing up, he was the greatest artist around without any doubt.

Addendum (November 29, 2015)

Every now and then, I search the World Wide Web for Donald Duck’s fabulous triptych, but to no avail. Perplexed, I just spent at least half an hour doing the same, and I came up with precious nothing one more time. This time around, I even looked for cartoons from the Thirties, Forties, and Fifties. For some strange reason, the three adjoining frames showing the Disney character from the front, side, and back have apparently not impressed too many people at the time. Otherwise, the three frames would be rather easy to find on the web. For me, this is quintessential Disney, though. And it captures Donald Duck’s character admirably. Otherwise, I would never come up with the idea of having my own triptych made close to the end of my military service forty-five years ago. To wit, I thought it also captured my own character quite splendidly. Be that as it may, I will keep searching for Disney’s triptych that is etched into my mind. With some luck, I will stumble upon it one fine day. The joy!

VLADETA PETRIC – SEPO (October 11, 2012)

Before we went to sleep last night, my beloved remembered my bronze bust, which was made when I was five and a half years old. She said that she could see the sculpture clearly by looking at me and that she could see me clearly by looking at the sculpture. The mouth, the nose, and the eyes were the same in spite of the six decades that separate us.

Made by Vladeta Petric in 1951, it has been close to me for years. It used to be in my room in Belgrade. When my parents moved to Reading in 1993, it came along with their furniture. And it came to Motovun when I moved there in 2003. Petric, known to all as Sepo, was a close friend of my parents. He used to be a frequent guest of our home when I was a boy. When I got an international award for my painting, he decided to make a bust of his “colleague.” I do not remember sitting for him, though, which probably means that it was complete rather quickly. If my recollection is to be trusted, he had a bit of a drinking problem. He was considered a very talented sculptor, but alcohol got in the way. He died well before my parents, who must have been at least ten years his seniors. Returning to the bronze bust, it has always been dear to me. It is a bridge that goes straight to my childhood in Belgrade.

Addendum (October 22, 2012)

It did not take me long upon my return to Motovun to find a hefty catalogue of Petric’s work in my library. In fact, I have two copies of it. It was published in Belgrade in 1974, four years after his death. Born in 1919, he was only fifty-five when he passed away. A photograph of my bust is there, as well. To my surprise, my name is spelled out in full, as well: Ranko Bon. And so is the year the sculpture was made: 1951. Perhaps the only disappointment in the catalogue is that Petric’s nickname is nowhere to be found. In Croatian, it stands for someone who limps. But he will forever stay in my mind as the limping one. My sculptor.

RAVI SHANKAR AND I (December 12, 2012)

I went to two concerts by Ravi Shankar. The first was in Belgrade in the late Fifties or early Sixties, and the second in London in mid-Nineties. Over the years, I have had his music on vinyl records, tapes, and compact disks. Right now, there must be at least two compact disks with his music in Motovun. The news of his death thus shook me a bit. Although I was happy that he lived to be ninety-two, I kind of believed he would live forever. Since childhood, he was too much a part of me to ever die, that is. And this is how I would like things to stay, too. Not to worry, though. Ravi Shankar and I are sure to stay together till my last breath. It cannot be otherwise. Even if I heard his music never again, it would forever remain a part of me. There. Screw you, death!

COMBRAY, BELGRADE (January 15, 2013)

Having read Marcel Proust’s masterpiece years ago first in English and then in Italian, I find some of his reminiscences of his childhood quite familiar as I am reading it again in French. Now and then, they strike

me as no less than my own. And so I find myself ferretting through my own writings about my childhood in search of salient parallels. In particular, his longing for his mother at Combray is very like my longing for my parents in Belgrade (“The Front Door,” April 4, 1998). Although three generations apart, we were about the same age at the time, I guess. But the confusion of Proust’s childhood with my own is most likely due to my intimate if faded knowledge of his book. Lodged deep in my mind but somewhat fragmented, bits and pieces of his writing appear too precious to be someone else’s reminiscences. Combray and Belgrade get muddled up. Nay, equated. Geography is for the grownups, anyhow.

DANUBE (February 5, 2013)

Out of the blue, the view of Danube from my parents’ apartment in Jovanova Street in Belgrade flashes in front of my eyes. As I have written years ago, an apartment building much taller than ours barred the view at some point during my youth (“Details, Details,” April 18, 1999). Seven or eight stories high, it was built in a street parallel to ours but in the same block. Only courtyards separated us. As we moved to Kosovska Street in the mid-Sixties, it must have been built in the late Fifties, when I was in my early teens. And it must have been quite a blow for my parents and me not to see the mighty river ever again. I do not remember any anger about it, though. We must have taken it as progress. Back then, a wonderful view was just that, a view. Nothing to boast or bitch about in a world dashing forward with abandon. Returning to the view of Danube, now I remember the lattice of an iron bridge that linked Belgrade and Pancevo on the northern shore. I also remember the silhouettes of tugboats and barges sliding along. As I write, they are right in front of my eyes. So many years later, the “new” apartment building does not bar the view any longer. In fact, it vanishes at will.

WITH EMPTY (February 24, 2013)

While I was growing up in Belgrade in the Fifties and Sixties, the favorite snack of my peers was a pastry known as *burek*. It comes from *börek* in Turkish, and it is baked in an oven. Albanians from Kosovo usually owned the shops selling the snack, and their Serbo-Croatian was typically on the rudimentary side. Made of thin dough, *burek* used to come with different fillings: meat, cheese, and even apples or bing-cherries. In the latter case, it was a fruit pie of sorts, and it was sweet. It was savory otherwise. But the cheapest kind of *burek* was empty. It contained nothing but thin dough. When ordering the snack in one of the Albanian shops, one would specify the filling. In the case there was no none, it was called “with empty.” It matched all the other kinds, such as “with meat” or “with cheese.” So many years later, long after Serbo-Croatian has disappeared from the map, I

still like to mention this kind of *burek*. It was the rage among my penniless peers.

THE ZHUGICH REFORM (March 12, 2013)

Jasmina Zugic, an old friend from London who hails from Belgrade, has recently sent me an electronic-mail message in Serbo-Croatian, a language that has long become ancient. A mathematician by training, she uses “ch,” “sh,” and “zh” for letters not available in the Latin alphabet but common in all Slavic languages. For instance, her last name would be Zhugich in her own script. Add a few more tricks of this kind, and both Serbian and Croatian languages would be rid of all sorts of weird characters once and for all. The distinction between soft and hard “ch” so dear in these parts is but a matter of pronunciation, and everyone would know that my friend’s name ends with a soft rather than hard “ch.” The trouble is that two linguists, Vuk Karadzic from Serbia and Ljudevit Gaj from Croatia, introduced the weird characters in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, when few people in their lands could either read or write. The new characters were supposed to be essential for proper pronunciation of the two languages. Of course, similar inventions were introduced across Slavic lands around the same time, and for the very same reasons. As I already said, my friend’s solution was there from the beginning. It was eschewed a century and a half ago on purely nationalistic grounds. A new and widespread reform of all these languages is thus awaiting. The Zhugich reform, to give it a proper name. And the Latin alphabet has been available since Roman times. All that is now needed is a little intelligence and much courage, for the Slavs are pretty protective of their silly inventions, no matter how recent.

FUCK ARCHIVES (April 5, 2013)

A student of art history from Belgrade contacted me recently in connection with my father’s opus. Her undergraduate thesis in the history of architecture was about Palace Albania in the center of what used to be the capital of Yugoslavia. Now she is working on her master’s thesis, which is dedicated to my father’s work in general. She wanted to know whether I was in possession of his archive. It took me a while to explain that some of my father’s papers remained in Belgrade in 1993, when my parents moved to Britain during the war, but that my father had never had an archive worthy of that name. He expected someone else to piece it together, and I have failed him in this regard. As his only child, I could have been a bit more attentive of his opus. It took me a while to remember that I do not have my own archive, either. In fact, I left all of my many professional books and papers in Reading before moving to Motovun. Besides, I do not have copies of my undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral theses. Like

father, like son. Fuck archives. Let others piece them together, if they can.

QUADRUVIUM, AGAIN (May 12, 2013)

Today I chanced upon Dasa Drndic, a Croatian writer of renown, in the center of Zagreb. We know each other since our childhood in Belgrade. Our parents used to be friends, too. Now she lives in Rijeka, one of the three cities that mark the tips of the Istrian triangle. I knew that her father, Ljubo, was originally from Karojba near Motovun, but today she mentioned that he was buried there, as well. “Do you know where the name of the place comes from?” I asked her out of the blue. She did not, but she was interested. “*Quadrivium*,” I beamed at her, “which stands for crossroads in Latin!” She was delighted, but her father’s birthplace did not seem to be very close to her heart. Otherwise, she would have come across my piece on the subject already, which has been long available on the World Wide Web (“*Quadrivium*,” November 16, 2005).

A MISSED CALL (June 9, 2013)

Milan Brkic, known to all as Brka, my old friend from the University of Belgrade, died in Novi Sad today. We were inseparable during our studies of architecture. He was one of the brightest and funniest people I had ever met. A few hours ago, I missed a call from Branko Cepic, our common friend, who now lives close to Maribor in Slovenia, and I told my beloved what the call was about before we managed to connect. I just knew it. Brka and I communicated rarely as of late, but I was always aware of him. Time and space made no difference to our friendship. A missed call was thus enough for me. It will take me a couple of years to fully appreciate Brka’s departure, though. Assuming I ever will.

SURLA (October 19, 2013)

Across the Balkan peninsula, *surla* is the word for elephant’s trunk. All of a sudden, the word electrifies me. Where is it from? It sounds Turkish to me! It could be of Arabic or Persian origin, and it could hail from as far away as Mongolia, but it was most likely brought to the region by the Turks. Without much ado, I start ferreting through the World Wide Web. The first thing that comes to my mind is the instrument I remember from my childhood in Belgrade, *zurla*. Back then, it was commonly played together with *tapan*, a large drum. Similar to oboe, the high-pitched wind instrument made of wood is nowadays known as *zurna* in Turkish. It does not take me long to discover that one of many versions of the instrument’s name is *surla*. Bingo! The Balkans knew of no elephants, it goes without saying, and

it is thus not surprising that names for elephant limbs come from the east, most likely from India. But it is still amazing to me that the word for elephant's trunk has passed my notice to this day. Chances are that the word has never attracted anyone else's attention, either. At least not in the Balkans, the dumping ground of untold civilizations.

FORTY FIFTH PARALLEL NORTH (December 17, 2013)

I have lived all over the world, or so it seems to me, but I have rarely moved far from the Forty Fifth Parallel North. This I realized only today. Zagreb is on the Forty Fifth and Belgrade is on the Forty Fourth. Cambridge, Massachusetts, is on the Forty Second, and that is as far south as I have ever lived. Ljubljana is on the Forty Sixth. Only Reading, Berkshire, and London are on the Fifty First, and that is as far north as I have ever lived. Now, Motovun is squarely on the Forty Fifth Parallel North, and so is Istria, where both my parents' families hail from for about half a millennium at least. Well, and so is Venice, where my father's family actually hails from. The Forty Fifth Parallel North is my parallel, as it were. The only thing that is puzzling about today's discovery is its timing. How in the world have I managed to miss it until my sixty-seventh year? And I have been shifting east and west along the same parallel all along.

QUIEN NO SE AVENTURA NO PASA LA MAR (January 12, 2014)

Thus a sign in exquisite lettering on an old woodcarving my parents used to have on a wall of their apartment in Belgrade when I was growing up. I still remember exactly where it stood. It showed a few galleys braving the waves. The woodcarving celebrating Spain's colonial past disappeared at some point, though. My father had a habit of giving things to friends who admired them, and this is what must have happened with it. But the Spanish proverb is still with me so many years later. It may well be that I crossed the Atlantic thrice on account of its wisdom. Although I am not eager to cross any oceans any longer, I still dream of a slightly different version of the proverb: it would end with "*el universo*" instead of "*la mar.*" And the woodcarving would show a few spacecraft braving the galaxies. The spirit is still with me, no doubt. Only the oceans have shrunk into insignificance, I guess.

BONI, AGAIN (July 15, 2014)

Nearly a decade ago, I found the plural of my family name in a grocery store in Belgrade ("Boni," May 27, 2005). Most likely the phonetic spelling of Bonnie or Bonny, it was on toilet paper produced in the Serbian capital. Today I found the very same toilet paper in the grocery store on Gradiziol. As the packaging shows, it is still

produced in Belgrade. I bought a package at once, it goes without saying. And I showed it to everyone from the hilltown I met on my way home. “This toilet paper is only for my own family,” I explained. “Every family now has its own toilet paper!” There was much laughter. Of course, this sounds much better than the alternative interpretation, according to which everyone will be wiping his or her bum with my family name. Perish the thought.

NENAD NOVAKOV (July 19, 2014)

I met Aleksa Dmitrovic last summer, when he came to Motovun with Velja Ilic, who has a house in the hilltown together with his wife, Bojana. They live in Belgrade. Aleksa and I share a number of interests, and so we hit it off at once. A generation younger than me, he knows quite a few of my old friends and acquaintances from the capital of former Yugoslavia mainly through his father. Aleksa arrived with Velja yesterday evening, and we had a good chat on the hotel terrace this afternoon. One more time, I struggled with many names that were very close to me once upon a time. After so many years, my memory is failing me all too often.

As design in the broadest sense of the word is one of Aleksa’s interests, I asked him at some point whether he knew of Nenad Novakov. “Hey,” he raised his eyebrows and chuckled, “he was my teacher!” I was delighted, and I proceeded to tell him about an urban planning competition that Nenad had organized many years ago. Many of my friends took part in it. To prod my memory, I opened the laptop that I had with me, and searched for Nenad’s name. The project I was talking about popped up at once (“On Socialist Spatial Order: A Normative Application of Entropy Maximization,” June 18, 1979). I was amazed that this was the only piece in which his name had appeared, though. For crying out loud, Nenad was one of my closest friends in Belgrade!

A designer of note, he was instrumental in my own early successes in the field. I took part in several design competitions, and I came on top a few times. That was in the late Sixties, when design was taking off in former Yugoslavia. I met Nenad through his first cousin, Milan Brkic or Brka, who was my closest friend for years. We were studying architecture at the time, and we were inseparable. Alas, both Nenad and Brka are dead by now! Nenad went first, too. The best I could do when I returned home was to write about the surprising hole in my *magnum opus*. The name of the piece suggested itself without any thought. My deepest apologies, old friend.

GO BELGRADE, GO! (August 29, 2014)

Another selection from my *Residua* is about to be published. And in Belgrade, of all places. Two such selections have already been published in the capital of former Yugoslavia more than a decade ago. The first was about my growing up in Belgrade, as is only appropriate, but the second was about my “return” to Istria, where my parents hailed from. Both were in English. At first blush, this was like publishing a book about some Serbian boondocks in the Croatian capital, of all places. And in French, of all languages. Bordering on the impossible, that is. In fact, no Croatian publisher would ever think about publishing a book in a foreign language no matter the subject. But Belgrade is a special place to this day in spite of the many changes since the breakdown of Yugoslavia. It remains the largest city in the Western Balkans. One way or another, it remains its intellectual capital, as well. Whence my latest book about climate change, a planetary subject *par excellence*. And the fact that it will soon appear in Belgrade makes me quite happy. Nay, exuberant. In the years to come, I expect many a surprise of this ilk from the city of my youth. For my sins, I already have a couple of books in mind. Go Belgrade, go!

BELGRADE BOOK FAIR (October 3, 2014)

This year’s book fair in Belgrade will take place between October 26 and November 2. It will be the fifty-ninth in a row. One of the oldest and most important literary events in the region, it kicked off in 1957. I was eleven at the time. Last year it attracted close to one-hundred and sixty-thousand visitors. I remember going to the fair while I was living in Belgrade, but I do not remember exactly when or how often I visited it. The only reason why I am going on and on about it is that I will take part in the event this year. Actually, I will present my book about climate change at the fair (“Go Belgrade, Go!” August 29, 2014). Published in English by HESPERIAedu, a Belgrade publisher of some renown, it is supposed to go into print early next week. I am not yet sure what will be asked of me at the fair, but I expect one or two public appearances at which I will have a chance to present my last book. Nearly a month ahead of time, I already feel a bit awkward. My book offers little if any hope in the short or medium run, and its title is only a spoof on good old Lenin (“What is to Be Done?” July 25, 2014). Nothing can be done, that is. All is well in the long run, though. We are all dead, of course, but the children of our children’s children return to tribal life of our ancestors, for which they have all the right genes. Alleluia!

To John Maynard Keynes

THE NEXT LAST TIME (October 5, 2014)

By the end of this month, I will be visiting Belgrade once again. Weeks ahead of my visit, it feels kind of strange already. The last time I was there, which was a bit more than nine years ago, I thought that it would be my last visit. But I had a feeling even back then that it was not the first time that I had thought that my visit would be the last. Or the last next one, to be a bit more precise. Now I am quite sure that this is at least the second time that I have thought that my next visit to Belgrade will be my very last. It may be the third time, though. Or maybe even the fourth, for my memory is playing tricks on me this time around. Too many visits to Belgrade, I guess. The only thing I am certain about right now is that this will be the next last time. One more time, I cannot but wonder whether I will return to Belgrade ever again. And all these thoughts are crowding my mind well before my next visit.

DREAMING OF 1968 (October 6, 2014)

I dreamt that I was in a large hall teeming with young people. In their late teens and early twenties, they formed many small groups. And they were all engaged in lively conversation. Their animation and openness struck me as beautiful. I had a small camera with me, and I photographed many a small group from afar. I was going for their faces. Their open eyes and lively mouths delighted me. There was no mischief in them. Everyone spoke from the heart. And then my beloved appeared out of nowhere, snatched my camera from me, and disappeared in the crowd. I screamed at the top of my voice. I was both frightened and angered by her unexpected intervention. The scream woke me up in the middle of the night, but I managed to fall back asleep soon afterwards. I found myself in the same crowded place, but there was not a trace of animated conversation any longer. I remember seeing my beloved watching me from some distance. Clutching the camera that she gave me many years back, she watched me intently. Haltered and scorn beamed from her eyes. When I woke up again, it was still dark outside, but I got up and went to my study to record the dream. I was afraid it would peter away by the morning. I had no idea what to make of it, but putting it into words seemed essential to me. It took me a while to go back to sleep one more time. Only when I got up in the morning it dawned on me that I was dreaming of 1968. I have not seen such open eyes since my youth.

THE MESSAGE (October 13, 2014)

As I just learned from Belgrade, my book on climate change is going to the printers today ("Belgrade Book Fair," October 3, 2013). Three-hundred copies will be printed at this stage. Even though this is mere peanuts, I am still delighted. With some luck, the book's message will

spread. Although it is unlikely that humans will get the message any time soon, it will spread unimpeded from now on. But I already cringe in awe at the day when humans really get it. The message. The quiet panic will be heard all around the globe. The silence will be deafening. What follows will define the human species for centuries to come. Some will go nuts, but it can still be hoped that most will hunker down and pay due attention to survival. Mere survival.

THE WESTERN BALKANS (October 16, 2014)

I just walked to the central bus station in Zagreb and bought a return ticket to Belgrade. *Alea iacta est*. I trust that my book on climate change will indeed see the light of day any day soon. Fingers crossed. But the walk was quite an emotional ordeal for me. Every step brought me closer to the city in which I grew up. The bus station itself was the right place to jog my memories, too. The people. The smells. The architecture. The Balkans. Sorry, the Western Balkans. Although I will be away for three days only at the end of this month, the origin and destination of my trip has already merged in my mind. Indeed, the only part of the Croatian capital that does not feel like the Western Balkans is its very center. Both the upper and lower towns are Austro-Hungarian to boot. Well, the upper city is outright German. But the rest of the city is much closer to Belgrade than many of its inhabitants would care to admit. One way or another, I am already on my trip. Nearly a fortnight in advance, I am trundling along. Belgrade, here I come!

MY FATHER AND PUTIN (October 17, 2014)

Yesterday I got a number of electronic-mail and mobile-phone messages from friends in Belgrade to the effect that my father's name was often mentioned in the media in the context of Vladimir Putin's visit to the Serbian capital. Namely, he brought a wreath to the Liberators of Belgrade Memorial Cemetery, which was designed by my father. Whence the connection. Many Russians died in the battle for Belgrade in 1945, and most of them were buried at the cemetery in question. At any rate, the connection makes me a bit uneasy. I am quite happy that my father's architectural prowess is recognized to this day, but the hoopla surrounding Putin's visit is not exactly to my taste, to put it mildly. Relentless forging of ever-deeper ties with Mother Russia cannot but worry many of Serbia's neighbors. My father's name mentioned in this context would only annoy many people in Croatia, where he comes from. Willy-nilly, I thus find myself ensconced in events that are rather repulsive to me. My poor father would feel exactly the same, I am quite sure. Which gives me a dash of comfort, too.

DYING AND DYING... (October 23, 2014)

I just read in one of the leading Croatian newspapers that Marija Crnobori had died in Belgrade at the ripe age of ninety-seven. An actress of great renown in former Yugoslavia, she was a good friend of my parents. Like them, she came from Istria. I still remember her quite distinctly. As a youngster, I found her beautiful. The last time I saw her was in front of my parents' apartment building on Kosovska Street in Belgrade. If I remember correctly, I was returning home with my mother, they bumped into each other by chance, and they started talking at once. I must have been in my twenties, but I still found her beautiful. She was in her fifties at the time. There was something mesmerizing about her, to be sure. Years later, I met her sister Vera, who owned a house in Motovun. She died five years ago, as well. All these connections came through Josip Crnobori, a Croatian painter of renown who was my parents' close friend in Zagreb. I do not remember how Marija and Josip were related, but they were close relatives. Anyhow, another friend of my parents is gone. Every time I come across news of this sort, I feel their death once again. And so they keep dying and dying...

HEADING FOR BELGRADE (October 28, 2014)

I am leaving Zagreb one more time, but the bus driver seems to have lost his way. All is well, though. Instead for Motovun, this time I am heading for Belgrade.

SEVENTY YEARS AGO (October 28, 2014)

Looking at Kozara from the bus, I shed a few tears. My parents looked at the mountain while in a concentration camp during World War II. Only seventy years ago.

AIR-CONDITIONING LEPROSY (October 28, 2014)

The first surprise in Belgrade this time around is the number of air-conditioning units on every façade, including my father's masterpiece, Palace Albania. The ugly boxes are everywhere. Literally so. There are hundreds and even thousands of them on some façades in the center. In fact, they have become one of the main architectural features of the city. The surprising bit is that this, as it were, epidemic is entirely new. On my last visit nine years ago, I do not remember anything of the sort. Air-conditioning leprosy, in short. On the bright side, Belgrade has become so much richer in the meanwhile. Few people could afford the ugly boxes until recently, I reckon.

Addendum (January 4, 2015)

Over lunch with Jasna and Rade Kronja earlier today, Belgrade came up in conversation. They asked me about my impressions on my visit a couple of months ago. And they were quite surprised to hear about the air-conditioning leprosy. Although both of them are architects, they have missed it entirely. It did not take us long to understand the reason, of course. They still live in the city of our youth. Rade works in Kazakhstan, of all places, but he regularly comes to see his wife and their offspring. It takes a longer absence, like mine, to notice the encroaching horror. But I was surprised when they asked me whether I had noticed anything similar in Zagreb. Of course, I have not. And my regular visits to the Croatian capital ever since my move to Motovun explain my blindness, if that is what it is. The air-conditioning leprosy may well be typical of all the countries in the Western Balkans. And all it takes to notice it is a bit longer absence.

FAR FROM MAJESTIC (October 29, 2014)

When I learned about my trip to Belgrade in connection with the promotion of my new book, I decided to stay at Majestic, a hotel I have long been acquainted with. My father often had coffee in its café together with his friends. His barber was in the hotel as well. When I grew old enough, he introduced me to the barber, and I used to come to the hotel for my haircuts. Built between two world wars, it is a jewel of modernist architecture, too. But the room I got this time around could not be worse. On the lowest floor, it faces the courtyard rather than the street. Its only and small window gives on a few exhaust pipes coming from the kitchen. After so many years, my family name means nothing to the hotel crew. So many years after the breakup of Yugoslavia, my father is history. Which is why I have ended up in a room that is far from majestic.

A JOKE ON LENIN (October 29, 2014)

When I went to the hotel lobby for my breakfast, I was surprised by a large portrait of Lenin hanging on a prominent wall. It is facing the street through a large window. He is no less than Majestic's mascot nowadays. I realized soon afterwards that many of the guests at breakfast tables were Russian. Every now and then, Russian language can be heard. But the guests look it, too. And my new book's title is a joke on Lenin, of all people. There is nothing to be done about climate change, that is. It is to be survived, and that is all there is to it. Looking at his portrait, I can well imagine how angry he would be with my joke. Neither would his fellow Russians be amused about it. Luckily for me, my fellow guests at my favorite Belgrade hotel will never learn about my book. Besides, it is in English.

JOVANOVA, KOSOVSKA (October 29, 2014)

There was a hole in my program around noon today, and so I went out for a walk. Although windy and chilly, it was quite sunny. I had no plans for my walk, but I immediately noticed that I was heading toward the first place where I lived with my parents. It did not take me long to reach Jovanova Street, and I walked toward our old apartment building. I recognized only one family name on the bells by the front door: Jovicic. Dragan, my best childhood friend, is no more, but some of his close relatives are apparently still in the building. I almost rang the bell, but I stopped myself just in time. Let bygones be bygones. It would take me quite a while to explain who I was, I reckoned. And then I resumed my walk through my old neighborhood. Everything struck me so much smaller and shorter and narrower than I remembered it. Interestingly, I felt no pull of the second apartment building in which I lived with my parents. Chances are that I will not walk through Kosovska Street even once on this visit to Belgrade. In my mind, Jovanova beats Kosovska Street by a wide margin. I was about eighteen when we moved. Nearly a grownup, that is. But my childhood still exerts an enormous pull at this stage of my life. Or is it already, instead?

MY DISCOMFITURE (October 30, 2014)

My talk at the Belgrade Book Fair went well. I did not beat around the bush in presenting my book's gory message. I sat between Aleksandar Dmitrovic, who introduced me to HESPERIAedu, the book's publisher, and who designed the book, and Zorica Stablovic Bulajic, the publisher. Nena Jovanovic, the wife of my first Belgrade publisher, Misa Jovanovic, was in the audience. Before the talk, she told me that he had died on that exact date seven years ago. When I lauded Zorica for taking up my book, I mentioned Misa, as well. When I came upon his death, I choked up. First I stopped speaking, and then I mumbled a few words under my breath. But my discomfiture worked well with the audience. Although my book was about awful things, I was a man with a heart and soul. My talk thus ended with a warm applause. I met Zorica only yesterday, but we were hugging by the end of the evening. My second Belgrade publisher is a wonderful person. And that is all that counts with me at this stage.

SHAMANISM FOREVER (October 30, 2014)

My talks with Zorica Stablovic Bulajic, my publisher, are going very well. My first book with her will soon be available as an electronic book, which will be essential for reaching markets abroad. Even more important, my second book with her is under discussion. Although I have completed my *Cave Art Now* in 2003, the sundry afterthoughts written ever since have been piling up. The book would be a perfect

follow-up to *What is to Be Done?* It would show that the prospects of our species are quite enticing in the long run. Anyhow, there is no reason to push the decision at this stage, Zorica is inclined toward the second book about the links between cave art and the likes of Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Malevich. She even brought the book up at yesterday's presentation at the Belgrade Book Fair. She beat me to it, as a matter of fact. With some luck, the second book will be presented at the next fair. Shamanism forever, as it were.

THE PINK REVOLUTION (October 30, 2014)

I had lunch with Vojin Tomic, a good old friend from highschool. We have been close ever since. He is retired from the University of Belgrade, but he is still very active as an emeritus professor. Among other things he told me, he is worried about that Belgrade is rapidly becoming a Caribbean capital of sorts. "Entertainment," he raised his eyebrows, "everything's entertainment nowadays!" As an example of this trend, he mentioned Pink Television, of which I have already heard. I have never seen any of it, but I remember hearing about news combined with striptease. As we were saying goodbye after lunch, he asked me about my impressions of the city. I started by telling him about the myriad air-conditioning boxes that I noticed upon arrival, but then I switched to something much more serious. "Imagine," I raised my eyebrows this time around, "the bookstores I remember since childhood have disappeared!" I still remember a few on my last visit nearly a decade ago, but nearly all of them have been replaced by outfits selling fashionable clothes and shoes. "That's just another example of the pink revolution I've been talking about," Vojin nodded in agreement. "Most of the youngsters couldn't care less about books!" The felicitous phrase will stay with me for quite some time, no doubt.

THE OLD CARROT (October 31, 2014)

It was great visiting Belgrade for a few days, but it is even greater to be on my way back to Zagreb. The trip almost over, I feel kind of relieved. At the earliest, I will undertake such a trip in about a year. Assuming that my publisher will go for another book of mine, it will be presented at the next Belgrade Book Fair. That is our present understanding, at any rate. My discomfort with travel notwithstanding, the intervening year is long enough not to make me cringe at the prospect. And the very possibility of seeing the second book under the same imprint is the welcome enticement in the intervening period. The old carrot, as it were. The stick of travel would otherwise be a bit too much for me, I guess. And thus I find myself manipulating my own self across both space and time once again. How about the third book, though? Or the fourth? At the rate of a book per trip, I cannot but

smile at my cunning as the bus trundles happily along. Devilishly cunning, indeed.

DOWN MEMORY LANE (December 18, 2014)

The end of the year is nigh, and thus I am venturing down memory lane ever more often. As I am browsing through my writings, which I do around this time of the year with special zeal, I am occasionally disoriented by references to times and places. Where was I when the original piece was written? And where was I when I wrote the *addendum* extending it? One way or another, so many places pop up here and there, most often in a befuddling succession: Belgrade, Cambridge, Ljubljana, Reading, London, Motovun, and Zagreb. In my mind, Motovun and Zagreb are very much alive, as it were, but what about all the other places? Are they still alive, whatever this may mean?

As I write, Belgrade and Ljubljana are quite close, geographically speaking at least. The former capital of Yugoslavia is alive and well in my mind, but every visit points at ever-larger holes in my memory. The city's periphery is a mystery by now. Obviously enough, Palace Albania marks the center. Ever since my childhood, my father's masterpiece is forever etched into my mind's eye. The confluence of the Danube and Sava is quite dear to me, too. It is similar with Ljubljana, where the old town on the hill near the center marks the whole city. The Ljubljanica River that runs through the old city pops up in my mind every now and then. Once again, the periphery has evaporated from my mind by now. Just like Belgrade, Ljubljana is reduced to its very center and a few memorable buildings.

Reading and London are within reach still. I left them both only relatively recently. I can see many a street and square with great precision, but I am rapidly losing their names. Even worse, I am mixing them up ever more often. To my annoyance, Tate Modern and the stretch of the Thames leading to it from the Houses of Parliament come to my mind often enough. The art world of the British capital around the turn of the millennium is best forgotten, I feel. I feel similarly about my academic stint in Reading, but the campus of the University of Reading is still a dear memory. The architecture was neither here nor there, but the profusion of tall trees hid everything else well enough. I am also fond of memories of the Kennet Canal that runs through the center of Reading, as well as the Thames into which it flows.

Cambridge is rapidly receding from my mind, though. I was there for the last time soon after my mother died, but it was the briefest of visits. Harvard Square is still with me to this day. The two universities of world renown and the busy avenue connecting them are also clear in my memory, but the rest is quite vague by now. The same holds for

Boston, where Beacon Hill is still uppermost in my mind. Right across the Charles River, Back Bay is not far behind in its pull across time. Interestingly, banks of the Charles are with me after so many years. But the rest has become quite vague. Painfully so, in fact.

One life, many distinct periods and places. In the end, one brain and many jumbled memories. Time matters to the brain, but distant events and places are of little concern to it. And so Belgrade, Cambridge, Ljubljana, Reading, London, Motovun, and Zagreb have become one single place. Right between the ears, they have become intertwined. Big Ben and Albania rise next to each other. The Charles flows merrily into Danube. And the Motovun hill towers over Ljubljana. By and by, time matters ever less, as well. The past, the present, and the future are only figments of our imagination. Keeping so many distinct periods and places apart is in vain, anyway. Sooner or later, they are bound to become one and the same.

PAST LIVES (January 3, 2015)

I was surprised this morning by a lengthy electronic-mail message from a woman with whom I studied architecture in Belgrade half a century ago. Having not been in touch for such a long time, she outlines the intervening years in Serbia and Montenegro, where she lives right now. Just like me, she is retired already. Her husband has passed away some years ago, but she is surrounded by her children and grandchildren. Knowing that I have spent much of my life abroad, she adds that she has never felt the pull to leave the land of her ancestors. She mentions many of our colleagues from the university, one of whom gave her my electronic-mail address a year or so ago. She is not sure why she is writing to me at this time, but she hopes that her message will find me in good spirits and excellent health.

To my astonishment, I do not remember her name. What is worse, I do not remember the name of a single colleague of ours she mentions in connection with our studies together. No matter how hard I squint at all these names, I am none the wiser. The only name that rings a bell, albeit rather faintly, is that of a professor who was her supervisor for her final project. I cannot remember how he looked or what he taught back then, but the name is still with me. All in all, I cannot shake a feeling that I am reading a message from one of my past lives. And there are many of them. Beside Belgrade, there are Cambridge, Massachusetts, Ljubljana, Reading, Berkshire, and London. A similar message from a colleague from any of these places would feel just the same. Outlandish, to say the least.

By way of response, I will have to send a few words to the woman sometime today or tomorrow. Not sure how to proceed, I will follow her own lead. I will say a few words about my wives and children, and I will briefly describe my return to Istria, the land of my ancestors. For

good measure, I will mention Jasna and Rade Kronja, who studied architecture in Belgrade together with us, and who will be in Zagreb the next few days. As luck would have it, they are arriving tomorrow. That will round off my response quite well, I reckon. Of course, I will say not a word about not remembering her or anyone else from her message. That would be uncouth, to say the least. And that will be that, I can only hope. Past lives are better left where they are. Poking one's fingers hither and thither cannot but lead to trouble.

BRANKO BON FOR BEGINNERS (February 22, 2015)

My father is one among the most famous architects from former Yugoslavia. Every few years, I get a letter, an electronic-mail message, or a phone call about him. Most of these come from Belgrade, but a few come from Zagreb, as well. Architects or historians of architecture are interested in documents and photographs in connection with one of his many buildings, which are now strewn over an enviable number of countries. And I am faced with the same story each and every time. Namely, I do not have anything they may be looking for. If they are surprised by my answer, I have to go on and on about history. For my father's life was not exactly an easy one, as one would imagine for an architect of renown.

He was born in 1912 on the island of Krk or Veglia in Italian. World War I started when he was a toddler. Although there was no fighting in the area, the end of the war brought great commotion. Italian proto-fascists took Rijeka or Fiume in 1918, and my father's parents decided to flee to Slovenia. They were afraid the invasion would hit Krk, as well. Although of Venetian origin, my grandfather was far from fond of the Italian rabble. Given that their island was spared, they returned after a year or so, but then my grandfather decided to move to Zagreb. As a land surveyor trained in Vienna and Prague, he went to work for the land-surveying office in the capital of Croatia.

My father learned a lot from my grandfather. Back then, land surveyors often designed simple buildings, such as warehouses and even schools. He had barely graduated and gotten married to my mother when he got the first prize at a Yugoslav competition for Palace Albania in Belgrade together with a colleague of his. This was in 1936, when World War II was already in the air. For this reason, my parents waited for ten full years for their first and only child. Albania was a big victory for my father, but a building supervisor from Belgrade soon started calling himself the architect of the building. At the time, my father was advised not to make a fuss about this because it was known that he was close to the communists in Zagreb. He kept mum on the threat of jail.

The war came soon enough, and my parents joined the resistance movement in Zagreb. My father was employed by the ministry of

finance of the quisling Croatian regime with full knowledge of his communist friends. My parents' apartment became a place for the top brass to meet and print incendiary leaflets calling everyone to the partisan movement. Wounded comrades found a refuge in the apartment, as well. When the war was over, my father became one of the key architects of the new regime. Under tight supervision by the secret police, he designed many a building, including some for Tito himself. Having won the competition for a major building in Belgrade, he moved together with his family to the Yugoslav capital in 1948. I was a toddler at the time.

Much of what my father had worked on in the post-war period was very close to Tito and the top brass. All of it was top secret, though. When he started working on the design of a nuclear reactor close to Belgrade some years later, everything was top secret one more time. The reactor came with a whole settlement attached. There were offices, apartment buildings, schools, and so forth. It took my father quite a number of years to extricate himself from the clutches of communist leadership and secret police, but most of his major buildings were already behind him by then. As the director of an architectural atelier, he now designed mostly hotels, which were needed in the wake of the tourist boom in the mid-Sixties.

In short, my father had but a few documents and photographs of his many buildings. Having become quite secretive about his work in the Forties and Fifties, he rarely told my mother and me about his work even when he got out of the clutches of the secret police. The little bit that he had on him by the early Nineties, when Yugoslavia fell apart, was left in Belgrade when I pulled my parents to Reading, Berkshire, where I lived at the time. They sold their apartment, and they had their paintings and some of the furniture moved to England, but the cabinet my father had in his room was left behind. There must have been some documents and photographs in that cabinet, but not too many. At any rate, both of my parents died in Reading in 2001, and I moved to Motovun in 2003.

Now, how do you explain all this to someone interested in your father's work? I often wish that I had paid more attention to all the documents and photographs in the Seventies and Eighties, when I was visiting with my parents every summer, but I must admit that it never even crossed my mind back then. I was sure that Yugoslavia would fall apart sooner or later, but I never thought of saving anything from the pyre. Now it is up to the most intrepid among architects and historians of architecture to find what they are looking for. I have next to nothing to give to them. Except my *magnum opus*, of course. My father is all over my writings, and I am most happy about it. I can only hope that this belated praise will help explain the dearth of information about the great Yugoslav architect.

BELGRADE, ZAGREB (March 23, 2015)

Nenad Popovic, one of the Croatian publishers of renown, told me years ago that publishing a book in English in Zagreb, let alone anywhere else in Croatia, would be nigh impossible. He would only wave his hand at my protestations. When I would remind him of my books published in Belgrade, he would just laugh. In spite of his advice, I have been trying to find a publisher for my last book about the legal troubles foisted upon me by the former mayor of Motovun. So far, there has been no sign of interest from any of them. When I mentioned Popovic's advice to one of them, all I got was laughter. And plenty of it. Although my book is about corruption and organized crime surrounding golf development in Croatia, it apparently has no chance in any language other than Croatian. I do not dare even mention my books in English published in Belgrade, and by different publishers. God forbid. From the perspective of publishers in Zagreb, the two cities are not on the same planet, nor in the same galaxy. So, why ever mention them in the same breath?

LIKE A SPIDER'S WEB (May 23, 2015)

As I write, Predrag or Pedja and Smilja Ristic are on their way to Motovun. They live in Switzerland. I have not seen them for too many years to remember, and I will have hard time recognizing them when they arrive this evening. Pedja's parents, Milorad or Beli and Gordana, were my parents' closest friends in Belgrade for some forty years. As I wait, memories of my childhood and early youth are flooding my mind. In many ways, Beli was one of my closest friends. I could talk with him about anything I wished, and at any length I fancied. But I am flabbergasted by the near absence of the Ristic family from my *Residua*. They pop up here and there, all right, but much less often than they deserve. Which only goes to show that my *magnum opus* is hardly a mirror of my life I would wish it to be. It is like a spider's web, where many a fly ends up purely by chance. And there are zillions of flies still buzzing around, as witnessed by Pedja and Smilja's unexpected visit.

TWO STORIES ABOUT YUGOSLAVIA OF MY YOUTH (May 24, 2015)

There are two stories I heard from Milorad Ristic, known to all as Beli, which I like retelling over and over again. Both of them have to do with former Yugoslavia soon after World War II. Beli must have told me the stories in the Sixties, while I was studying at the University of Belgrade. At the time, the communist regime was already in trouble. Dissent in all its forms was rife. In retrospect, the only reason why the two stories have not found their place in my writings in the Seventies or Eighties was that they could put Beli in trouble. He was the director

of Vinca at the time, and Vinca was an important nuclear research facility not far from Belgrade. My father designed the reactor building and all the surrounding facilities, including offices, laboratories, and apartments for the staff. That is how his friendship with Beli came to be.

Beli was quite young when the war ended. An engineer of promise, he became part of a team whose task was to design the first Yugoslav tank, which was to be shown at a military parade on May Day, the International Workers' Day. I am not sure of the year, but it must have been in the late Forties, when Yugoslavia broke its ties to the Soviet Union. Therefore, the engineering team's task was to come up with a credible weapon system. If any of the tanks produced for the parade failed, there were measures to tow them away as quickly and quietly as possible. Which is why the whole endeavor was a top secret at the time, as well as many years hence. The team studied all the tanks the Yugoslav military had in their possession—German, American, and Russian. According to Beli, the Russian tank was the most fascinating in its simplicity. One of its design features was a requirement that any repair needed could be undertaken by a blacksmith in any village across the Soviet Union. I remember being deeply impressed by this exceedingly simple but immensely wise design feature.

Beli quickly became an engineer of renown in former Yugoslavia. His main concern was energy needed for rapid industrial growth of the country, and his directorship of Vinca reflected his importance. It must have been in the late Fifties when he became concerned with some problems in the country's energy strategy, and so he visited the then minister of the economy, Svetozar Vukmanovic, known to all as Tempo. The nickname had to do with the pace of industrial development, of course. Beli was surprised by Tempo's huge desk, which was completely bare. There were five or six telephones on a shelf behind the minister's armchair. As Beli was talking about his concerns about the energy strategy, Tempo was listening without a word. His hands were resting on the desk. When Beli was finished, there was a long pause. Tempo was staring into his eyes. And then he lifted his hands and slammed the desk with all his might. "You're lying!" he yelled at Beli at the top of his voice. But the young engineer was cool. "I'm not," he said calmly. At that point Tempo got up, walked around the desk, and shook Beli's hand. The slamming and yelling were only a test. Communist Yugoslavia was still a peasant country back then. And the minister of the economy had few tools to check the veracity of anything people would tell him.

The two stories tell a lot about Yugoslavia of my youth. They speak volumes about my parents and their closest friends, as well. Looking back, the world I came into is almost incomprehensible today. Communism in all its forms is hard to imagine, let alone explain to the innocent. Communist parties of yesteryear are the greatest mystery of all. The subtle interplay of trust and mistrust within and without their

ranks made them both formidable and frightening at the same time. But the best, if not the only, way to bring the postwar years to light is through stories such as these two. Alas, only stories survive each and every calamity in history.

ANOTHER PLANET (August 13, 2015)

The latest Webometrics ranking of more than twenty-thousand universities around the globe is in the news in Croatia. The top universities in the world are Harvard, MIT, and Stanford, in that order. As far as Europe is concerned, Oxford is thirteenth and Cambridge is fourteenth in the ranking. Other European universities are far behind. The placement of Croatian universities is quite pitiful by comparison. Zagreb is 458th, Rijeka 1528th, Split 1571th, and Osijek 1828th. Wow! Pitiful, indeed. By comparison, again, Ljubljana is 216th and Belgrade is 431st. Looking at the ranking, I cannot but wonder whether my colleagues from former Yugoslavia can ever understand me and my academic career. With both Harvard and MIT behind me, I must be totally incomprehensible to them all. Another planet, as it were. Woof-woof. Meow-meow. Chirp-chirp.

SOMETHING QUITE AMUSING (August 25, 2015)

Racing car drivers are dying left and right. “Gosh,” I told my beloved upon bumping into yet another story of this sort, “I am missing something quite amusing!”

Addendum (December 14, 2016)

I remember watching car races around Kalemegdan in Belgrade when I was a kid. But I was not attracted to racing as such; rather, I enjoyed the roar of the engines and the sharp smell of kerosene. More important, I enjoyed the excitement in the air, for death was always near. I have not been to any races later in life, but I occasionally see snippets of races entirely by chance. Short videos of this sort occasionally pop up on the screen of my laptop, for instance. Once again, the speeding cars are of no interest to me, but I enjoy seeing collisions between them, and especially when one of the cars takes to the air and starts spinning around. Seeing the driver’s body flipping around in midair is a special joy, as well. Now, I admit to this “nasty” twist to my fascination with car races, but I wonder about so many aficionados of the vaunted sport. Are they, too, attracted by collisions and flying cars? Well, I bet this is what car racing is all about. A gladiatorial sport to boot.

THE FAMILY TREE, AGAIN (December 9, 2016)

Tommy Martinovic came to see me. His mother died in Belgrade a short while ago, and he came to Novigrad, where he has an apartment, for a bit of rest after the funeral. We talked about family affairs most of the time, and my head is still reeling from all the names. To begin with, Tommy's maternal grandmother was a sister of my paternal grandmother, both of whom were born in Klana, Istria. His mother and my father were first cousins, and we are second cousins. Now, his mother was married twice, and she had a son from her first marriage, whom I used to know rather well while I was living in Belgrade in my youth. Tommy, who has lived in London since his youth, is not very close to his half-brother. I also used to know their two aunts, one of whom is dead already. But I also used to know several other first cousins of my father's, for his mother had three sisters. As Tommy and I were talking, I was struggling to remember all their names. By the time he left, I was wondering about all my family ties. I used to know quite a few of my relatives on both my father's and my mother's side, but their names are hard to remember at present. Remembering our exact family ties is even more trying. And so I remembered my erstwhile wish to learn more about my family tree ("The Family Tree," October 27, 2012). The wish has evaporated as soon as I moved to Istria, though. Putting together such a tree would be quite a job, as well. Alas, going back only three or four generations would involve about a hundred people at least! Just remembering where they hail from is quite a chore: Labin, Plomin, Baska, Klana, Buzet, Hum, Krk, Pazin...

A TIME WARP (December 14, 2016)

I am about to meet again with Jasna and Rade Kronja, with whom I studied architecture in Belgrade in the Sixties. Astounding. Another experience of a time warp.

SHORT BIO

Ranko Bon writes and paints. He has published several collections from his *Residua*, the Mother of All Blogs (www.Residua.org): *Residua I-XX: Selections* (London: The Hereford Salon, 1996), *Belgrade Postcards* (Belgrade: Vracarski Breg, 2002), *Istrian Postcards* (Belgrade: Vracarski Breg, 2003), *Toward a Short History of Motovun* (Munich: Elisabeth Sandmann Verlag, 2010), and *What is to Be Done? Climate Change for Beginners* (Belgrade: HESPERIAedu, 2014). In addition, he has published in several art and literary journals: *Inventory* (1996-1997), *Flash Art* (1998-1999), *Butterfly* (1999), *Statement Art* (1999), *Tank* (2000), *Another Magazine* (2001), *The Jackdaw* (2001-2010), and *Gazet* (2002-2003).

He has exhibited at the Hereford Salon in London (1994-1999), Norwich Gallery in Norwich, England (1998), Made to Measure Gallery in London (2000-2001), Abbot's Walk Gallery in Reading, England (2001-2003), Ca' Bon Gallery in Motovun, Croatia (2003-present), Five Towers Gallery in Motovun (2004-2005), Open Space, *Zentrum für Kunstprojekte* in Vienna (2010), and Calvert 22 Gallery in London (2011).

He holds a Diplomate Engineer in Architecture degree from Belgrade University (1969), a Master's in City Planning from Harvard (1972), and a Ph.D. in Urban Studies and Planning from MIT (1975). He has worked in the Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia in Ljubljana (1975-1979) before teaching at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1979), the University of Massachusetts in Boston (1979-1980), Northeastern University (1980-1983), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1983-1990), and the University of Reading (1990-2003), where he is professor emeritus. He lives in Motovun since leaving teaching and research in 2003.