

# ISTRIAN POSTCARDS

Ranko Bon



This is the second book by Ranko Bon in the *Postcard* series. The first, *Belgrade Postcards*, came out in 2002. Both books, which are intertwined, are selections from *Residua*, begun in 1976 and available on the World Wide Web since 2000 ([www.residua.org](http://www.residua.org)). In this book Ranko traces his “return” to Istria, where his parents were born while it was still a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Now as ever, Istria is the land of many tangled roots. It is the home of all those who have travelled far and for long.

Reading, Berkshire

September 2002

## PREFAZIONE

*El dolor che go nel cuor  
i dotori, i dotori  
El dolor che go nel cuor  
i dotori no i lo sa.\**

*I ricordi che risalgono alla giovinezza non si dimenticano mai. L'Istria è anche il mio primo ricordo nascosto nel fondo della mia mente. Sotto il sapore del mare, la memoria torna sempre alla penisola istriana abbracciandola. Basta uno sguardo alla terra rossa ovunque.*

*La defunta signora Bon mi ha scritto una cartolina, in data a 31 dicembre 2000, in occasione dell'uscita del mio libro, Vecchia Rovigno Addio, nella quale mi diceva, che lei, Milena, è stata per la prima volta in questa città costiera con suo figlio Ranko, nell'anno 1948.*

*“Era una giornata piena di sole. Siamo stati ospiti del famoso pittore Edo Murtić”, scriveva la signora, “che è venuto ad accoglierci a Kanfanaro con la sua motocicletta. Abbiamo percorso, tra buche e tartarughe, la strada bianca, fin alla città di Rovigno, della quale, per caso, è originaria la mia nuora Silvia Benussi, moglie del mio carissimo fratello Radovan. Ranko, fin ad allora timido, quieto, strada facendo, avviluppato dai sapori istriani, ha cominciato a gridare di gioia...”*

*Adesso, io, nipote triestino, detto Michele Carniel, vi sto presentando un bouquet di cartoline istriane, realizzate dallo stesso figlio timido Ranko, cinquantquattro anni dopo, e tutte, dalla prima all'ultima, inneggiano alla gloria della terra rossa istriana, a sua madre Milena nata a Pisino (Pazin), al padre Branko, lupo isolano di Veglia (Krk), alle donne, agli amici ed alla bellezza della vita in generale.*

*Ranko Bon, oggi professore all'Università di Reading (Inghilterra), dal prossimo anno cittadino di Montona (Motovun) in Istria, nato a Zagabria nel 1946, cresciuto a Belgrado, ha cominciato scrivere le cartoline a partire dal 1976 fin proprio ad oggi, con la promessa che non smetterà mai. Certo, non volontariamente.*

*Questa selezione che è piccola parte, scritta in origine in lingua Inglese, appartiene a una collezione più vasta, denominata—Residua. I lettori possono trovarla nel sito internet ([www.residua.org](http://www.residua.org)).*

*Godete tranquillamente, goccia a goccia, come abbiamo goduto noi, la grupa istriana (c'era una volta) "I soliti ignoti naufraghi", della manifattura belgradese Vračarski breg.*

Miša Jovanović

Belgrado, Novembre 2002

*\* Canzone ottocentesca che a forti analogie nella parte melodica con il canto Croato "Za jedan časak".*

ODYSSEUS OR MYTH AND ENLIGHTENMENT[1] (October 6, 1977)

What would have happened had Odysseus not been tied well enough to the mast? Imagine: He himself would have taken his ship to the Sirens! His cunning would have failed. So, sailors, plug your ears tight, tie him well, and let him enjoy the singing of the Sirens. Your cunning must complement his.

*Addendum I* (October 28, 1995)

*Perché lo sconfinato rispetto, l'ammirazione per chi comanda? L'ambizione di comandare a propria volta? Ciò che scrive Comte (che pure passa per autoritario): "ogni partecipazione al comando è radicalmente degradante", lo condividiamo pienamente. Noi non abbiamo stima per chi comanda. Anzi, lasciamo che comandino proprio quelli per cui non abbiamo stima.*

From Manlio Sgalambro's *Del pensare breve*, Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 1991, p. 76.

*Addendum II* (May 18, 2000)

If Odysseus had not plugged his shipmates' ears, they would have done it on their own.

From Steven Pinker's *How the Mind Works*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1998 (first published in 1997), p. 420.

*Addendum III* (August 23, 2002)

Twenty-five years ago, when I wrote the original piece, the connection between Odysseus and myself was farthest from my mind. At least in terms of my journey across the globe, I must add. That connection is obvious only now. If I follow Pinker in thinking about the mind as a society of agents, or of the brain as an archipelago of loosely connected islands of neural activity, then the mystery is resolved in one fell swoop. My own Odysseus, the commanding agent of my mind, was allowed to wander and explore the world precisely because the other agents had been cunning enough to obliterate all the dangers of the journey. If some

of them are stirring once again, it is because the journey is nearing its end. It is time to untie Odysseus from his mast and unplug the ears of his mates. There are no more dangers in sight or within earshot. Whence the sudden awakening. Or is it enlightenment?

*Addendum IV* (March 6, 2013)

The last *addendum* was written less than a month after I bought my house in Motovun. I knew that it would take me about a year to inhabit it, but my trip appeared to be at an end. Enlightenment was nigh, or so it seemed to me at the time. And it was sweet while it lasted. It took me only a few years to become embroiled again, as well as to start dreaming about continuing my trip for yet another bout across the vast and nasty seas. Odysseus rebound to his old mast one time too many. Be that as it may, it is wonderful to read about my temporary bliss. No matter how short it lasted, my homecoming struck me as a sure thing. If only home existed!

AUTOBIOGRAPHY VI (March 3, 1981)

The precision and the immediacy of the image was so striking, so compelling, that I let myself sink into it without any fear of daydreaming. All I could actually see was a house, a rather crude stone house of simple geometry, some olive trees and low shrubs around it, and the rocks separating it from the sea. We were close enough to hear the crickets. I could not be sure whether our boat was approaching the house, or just passing by it. I knew that that place was good, I knew that it was inviolable, although every attempt to sharpen my perception would gradually dissolve this sensation. I could not see the boat on which I was standing, but I could say with certainty that it was a Greek boat, and that there were some other colonists and men with weapons on board. The island, for I knew we were looking at an island, was in the Adriatic. Very blue. Many centuries ago. The people who lived in that house, on that island, were perhaps related to me. That remained unclear, though. But the overpowering sensation that made this atavistic image so demanding later on was that in the world we were looking at every man had a name, a name that meant something, a name that counted someplace. The sparsely populated islands in the vicinity were inhabited by people with names known to all the others. Those people had weight, they were there, they mattered for some reason. They had a place. They knew the islands, the houses, the weapons, the people, the sea itself. They spoke rarely. They were real. But, most importantly, they had real names. Their names somehow defined their places in the world. My return was thus a mixture of wellbeing I have experienced never before and of dread of the nameless multitudes I have sunk into. Here I am, an insect, a mere member of a species. The names are gone. And the islands are gone. The names themselves have become nameless.

*Addendum I* (April 23, 1982)

I had failed to elucidate the circumstances surrounding this powerful vision. Namely, at the time I was washing dishes. Many times since I have taken up this task willingly in anticipation of recurrent bliss. Naturally enough, this has not been successful. All that remains is a faint recollection of the place I have seen—truncated to an image the size of a garish tourist post-card. A blue, gray, and green diagram of vanishing reality... All my efforts have in fact been counter-productive. Dishwashing be damned!

*Addendum II* (March 19, 1983)

In his text, the writer sets up a house. Just as he trundles papers, books, pencils, documents untidily from room to room, he creates the same disorder in his thoughts. They become pieces of furniture that he sinks into, content or irritable. He strokes them affectionately, wears them out, mixes them up, rearranges, ruins them. For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live. In it he inevitably produces, as his family once did, refuse and lumber. But now he lacks a storeroom, and it is hard in any case to part from left-overs. So he pushes them along in front of him, in danger finally of filling his pages with them. The demand that one harden oneself against self-pity implies the technical necessity to counter any slackening of intellectual tension with the utmost alertness, and to eliminate anything that has begun to encrust the work or to drift along idly, which may at an earlier stage have served, as gossip, to generate the warm atmosphere conducive to growth, but is now left behind, flat and stale. In the end, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing.

From Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, London: NLB, 1974 (first published in 1951), p. 87.

*ATOPOS* (July 7, 1981)

To be a little improbable (Wilde),[2] to be unclassifiable, that is, of a ceaselessly unforeseen originality (Socrates),[3] to be nobody and nothing by understanding everything and everybody (Shaw),[4] to be elliptical, forever inviolate, forever new (Brown),[5] to be a sort of Proteus (Machiavelli),[6] and so on and so forth *ad infinitum*: the principle of adaptation. Only conscious adaptation to nature brings nature under the control of the physically weaker (Odysseus).[7] The weak are thus guilty, for they circumvent nature by means of cunning (Nietzsche).[8]

From a *desideratum* to an accusation: the dialectics of rationality and irrationality, bridged by cunning... The polymorphous is revealed, secularized, and preserved internally; whence, perhaps, both the

individual and the constitutive threat of his or her dismemberment (the unity of race, nation, or party, for example). Dialectics, the conscious adaptation of thought to nature, can bridge the gap only as a weapon of the physically weaker. The accusation accepted—as a *desideratum* and an index.

*Addendum I* (September 18, 2002)

There are people everywhere who form a Fourth World, or a diaspora of their own. They are the lordly ones. They come in all colors. They can be Christians or Hindus or Muslims or Jews or pagans or atheists. They can be young or old, men or women, soldiers or pacifists, rich or poor. They may be patriots, but they are never chauvinists. They share with each other, across all the nations, common values of humor and understanding. When you are among them, you know you will not be mocked or resented, because they will not care about your race, your faith, your sex, or your nationality. They suffer fools, if not gladly, at least sympathetically. They laugh easily. They are easily grateful. They are never mean. They are not inhibited by fashion, public opinion, or political correctness. They are exiles in their own communities, because they are always in minority. But they form a mighty nation, if they only knew it. It is the nation of nowhere, and I have come to think that its natural capital is Trieste.

From Jan Morris' *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*,  
London: Faber and Faber, 2001, p. 179.

*Addendum II* (March 28, 2013)

I was in America in 1981, when I wrote the original piece. And I was still in Britain in 2002, but I was already about to move to Istria, when I wrote the first *addendum*. Everything concerning internal exile was perfectly clear in my mind on both occasions. I am still struggling with being an exile in my own country, though. And especially in Istria, where both of my parents hail from, and where they have the deepest of roots. How is this possible? How is it possible that I am still struggling with the notion of being an *atopos* now and forever? The only meaningful answer that comes to my mind is that it is much more difficult maintaining my position at, as it were, home than it had been very far from it. At any rate, it is high time to embrace my elective status once and for all. And stop bitching about it.

AN ISLAND STORY (June 30, 1982)

People were quite different when my father was a boy. For example, he told me once that there was a beautiful maiden of marriageable age at Krk, the largest island in the Adriatic, where my father was born in 1912, and from where his family had to flee in 1918, immediately after the Italian occupation, because his father, a land-surveying engineer and the

head of the cadastral office for the island, had played an important albeit unclear role in the pro-Yugoslav provisional government there, formed in the brief interregnum that followed after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and, returning to the maiden, when the time came for her family to marry her off, she proudly refused all their choices, always finding something or other not to her liking in the young men presented to her. This soon became common knowledge in the small community. One day, a very poor young man came to propose to her without the benefit of her family's approval, but she, quite predictably, refused him as well with the following words: "I do not want a man without bread in his hands." This expression, parenthetically, is still used in many parts of Yugoslavia, and I imagine elsewhere in the world, to denote the ability of a man to support himself and his family, as "bread in hands" was in the past, apparently, all one really needed. Neither is bread what it used to be. Be this as it may, the young man left with a sinking heart, but returned in a short while with a loaf of bread in his hands, knocked on the door through which he was so recently almost thrown out, asked for the unfortunate maiden, who was indeed, according to my father, of astonishing beauty and poise, and, when she finally appeared, presented her with his loaf, turned around without a single word, and walked away. She just stood in the doorway, holding the accursed loaf, until she regained her composure and quietly closed the door. A couple of hours later, her family established that she had hung herself in her spacious chambers. My father insisted that he remembered this renaissance doorway with such absolute clarity, that he could immediately draw every single detail exactly as it was when he last saw it. As he reached for a pencil and a scrap of paper I stopped him, for, to begin with, as an architect he could always produce such a drawing, and moreover, I had not seen the doorway myself, and thus could not judge the accuracy of his recollection. And I regret this small gesture, because his knowledge is perhaps irretrievable, and because that particular doorway is of enormous interest to me now.

#### TEMPTATIONS OF A LOTUS-EATER (July 5, 1982)

There are many indications that death is, to use a vulgar expression, pleasant, and yet people tend to avoid it. An illustration will hopefully elucidate this paradox. An acquaintance of mine told me in the early fall of 1978, over a bottle of beer and almost confidentially, that the most beautiful and also terrifying experience he had had under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, about which I knew absolutely nothing, was in all respects exceedingly simple and thus dangerous in form. According to his recollection, he was either floating or flying, and he had full control of the direction as well as speed of his movement. The medium in which this three-dimensional exercise took place was not identifiable, but, lacking other models, he thought of it as the sky. At some point he saw a distant light, and he approached it eagerly, sensing its overpowering attraction. It was not an object, however, as he realized when he came sufficiently close to it, but something akin to an opening



in the sky. He slowed down. It was bright, pale blue, soothing, and it suggested fulfillment and blissful oblivion that he had not experienced ever before. He told me, quietly and unassumingly, that he knew, instinctively perhaps, that if he came closer to this opening, let alone passed through it into that glimpse of a world, he would not be able to return. Thus he decided, under enormous strain that demanded all his willpower, to turn around and flee as fast as possible. And that he did. He added that he had not taken any such drugs ever since, fearing the repetition of this temptation. His account was so dry and so utterly devoid of metaphysical speculations, that it appeared to me that his encounter with blissful death was indeed genuine. For that reason I did not say anything, apprehensive of my own intentions. When we finished our beer and paid the waiter, we returned to the painting of his small sailboat anchored in the nearby harbor, somewhere on the coast of Istria. Most likely it was Portorož or Porto Rose, but I am not sure any more.

Later on the same day, our job finished, I asked my acquaintance about the meaning of his words: “dangerously simple in form.” He shrugged his shoulders, and said that he did not know exactly what he meant himself, but proceeded with a couple of illustrative examples, of which I will recount only one. First of all, he said by way of a preface, you must not be alone in your chemical dreams, and second, you must always be ready to use some sort of a ruse to ward off a possible tragedy, facing either yourself or someone else. When you are left to your own devices, and there is nothing to latch onto, as was the case with his own story, you may easily slip into oblivion. Then he provided a counter-example. He told me that once there were three of them who took something or other at the same time. They talked occasionally. Their intertwined trips, as he put it, reached a point when they all heard a loud horn or trumpet coming from the outside, beckoning, and when one of them, the least experienced member of the conspiracy, started to rave about the Angel of Death who had come to take him away, and as his fear rapidly turned into frenzy and then into an unendurable and euphoric craving to depart with the Angel, my acquaintance and the third person involved realized that something had to be done then and there in order to prevent a disaster. By the way, this third person was another acquaintance of mine, a more or less successful writer from Ljubljana, who, as far as I could tell, knew quite a bit about drugs. His literary skills almost certainly helped, for the two of them reshaped the circumstances by persuading the deluded fellow-traveler, convincingly it would appear, that the sound they had heard had nothing whatsoever to do with the Angel of Death, but was the horn of a car, that is, another friend who would take them for a glorious ride, as he had promised a week ago, etc. They knew what they were doing, and the trick worked. It was important, it seemed to me, that the new or superimposed story be tightly interwoven with the rest of the so-called trip, if it was to work, because no-one there really knew anything about the true nature of the sound. It might have been, for all they knew, the Angel of Death himself. By implication, even in that case the trick could be successful insofar as it was plausible and convincing. Be this as it may, what struck

me as truly exciting about our conversation was that it corresponded so well with my reading of Horkheimer and Adorno, Odysseus, and the myth of Enlightenment, although in an exceedingly rudimentary form. In short, the eternal bliss is always around the corner, and easily accessible, but one nevertheless tends to circumvent it by skillful administration of cunning, where reason, philosophically speaking, plays a relatively minor and altogether auxiliary role. However, contrary to Horkheimer and Adorno, and contrary to the prevalent myth about drug addicts, even the Lotus-eaters must make sacrifices and go without. Even they need a firm mast and fellow argonauts to tie them to it. But why this is so, remains a mystery.

#### BORDERLINE (May 29, 1983)

A strong arm shakes me out of my slumber. It is bright and cold in the compartment. I am bundled up in my Loden, to no avail. The upholstery smells of other travellers. I notice that I have drooled on the scratchy red velvet. Fall 1977, a couple of miles before the Italian border, on a business trip to Milano and Urbino. "Your passport!" shouts a seven-foot-tall peasant in police uniform. He uses the familiar "you." I fumble through the pockets of my jacket and my coat, half awake. "Faster!" shouts the seven-foot-tall peasant in blue, and leans toward me. He stares at me unabashedly, and I stare back at him with concealed contempt. It must be after midnight. His uniform is bursting at the seams. I hand the accursed passport to him and shout: "Here!" My voice frightens me. The giant looks through the passport and gives it back to me without a word. He shuts the door with a slam and stalks into the next compartment: "Your passport!" Only after the train pulls out of Trieste do I try to fall asleep again, but I cannot contain my thoughts. My thoughts frighten me.

#### HERNÁN CORTÉS (March 25, 1984)

The shore was awesome: shimmering beaches, marshlands of a mysterious mood, gigantic sand dunes that shifted with the whim of wind, a tangle of tropical forest beyond. The familiar world closed behind them. Their leader, Hernán Cortés, destroyed his ships so there could be no question of turning back. He would lead them inland to the heart of this new world.

From Gene S. Stuart's *The Mighty Aztecs*, Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1981, p. 6.

#### Addendum I (August 24, 1992)

Not long after the meeting with the Aztec ambassadors, Cortés received instructions from Governor Velásquez to return to Cuba. But, knowing of the rich kingdom in the interior, he decided to disregard the governor

and founded a garrison town at Veracruz. Bypassing his superior, Cortés sent a ship bearing gifts direct to Charles V of Spain. This done, he burned all the remaining ships to forestall any thoughts of return among his men and the Velásquez supporters and, after inspiring his troops with a rousing speech, he and his tiny army set off on 16 August 1519 for Tenochtitlan.

From Richard F. Townsend's *The Aztecs*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1992, pp. 22-23.

*Addendum II* (January 24, 1994)

Assembled at Cempoala, we discussed with Cortés our military disposition and the journey ahead of us. And as a conversation went on from one point to another, we who were his friends advised him (though many were of the opposite opinion) not to leave a single ship in port, but to destroy them all immediately, in order to leave no cause of trouble behind. As far as I can judge, this plan of ours for destroying the ships had already been decided on by Cortés. But he wished it to be put forward by us, so that if we were afterwards asked to pay for the ships he could say that he had acted on our advice, and we should all have to share the cost.

From Bernal Diaz's *The Conquest of New Spain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, p. 130.

*Addendum III* (January 13, 2004)

Shortly after landing on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico in 1519, in a move routinely hailed as bold and brilliant, Cortés burned his ships. Actually, he did not. The ships were scuttled and at least one was merely grounded. But in 1546 Cervantes de Salazar referred in print to Cortés's ship-burning and the image took hold.

The myth of the burning ships not only reflects the existence of numerous little legends within the larger myths, but also illustrates how every move of Cortés's has been taken as indicative of his exceptionality. With respect to the destruction of ships, Francisco de Montejo did the same thing in 1527 on the coast of Yucatan. Arguably this was in imitation of Cortés, and no doubt Cortés did influence other conquistadors through their common experience of the invasion of the Mexica empire or through reading the published editions of his letters to the king.

From Matthew Restall's *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 18-19.

*NOMEN ATQUE OMEN* (January 2, 1987)

My father's family name is presumably of Venetian origin. This is quite plausible, as he and his family come from the island of Krk, which was undoubtedly part of the Venetian empire for centuries. Bon is a typical Venetian name, too. It has survived there to this day. Whenever I visit Venice I stumble upon a Bon in person or in conversation. According to the experts, Italian names like Buono and Buona got shortened into Bon in Venice, which means that this family name has multiple roots. The history of Venice, while Venice was still Venice and not a crumbling tourist attraction, had witnessed many illustrious Bons. Giovanni and Bartolomeo Bon come immediately to mind: the famous Ca' d'Oro on Canal Grande, a marvel of Florid Gothic architecture, is attributed to them.

But all this is of little importance. What I am concerned with here is the fact that my family name has a definite and unambiguous meaning, and that I have indeed felt for years that I must live up to it in some way. In Veneto, the Venetian dialect, this word means “good.” My ancestors must have earned that simple brand, but exactly how they had earned it is bound to remain a mystery. The question I must keep answering for myself is very simple and hardly mysterious: how can I justify this good name by my own deeds? There are already many tacit signs that I am well on my way toward providing an answer to this question. Namely, it appears that I believe that good is a residual category, or an index of how little harm one has managed to make despite all the opportunities for evil deeds one has had, or one has created oneself, over one's lifetime.

In other words, it appears that I believe—quite simplemindedly, of course—that good deeds are nothing but evil deeds averted or circumvented in the nick of time, just before it would become too late to do anything about them. If this argument could be extended to my unfortunate and defenseless ancestors, it would appear that they had been most hideous creatures, indeed. And that circuitous thought makes me uncomfortable at times, and especially when I am confronted with my supposed origin and fate in my quotidian affairs. Naturally enough, I hope that these are but idle and vain speculations about things that are better left in peace.

*Addendum I* (June 17, 1996)

In the traditions it is written that God had said: “Paradise is for those who intend to commit some sin and then remember that My eye is upon them and forbear.”

From Al-Ghazzali's *The Alchemy of Happiness*, London:  
The Octagon Press, 1980, p. 82.

*Addendum II (April 5, 1998)*

As of late, paradise has been slipping away from me. I do not even dream of committing some sin. Barring fundamental change in my life, I am sure to end up in hell.

THE ORGANS OF TRUTH (February 6, 1989)

A man must have some contact with humanity, whether he wants it or not. I would say that the best contact with humanity is through love and sex. Here, you learn many things about life, because in sex and in love human character is revealed more than anywhere else. Let's say that a man in society can play a very strong man, a dictator, but in sex he may become reduced to a child, or to an imp. The sexual organs are the most sensitive organs of the human being. For example, the eye will not stop seeing if it doesn't like what it sees, but the penis will stop functioning if it doesn't like what it "sees." I would say that the sexual organs express the human soul more than any other part of the body. They are not diplomats. They tell the truth ruthlessly.

From Isaac Bashevis Singer and Richard Burgin's  
*Conversations with Isaac Bashevis Singer*, Garden City,  
New York: Doubleday, 1985, p. 33.

*Addendum (March 27, 1994)*

Indeed, the last few weeks I have been using my penis as my only guide through my jumbled recollections and toward the truth. When it went up, I felt I was on the right road; when it went down, I knew I was straying. Like a ruthless "seeing-eye" dog, my penis took me where there was much more for me to learn than I bargained for at the outset of our journey.

ON THINKING AS A MODE OF INTERCONTINENTAL  
TRANSPORTATION (February 20, 1989)

Yourcenar: I suppose that a sage, like one of the old Taoists, could circumnavigate the globe several times without leaving home, without ever stepping outside his cell. That would be the mark of a true sage.

Galey: He would dream his way out.

Yourcenar: Even more remarkable, he would think his way.

From Marguerite Yourcenar's *With Open Eyes:  
Conversations with Matthieu Galey*, Boston: Beacon  
Press, 1984 (first published in 1980), p. 111.

*Addendum I* (December 11, 1993)

Yourcenar was deluded on at least two counts. First, an old Taoist worth this name would not be sitting in a cell or have a home. Why would an elephant ever depart or arrive? Second, an old Taoist worth this name would not wish to circumnavigate the globe, let alone several times. Why would a tiger want to visit the Dordogne or Central Park in New York City? Perhaps Yourcenar was thinking about the not-so-old Taoists?

*Addendum II* (December 13, 1993)

Without going out-of-doors, one may know all under heaven; without peering through windows, one may know the Way of heaven. The farther one goes, the less one knows. For this reason, the sage knows without journeying, understands without looking, accomplishes without acting.

From Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* (translated by Victor H. Mair), New York: Bantam Books, 1990, p. 15.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY XIII (December 5, 1989)

I left Yugoslavia twice, in 1970 and again in 1979, when I promised myself never to return except for summer vacations. I left the United States for the first time in 1975, when it appeared that I would stay in Yugoslavia forever. I will leave the United States again in 1990, perhaps for good. The United Kingdom, where I will move in the summer, will be my fifth home, as it were. If everything goes according to my present plans, around my fiftieth birthday I will move again, this time to Italy. The idea of living in Venice or Florence attracts me very much. My sixth home should be my last. But who knows? I have become accustomed to changing countries like shoes!

*Addendum* (August 1, 2015)

Changing countries like shoes, I eventually ended up in Croatia, which was still a part of Yugoslavia at the time this piece was written. Although I live in a town that was in Venetian hands between the Thirteenth and Eighteenth Century, it is a far cry from Venice of my erstwhile dreams. At best, I can visit it whenever it strikes my fancy, for it is only a few hours by either car or boat from my home. And this is what I like to do whenever an opportunity arises. Travel is far from attractive to me at this stage of my life, but it is different with Venice. Very different. Every visit, no matter how brief, strikes me as another homecoming. The sights, the sounds, the smells... Deep in my bones, I am Venetian. My sixth home, as it were, is thus quite to my liking, and it may well remain close to my heart till my last day. As the crow flies, it is one-hundred and seventeen kilometers away from Venice, and

no less than one-hundred kilometers of it is by sea. My beloved Adriatic Sea.

#### ELSEWHERE (December 7, 1989)

On occasion, especially when the pace of things quickens beyond your control, you are propelled by premonitions, vague enthusiasms, and cozy expectations to places you know well, such as your home or office, where you imagine you will find a form of wellbeing you crave for. Of course, this haven of yours is always elsewhere, where you are not. It is rarely an unreachable place, though. You finish up whatever you are doing almost feverishly, because this blissful place is beckoning ever more clearly, and you set out on the journey at last, eager to the point of pain. The steady glow of your destination feeds your confidence and you ultimately become convinced that everything will be well in the end. And then, when you finally arrive to the place that has suggested absolution, you discover that it has been but a mirage. Cold, empty, dark, the place offers little more than shelter from the weather. And you feel cheated, bereaved, because you always manage to forget that the place in question had already given you so much more than you had any right to expect.

#### *Addendum* (December 18, 2014)

As of late, the pull of elsewhere often involves quite a bit of travel. One elsewhere is in Motovun, and the other is in Zagreb. Predictably, the two compete for my attention all the while. But this piece came to mind in connection with yet another elsewhere that popped up out of nowhere earlier today—Bon Island in Thailand (“Bon Island,” December 18, 2014). Close to Phuket, where I stayed for about a week in 1989 together with my second wife to be, as well as my second wife to divorce in the fullness of time, the tropical island became surprisingly real to me. The memory of the place is still with me, and its pull came my way out of the blue. The colors, the warmth, the peace... Elsewhere incarnated, as it were. The unexpected pull I experienced was so strong that I almost panicked. For I know exactly what would happen if I ventured all the way there. Of course, Motovun and Zagreb would beckon from afar. And ever more strongly. In short, elsewhere be damned. Embrace here and now, if only you can. Or so I try to admonish myself one time too many.

#### THE COURT MASTER OF GEOMANCY (May 13, 1990)

As ancient custom required, Emperor Khah undertook four journeys in his youth to learn first-hand about the empire he was to inherit from his childless uncle. Each time he set out from the capital in one of the four cardinal directions. Each time he spent a full year on the road outward, and somewhat less than a year on the road back to the capital. His first

journey took him to the eastern provinces, troubled by local unrest and barbarian invasions long before Emperor Khah's reign. It is said that he met his future court master of geomancy in the eastern provinces, and that he immediately took to liking this remarkable man of barbarian origin. It is this man who advised the emperor to move the capital to the east, where the presence of vast imperial armies proved to have been essential in preserving the integrity of the empire. The court master of geomancy also advised the emperor on the site for his eternal home. The best proof to the wisdom of this advice is that Emperor Khah's tomb has not been found to this very day. It is therefore believed that the unfathomable treasure buried there is still intact. The only clue as to the site of the tomb—which is believed to have come from the court master of geomancy himself, and which is therefore not to be trusted—is that it is at the westernmost point reached by Emperor Khah on his fourth journey. Of course, this point falls in a featureless desert the size of an entire ocean. The only people who have managed to find a foothold in this unfriendly place are the banished survivors of barbarian hordes that once threatened the eastern borders of the empire.

*LEO SERENISSIMUS* (November 18, 1990)

The Lion of Venice, presently on exhibit in the British Museum's lobby, is quite a sorry sight: judging from a photograph in a recent newspaper, the unfortunate creature's ancient grin looks rather amusing, if not silly, when viewed at head-height. With a dash of perhaps misplaced local patriotism, I cannot but argue that it is a sacrilege to expose the old mascot to the scrutiny of curious crowds. The statue was meant to sit atop of Nicolò Barattieri's twelfth-century pillar outside San Marco's basilica, at a safe distance from petty smirks, where it should return as soon as possible. In fact, I wonder why was the lion allowed to wander so far away from his natural habitat. I am confident that my Venetian ancestors would find my argument superfluous because of its obviousness, but I wonder whether it would make any sense to the citizens of Venice today. Are there any Venetians left there?

*Addendum* (December 20, 1990)

In general, I do not suffer from petty curiosity, but even I succumb to it from time to time. The freak show at the British Museum turned out to be one such exception: unable to restrain myself, yesterday afternoon I went to visit the old lion. Even worse, I took a few photographs of the poor thing. The only compensation for my curiosity is that I have witnessed the extraordinary bronze patchwork that is the Lion of Venice: this piece from the original statue, that piece from the Middle Ages, and this piece from the restoration in the last century. By the way, there are indications that the original statue may go as far back as 300 BC. The range of colors, hews, and textures of different bronze pieces is surprising, indeed—from flat, pale turquoise to shiny black with golden hew. All this was quite lovely, but I could not force myself to



stay for more than a few minutes. As I was walking in the direction of Oxford Street, I could not but feel ever so slightly embarrassed because of my misplaced curiosity, that is, my failure to curb it.

#### TEN PRINCIPLES OF BON BUDDHISM (April 10, 1992)

1. Salvation is the immediate task of every individual. It cannot be attained through efforts of others on one's behalf. One should begin now by facing life as it is and by learning about it through direct and personal experience. The understanding of the teaching will gradually follow.

2. The truths upon which Bon Buddhism is founded are natural. They have been taught through the ages by the enlightened individuals who have discovered them through direct experience. Enlightened individuals are known as buddhas in the east, but they can be found in all cultures and climates.

3. The first fact of existence is change or impermanence. All that exists passes through the same cycle—birth, growth, decay, and death. Life alone is ceaseless, ever seeking self-expression in new forms. Life is a process or flow, and those who cling to any of its forms, however splendid, will suffer by resisting the flow.

4. The universe is evolving and it functions according to law. The ever-changing universe is the expression of the law of natural causation, of action and reaction. All effects have causes, and an individual's character is the sum total of his or her thoughts and acts. Each individual is the sole creator of his or her circumstances and final destiny.

5. Life is one and indivisible, though its evolving forms are innumerable and perishable. It is inextricably bound with the universe as a whole. Life never ceases, though all life forms must die. Their remainders ultimately become part of new life forms. From an understanding of life's unity arises compassion, a sense of identity with, and kindness toward, all forms of life. From it also arises a sense of care for the natural habitat of all living creatures. The universe is the habitat of life in all its manifestations. Life being one, the interests of a part are those of the whole.

6. Reality is indescribable in its infinite and ever-changing variety. All forms of life are manifestations of this reality. The purpose of life is the attainment of enlightenment, the extinction of the limitations of selfhood. Thought can never encompass reality, but direct experience and appreciation of reality can be attained through enlightenment. To be enlightened means to fully and directly partake in life's flow, not only on occasion but at all times and under all circumstances. All forms of life are endowed with the potentiality of enlightenment and the process therefore consists of becoming what one is, of realizing one's nature.

Not all will attain enlightenment, but striving for it is rewarding in all its stages.

7. The path to enlightenment must be trodden by the whole individual, not merely the best of him or her, and heart and mind must be developed equally. By right thought and action one can gradually purify one's inner nature, and so by self-realization attain in time a sense of inner peace and unity with the universe. The right thought and action can be discovered only by introspection.

8. Inward concentration and meditation lead in time to the development of the inner spiritual faculties. The subjective life is as important as the daily round, and periods of quietude for inner activity are essential for a balanced life. Bon Buddhists should at all times be mindful and self-possessed, refraining from mental and emotional attachment to the passing show. They should be attentive and alert, always fully aware of their inner lives and their surroundings.

9. There is no authority for truth save the intuition of the individual, and that is the authority for the individual alone. Other individuals, those farther along the path to enlightenment, may serve as teachers and exemplars, but they cannot be intermediaries between reality and the individual. All suffer the consequences of their thoughts and acts, and learn thereby, while helping their fellows to the same deliverance. The utmost tolerance should be practiced toward all religions and philosophies, for no one has the right to interfere in the journey of others.

10. Bon Buddhism is a system of thought and a way of life that is reasonable, practical, and all-embracing. It has no dogmas, satisfies the reason and the heart alike, insists on self-reliance coupled with tolerance for other points of view, embraces science, religion, philosophy, psychology, ethics, and art, and points to the individual alone as the sole creator of his or her destiny.

To Christmas Humphreys

KRK ZEN (June 14, 1992)

My father told me once of a captain from the island of Krk, where my father grew up. The captain—called *barba* in the Italian dialect common to the Adriatic coast from Trieste to Dubrovnik—had a small cargo ship and hired a few hands. One day there was a big storm and the ship took in a good deal of water. The captain ordered his hands to go into the hold and pump out the water. They were pumping and pumping, but the storm kept raging and the ship kept taking water. At length they returned to the deck, disgruntled: “*Barba*, we don’t want to pump!” The captain was calm: “Then don’t pump.” “But we will drown!” “Then pump.”

MARIN SANUDO (March 10, 1993)

Sanudo chose as his headquarters the island of Naxos. It was the place where Ariadne, having saved Theseus from the Minotaur in Crete, was abandoned by the hero on his way home to Athens. It was also the birthplace of Dionysos, god of wine, whom she married instead, and was one of the greenest and most cheerful islands in the whole Aegean. It did not fall easily to Sanudo and his cutthroats when, in 1207, their galleys appeared off the little village capital out of the Paros Channel, and sailing past the tall temple of Apollo on its islet, beached themselves upon the shore. The Genoese had got there first, and fought back so fiercely that in a gesture familiar enough to chroniclers of these seas, Sanudo ordered his galleys to be burned, to encourage the faint-hearted in his ranks. Inspired thus, they stormed the Genoese positions at last and proclaimed Sanudo Duke Marco I of the Archipelago. A Catholic archbishop was promptly dispatched to the island by the Pope, and Apollo's temple served as a quarry for the construction of a twelve-towered citadel, the seat of dukely government.

From Jan Morris' *The Venetian Empire: A Sea Voyage*,  
Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990 (first published  
in 1980), p. 47.

MILANO-LONDON (May 24, 1993)

Perhaps Italy disappoints more than other European countries because it offers the most palpable evidence of continuous decline of our civilization since the beginning of this millennium. Perhaps Milano exemplifies this phenomenon most palpably because of its comparatively late start and continuing economic success to this very day. The best way to experience our loss is to walk from the magnificent Duomo toward the periphery of Milano. This is not an extravagant suggestion, painful as the experience may be: it took me less than a quarter of an hour from the cathedral to the remnants of the medieval wall and then less than two hours to the fertile Lombard fields. And I cursed our fate all the way.

*Addendum* (June 27, 1993)

Perhaps this is why Venice is the most enchanting of Italian cities: all the achievements of the modern age are in Mestre and beyond—that is, out of sight.

LESS THAN A LIFETIME (March 6, 1994)

If ever less is ever more on the true path, if ever to subtract is ever to add, than the journey through the world of art ought to take less than a lifetime.

*Addendum* (March 17, 1994)

In the pursuit of knowledge, every day something is added. In the practice of Tao, every day something is dropped. Less and less do you need to force things, until finally you arrive at non-action. When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.

From Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* (translated by Stephen Mitchell), London: Kyle Cathie, 1990 (first published in 1988), no page number.

FAMILY CREST (March 26, 1994)

Last week a letter for me arrived from the Historical Archive in Rijeka (Fiume in Italian). My parents opened it. The Archive director responded to some of my inquiries regarding the Bon family on the Adriatic coast. In addition, she sent me several renderings of the family's coat-of-arms. I learned about the letter from my parents, who were quite excited about the family crest. I saw it a few days later, upon my weekly return from London to Reading. Because they could not explain to me on the phone how the coat-of-arms actually looked, I imagined it much more complex than it had turned out to be. It is vertically divided into two fields—the left field is silver, and the right field is red. One of the Sixteenth Century renderings of the crest was from the island of Cres (Cherso in Italian), whence the Bon family outside Venice seems to have spread in this part of the Adriatic. Now I have to figure out what, if anything, to do with this unexpected gift from the past.

A SUFI PREFACE TO MY *RESIDUA* (March 26, 1994)

They asked Hilmi: "Why do you take so much interest in matters which are not connected with the progress of man?" He said: "When you want to know how hard the coppersmith has been working, you look at the shavings on his floor."

From Idries Shah's *Thinkers of the East*, London: Arkana, 1991 (first published in 1971), p. 152.

MYSTICISM REVEALED (April 19, 1994)

In the last pages of the *Masnavi*, called by the Iranians the "Koran in Persian," Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) instructs the reader that words are pointless beyond that point in the story.[9] He says that one can travel on saddle and horse up to the sea-coast, whence one should travel by boat, a "horse of wood." That boat is silence, says Rumi. But then he adds that a perfect man of spirit smashes his boat, too, and plunges

into the sea like a fish. Indeed, all mysticism begins with the inescapable envy of animals.

*Addendum I* (January 3, 1995)

I pasted a copy of this piece on a blank page in the back of a library copy of Rumi's *Masnavi*, which I got from Miša Papić. I printed it in a handsome type and put a nice black frame around it, so it looked vaguely “official.” Several months later Miša took the book from the library once again. I asked him to show it to me. The blank page in the back was torn off in anger, as testified by the ragged remnants of the page. The execution looked vaguely “official,” again. An unenlightened disciple of Rumi must have chanced upon it.

*Addendum II* (November 13, 1999)

*Il maestro Tokusan era seduto in meditazione sulla riva di un fiume. Sopraggiunse un discepolo che, avvicinandosi all'argine, gli gridò da lontano: “Buongiorno, maestro! Come stai?” Tokusan interruppe la meditazione e con il ventaglio fece segno al discepolo: “Vieni, vieni...” E si alzò, si volse e prese a costeggiare il fiume, seguendo il corso dell'acqua. Il discepolo, in quell'istante, raggiunse l'illuminazione.*

From *La tazza e il bastone: Storie Zen*, Milano: SE, 1993  
(first published in 1983), p. 92.

THE NEXT MOVE (January 29, 1995)

On our way to the British Museum, where we were going to see an exhibition of Byzantine artifacts, Lauren told me that she had been planning to talk to me about something quite serious, quite important, but that the right moment for such a talk had turned out to be difficult to find. She wanted to know whether it would be alright with me if she went ahead and told me what was on her mind. The ominous tone of this introduction notwithstanding, I hugged her and told her that I was all ears. In sum, she said that she just could not imagine us living in England for ever and that she thought that it would be good if we put a time limit to our stay here—say five years. She was not sure where she would ultimately wish to go, but she knew that it did have to be a warmer and brighter place. The last week or so the weather had been truly dismal, too. She thought we could put our minds together and spend some time looking for the right place. The few places she mentioned in passing—the Southwest in the States, where she grew up, Australia, and Istria, where she had never been—attracted me, as well. Perhaps to her surprise, I agreed with her proposal without much ado. As I told her later on, the most attractive part of this project was that we would share it for some time to come. What better way to complete the millennium?

OTTAVIANO BON (1552-1623) (February 21, 1995)

*Nacque a Venezia il 7 febbraio 1552, da Alessandro di Alvise e da Cecilia Mocenigo, secondogenito di quattordici figli. La sua famiglia, quella dei Bon di S. Barnaba, nel sestiere di Dorsoduro, era fra le più antiche e nobili della Repubblica. Suo padre, il "procurator", vissuto dal 1514 al 1576, secondo la migliore tradizione veneta aveva partecipato alla vita politica ed economica dello Stato; ma più che uomo politico, era stato un mercante e si era arricchito con i traffici marittimi a cui ben presto chiamo il Bon che, quindi, dovette interrompere l'intrapreso studio delle lettere. Egli iniziò la propria attività sul mare in un momento incerto per l'economia veneziana, minata dall'intensa concorrenza delle nazioni europee negli scali orientali, a seguito della loro penetrazione politica e mercantile dopo la guerra di Cipro del 1570. I rovesci commerciali che si manifestarono in quel tempo spinsero il Bon, come altri patrizi, ad investire parte dei propri beni in solide proprietà in terraferma, aggiungendo ai possesi a Sant'Erasmus e a Torcello quelli nel Padovano, e partecipando a vaste opere bonifiche nei territori del Polesine.*

*L'esperienza marinara, determinante per la formazione culturale e spirituale del Bon, si interruppe alla morte del padre (1576), quando il patrizio, affidata al fratello Filippo la responsabilità degli affari, riprese gli studi a Padova. Nell'ambiente universitario, vivace e ricco di fermenti culturali, il giovane patrizio, per affinità spirituale, si avvicinò ad alcuni veneziani come Luigi Lollino, Nicolò Contarini ed i fratelli Morosini, frequentando le riunioni letterarie tenute dai maestri Gian Francesco Mussato e Sperone Speroni. Proprio Andrea e Donato Morosini gli aprirono la loro casa a Venezia e in quel "ridotto" il Bon venne a contatto con Leonardo Donà, Paolo Sarpi, Giordano Bruno e, presumibilmente, con il Galilei. Completava, così, la propria formazione fra i patrizi che intendevano reagire alla lenta decadenza politica e commerciale della Repubblica.*

*Il disagio economico della Repubblica e le accese polemiche in seno all'aristocrazia contribuirono all'affermazione delle idee innovatrici di Leonardo Donà, il futuro doge, e dei nobili a lui vicini, fra cui il Bon, che in tale periodo, dall'aprile 1598 al giugno 1600, fu ripetutamente eletto savio di Terraferma.*

*L'8 luglio 1601 il Bon fu eletto ambasciatore straordinario in Spagna, con l'incarico di dirimere le controversie sorte fra la Repubblica ed il re cattolico, riguardo ai danni inferti alla navi della Serenissima dalla pirateria dei vicerè di Napoli e di Sicilia. La missione va posta in relazione alle iniziative promosse nel campo della politica estera dal gruppo sarpiano negli anni precedenti l'Interdetto. Le trattative, condotte inizialmente dall'ambasciatore ordinario Francesco Soranzo, non ebbero alcun successo per l'ambiguo atteggiamento della corte. Il Bon, resosi conto della situazione ostile, il 16 aprile 1602 annunciava*

*al Senato il fallimento dell'ambasceria, commentandone dignitosamente il risultato nella relazione del 21 dicembre dello stesso anno.*

*Il 19 giugno 1602, al suo rientro in patria, fu riammesso in Senato in qualità di savio di Terraferma, mentre più vive divenivano le preoccupazioni per i problemi giuridizionali con la S. Sede e vivacissime discussioni si accendevano soprattutto sul problema spagnolo, reso più attuale dall'esito della sua ambasceria.*

*Il 19 aprile 1604 fu eletto bailo a Costantinopoli. In quel periodo i rapporti veneto-turchi non destavano seri motivi di preoccupazione, ma dovevano aggravarsi negli anni successivi per le ingerenze della S. Sede e dell'Austria nell'Adriatico ove, fomentando la pirateria usocca, i due stati mettevano in pericolo la giurisdizione di Venezia sul Golfo ed inasprivano le relazioni con i Turchi, anch'essi danneggiati dalle incursioni corsare.*

*Ad rientro in patria, avvenuto nel 1609, l'atteggiamento conciliante tenuto dal Bon durante l'Interdetto e la sua adesione ad un programma di distensione nei rapporti con la S. Sede, fecero sì che il nunzio pontificio auspicasse la sua nomina ad ambasciatore presso la corte romana. E di quel tempo la sua ferma opposizione alle richieste di cittadinanza e di diritto a commerciare a Levanto, presentate nel maggio del 1610 dagli Olandesi, che avrebbero potuto sovvertire le tradizioni nel campo della fede e dei costumi ed intaccare le strutture stesse dello Stato. La sua posizione nei riguardi dei problemi con la S. Sede gli valse da parte del Senato l'incarico di provveditore ed inquisitore in Terraferma (17 marzo 1611), con il compito della revisione dei territori trevisano e friulano e specialmente di Ceneda, la cui sovranità era stata ed era oggetto di lunghe polemiche e contestazioni tra la Serenissima ed il papa*

*L'attività politica del Bon segna una svolta decisiva con l'ambasceria straordinaria in Francia. Ivi venne inviato l'8 aprile 1616 per affiancare l'opera dell'ambasciatore ordinario, Vincenzo Gussoni, al fine di ottenere il libero transito del passo die Gigioni, resosi necessario a Venezia per reclutare truppe d'Oltralpe, mentre ardevano i conflitti veneto-arciducate e ispano-sabaudo. Aveva, inoltre, l'incarico di patrocinare il buon diritto della Serenissima nei confronti dell'Austria che, attraverso le molestie usocche, cercava uno sbocco sul Golfo. Tale compito risultava delicatissimo in quanto era indispensabile non smuovere la suscettibilità del re cattolico e della S. Sede. La crisi francese del maggio 1616, quando Maria de' Medici si appoggiò apertamente alla Spagna, rese tuttavia vana la missione, poiché alla concessione del passo si opposero sia gli Spagnoli, sia il nunzio di Francia, cardinale Ubaldini, e le trattative, qualche tempo dopo, si arenarono.*

*Intanto diveniva problematica anche la soluzione del negoziato per la pace in Italia, intrapreso da Venezia a Madrid e, alla fine di giugno*

*1617, il Senato accettò la mediazione francese e la continuazione delle trattative a Parigi, tanto più che si erano manifestati nel basso Adriatico nuovi atti di ostilità da parte dell'Ossuna, vicerè di Napoli. Il Bon ed il Gussoni furono, quindi, incaricati di conseguire l'esecuzione del trattato di Vienna del 1612 e di procurare la restituzione di alcune galere catturate appunto dell'Ossuna.*

*Il Bon, pacifista convinto, stretto dalla necessità di concludere tempestivamente il negoziato, consentì a cedere sia sul punto delle galere, devolvendo la faccenda alla trattazione diretta con la Spagna, sia sul punto che riguardava la soluzione contemporanea dei due conflitti veneto e sabauda. A ciò lo spinsero le pressioni dei ministri francesi e del nuovo nunzio Guido Bentivoglio che, seppure legato a lui da viva amicizia, appoggiava sul piano politico la Spagna. Il Bon, inoltre, fu costretto a prendere a decisione da solo, in quanto non fu coadiuvato dal collega Gussoni, da cui lo dividevano motivi di un profondo contrasto ideologico.*

*Sebbene la pace, sottoscritta a Parigi il 6 settembre 1617 e ratificata a Madrid il 26 dello stesso mese, avesse ribadito la situazione territoriale anteriore alla guerra e, quindi, fossero stati implicitamente riconosciuti i diritti di Venezia, il Bon non aveva eseguito interamente il mandato conferitogli ed era passibile delle critiche del Senato. Il 18 settembre 1617 le pressioni dei patrizi più accesi, tra cui Nicolò Donato, Agostino da Mula, e Sebastiano Venier, fecero sì che fossero rinviati a giudizio i due ambasciatori, per rispondere del reato di trasgressione agli ordini; mentre Andrea Morosini e Agostino Nani chiesero un provvedimento più mite. Contemporaneamente fu deciso l'invio in Francia di Simone Contarini, patrizio di formazione sarpiana, deciso avversario della Curia romana e della Spagna e, oltre e tutto, nemico del Bon.*

*Il Bon, profondamente amareggiato, aveva deciso di ritirarsi a vita privata a Padova, ma dovette far fronte ad una nuova polemica del collega Gussoni. A questo rispose con la sua relazione di Francia del 1618, nella quale, assumendo personalmente ogni responsabilità, più che giustificarsi, esaminava con obiettività il dissesto politico interno, militare ed economico di Venezia e la situazione internazionale, elementi determinanti della sua condotta. Finiva così per attirarsi la censura della fazione più intransigente e soprattutto del Sarpi. Il frate, in un consulto, accusò il Bon di avere prevaricato gli ordini della Repubblica, di aver descritto in maniera dannosa e disonorevole le condizioni dello Stato veneziano, e infine di parteggiare per la Spagna. Il 28 novembre 1619 fu istituito un processo contro la persona e lo scritto del Bon che l'11 aprile 1620 fu assolto per l'intercessione dei patrizi più moderati; era decretata, tuttavia, la distruzione del suo scritto. Il provvedimento di assoluzione potrebbe significare che il comportamento del Bon fosse condiviso o giustificato da una maggioranza; mentre il decreto per la distruzione del suo scritto poteva essere suggerito, oltre che da ragioni di politica interna ed internazionale, dal timore che trapelasse qualche dura verità.*



*Nel 1619 il Bon contribuì con munificenza all'istituzione di un collegio per l'educazione dei nobili poveri. Questo valse molto probabilmente ad attirargli qualche simpatia ed a riabilitarlo, tanto che il primo marzo 1620 il Senato lo elesse podestà a Padova, una carica non molto impegnativa, ma che rappresentava una conclusione onorevole per la sua carriera. Ai primi de 1622, terminato l'incarico, fu richiamato con onore in Senato. Della sua ultima attività, tuttavia, non rimangono tracce negli atti ufficiali.*

*Il Bon morì il 19 dicembre 1623. L'ultimo atto che da lui si conosce, il testamento redatto il 15 agosto 1623, assume un alto valore spirituale e politico nella sua confessione di fede nella Chiesa di Roma. In un periodo di piena crisi religiosa in Europa, forse aveva voluto additare nell'attaccamento agli istituti tradizionali l'unico mezzo per salvaguardare le strutture e gli ordinamenti e base dello Stato. Volle, pertanto, essere seppellito in abito di cappuccino, come si conveniva ad un patrizio ossequiente ai dogmi della Chiesa.*

*Del Bon si conosce la Descrizione del serraglio del Gransignore, redatta dopo il bailaggio a Costantinopoli, in epoca imprecisata; ma più che questo lavoro, risultano importanti i suoi dispacci e relazioni inviati al Senato durante l'attività diplomatica, di rilevante valore per la conoscenza dell'epoca e dei problemi che si agitavano fra i vari stati europei ed in Turchia.*

From *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, Roma, 1969, pp. 421-24.

#### THE BUILDING OF CA' BON-REZZONICO: TOWARD A RESEARCH PROPOSAL (March 20, 1995)

As a building economist with a background in architecture and urban planning, I have been interested in the client as the key to the building team. My *Building as an Economic Process* (Prentice-Hall, 1989) is about the building process from the client's vantage point. In this research project I am interested in the family as the client. As a building client, the family behaves in ways similar to those of the modern corporation.

Venice offers many instructive examples of this phenomenon. As Richard Goy has shown in his *House of Gold: Building a Palace in Medieval Venice* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), Marin Contarini (1386-1441) of Ca' d'Oro was acting as a member of an illustrious *casada* or clan with multiple family branches that gave many doges. At the inception of the project in 1421, his father Antonio was likely to become a doge, too, having been a Procurator of San Marco since 1414. Although he ultimately lost the dogeship to Francesco Foscari in 1423,

Contarinis maintained such ambitions in the long run. A sumptuous palace on the Grand Canal was a part of the effort to place the family into the vortex of political and social life of the city. Thus, Marin Contarini must have been aware of the wider significance of his project before 1412, when he purchased from his in-laws, the Zenos, an old house not far from Rialto which was to provide the building lot for Ca' d'Oro.

As a client, a family is likely to act like a modern corporation rather than a powerful individual—say, a prince until a century or two ago, or a tycoon of the last century in Europe or America. Although a family would generally be led by one of its oldest and most illustrious members, the interests of its many members would not be the same. This is even more true of a Venetian *casada*, which often contained both rich and poor families with considerably different social roles and expectations. Something akin to the corporate building client's "schizophrenia" (this felicitous term appears in James Nisbet's *Estimating and Cost Control*, Batsford, 1961) can therefore be expected when the family is a building client. Projects can get derailed because of internal coordination problems within the client team, which compound the usual coordination problems between the client, the architect, the builder, and others in the building team. More important, powerful individuals within the same *casada* may behave strategically toward each other and even compete among themselves. This is not uncommon in the corporate world, either.

My research project focuses on the building of Ca' Bon-Rezzonico—from the grouping of two old Bon houses and other properties in the parish of San Barnaba, to design, actual construction, financial difficulties, an attempt at completing the palace, and its ultimate sale to the Rezzonico family. At least three generations of the Bon family were involved in this protracted process. This seems to be an excellent example of the family acting as the client. What is often glossed in books on architectural history as a simple turn of fortune appears to be pregnant with material worth investigating.

Questions about the demise of the Bons of San Barnaba are many. Having become a Procurator of San Marco in 1660, what did Fellippo Bon (1627-1712) have to do to start this building project in 1667 (just two years after his father, Ottavian, had died), and why did he and his heirs fail to complete it? As the project was one of the two biggest ones in the city at the time (the other one was Ca' Pesaro, also by Baldassare Longhena, built from 1679 to 1710), and given that Fellippo engaged the most famous architect in the city of his era, which Longhena undoubtedly was, what did he try to achieve with this display of wealth and power? In other words, what were his social and political ambitions?

How did his three sons—Piero (1651-1684), Giacomo (1653-1744), and Alessandro (1654-1715)—conceive of the project? How did the

intermittent war with the Ottomans affect the family, given that all of Fellippo's sons were directly involved in the fighting (in fact, Alessandro died from wounds earned in the siege of Nauplia, where he was stationed as the military commander of the entire Peloponnese)? What was the view of the project of Fellippo's son Giacomo's sons (Alessandro and Piero had none)—Pietro I (born in 1679) and Pietro II detto Fellippo (1688-1778)? How was the project perceived by all the in-laws, including the family of Giacomo Soranzo, whose daughter Francesca was Fellippo's wife; the family of Giacomo Balbi, whose daughter Chiara became Fellippo's son Alessandro's wife in 1697; the family of Antonio Nani, whose son Agostino married Fellippo's daughter Foscarina in 1677; the family of Pietro Pasqualigo, who married Giacomo's daughter Francesca in 1693; and the in-laws of Giacomo's daughter Marina, who was married in 1704?

What happened when Longhena died in 1682, by which time the palace was finished up to the first *piano nobile*? How did Fellippo's death in 1712 affect the project? Under what circumstances did Fellippo's heirs approach another leading architect of his era, Giorgio Massari, in 1745 (only a year after Fellippo's son Giacomo's death) for the completion of the work, and why did it turn out to be beyond their financial reach? Why was the building sold in 1750 rather than earlier if the family was financially distressed? What kind of deal did the Rezzonico family offer? How did the discussion with Massari five years prior to the sale result in his engagement by the Rezzonicos, for whom he ultimately completed the project in 1756, almost 90 years after its inception?

What happened to the Bon family once the property was sold off, given that they had inhabited the unfinished palace for several decades? How is it possible that one of the most prominent families in the city could be wiped out so completely by a project like this one? Did the project collapse due to the family's internal problems or to external factors outside their control? Also, how did the Bon project differ from the one of the Pesaro family?

Finally, is there anything we can learn about the corporate client today from the 17th and 18th century Venice? As many modern market institutions and forms of market organization were present in Venice of the time, can we learn anything of value about possible discoordination problems internal to the client organization facing the corporate world today?

WHERE NOTHING CAN HAPPEN EVER AGAIN (April 11, 1995)

My monomaniacal study of Venetian history has radically changed my perception of what is recent and what is ancient. The capture of Constantinople in 1204 by the crusaders led by doge Enrico Dandolo now sits close to time's navel, whereas the surrender of Venice to Napoleon in 1797 feels outright newsworthy. Now time begins to lurch

forward with the crumble of Rome, when the lagoon becomes alive with darting shadows in search of shelter from the hungry hordes that thunder up and down the Adriatic coast. The march of years is firmly established by 828, when, according to legend, two merchants from the lagoon—a Rustico from Torcello and a Bon from Malamocco—had brought from Alexandria in Egypt the stolen remains of St. Mark the Evangelist, a fulcrum of Venetian glory.[10] I go through generations like easy beads, and a millennium is but forty generations to me. And I watch my life shrink and shrink toward that edge of time where nothing can happen ever again.

FRANCESCO BON (1310?-?) (April 14, 1995)

*Nacque intorno al 1310, da Francesco (che nel 1318 era ambasciatore veneziano presso il Comune di Bologna), e fu iscritto al Maggior Consiglio nel 1336 (erra quindi il Romanin, fissando al 1333 la data della missione del Bon presso i Tattari della Crimea). Del resto, ben poco si conosce circa la sua attività fino al 1350: nel 1343 era “sapiens ordinum”, nel 1349 gli fu affidata una prima missione a Candia, di cui non conosciamo particolari. Già da questo periodo però egli dovette far valere le proprie doti, dato che appena iniziata la guerra con Genova (1350) venne inviato in Istria, con una commissione che gli conferiva pieni poteri, quale provveditore generale, per organizzare la difesa del litorale istriano: il triste recordo della sconfitta di Curzola del 1289 pesava ancora sui Veneziani, ma l'azione del Bon ebbe pieno successo e la difesa dell'Istria fu compiutamente assicurata.*

*Tornato a Venezia, il Bon partecipò a diverse commissioni e alle zonte del Senato, dimostrandosi uno dei membri più severi dei Consigli. Venne scelto tra gli elettori del doge Giovanni Gradenigo, dopo l'esecuzione per tradimento del doge Marino Falier (aprile 1355).*

*Nel 1358—allo scadere del termine di tre anni che la pace conclusa con Genova nel 1355 aveva fissato per la reciproca limitazione del commercio al di là degli Stretti e nel Mar Nero (limitazione che aveva colpito gravamente il vivace traffico veneziano in quelle regioni)—la Repubblica affidò al Bon e a Giovanni Querini la missione di trattare con il nuovo khan del Kiptchak, Berdi beg. Le istruzioni vennero fissate dal consiglio dei rogati (o Senato) il 12 aprile 1358: i due ambasciatori dovevano raggiungere Saray e chiedere al khan di ristabilire le libertates ed i privilegi del passato, così utili ad ambedue le parti. Il 21 aprile i senatori, in considerazione dei gravi danni patiti dai Veneziani nell'Impero bizantino, ordinavano al Bon e al Querini di fermarsi a Costantinopoli per richiedere con fermezza a Giovanni V Paleologo un pronto e completo risarcimento.*

*Il sindicatus (ossia l'atto solenne che conferiva il potere di porre in esecuzione i termini della commissione) veniva rilasciato agli ambasciatori in data 22 aprile. Senza aspettare il risultato della*

*missione, si provvedeva intanto già il 12 maggio 1358 agli incanti delle galee per il viaggio di Romania e del Mar Nero: l'alto livello raggiunto dagli incanti prova che gli appaltatori aspettavano forti guadagni a Tana, a Soldaia e nei porti della Crimea.*

*Mehmed Berdi beg khan fece buona accoglienza al Bon e al Querini, giunti a Soldaia ai primi di agosto, e a Saray tre settimane più tardi. Le trattative furono rapide e positive, e il nuovo patto tra i Tatars e Venezia fu concluso il 24 settembre: erano ristabiliti tutti i privilegi goduti al tempo di Djani beg khan, specialmente il libero traffico e la libera dimora a Tana, la limitazione dei diritti doganali. Inoltre il governatore della Tana, Toghlul beg (il Tolobey del documento) imponeva ai Veneziani una tassa speciale di tre sommi (circa 15 ducati) allo sbarco di ogni nave veneziana, a risarcimento dei danni subiti dai mercanti armeni sudditi dei Tatars in occasione della guerra tra Genovesi e Veneziani: beninteso tale misura era solo provvisoria, e in sostanza i mercanti veneziani potevano riprendere liberamente il traffico nel Mar Nero e nelle terre occupate dai Tatars.*

*Subito dopo il loro successo a Saray, il Bon ed il Querini si recarono presso Kotlugh Timur, nuovo signore di Solgat, per ottenerne, secondo le istruzioni ricevute dalla Signoria, nuovi vantaggi in Crimea: soprattutto, nuove facilitazioni per approdare ai migliori porti. Così la marina veneziana veniva ad acquistare piena libertà nei confronti di Genova, non avendo più bisogno di sostare a Caffa, la grande colonia Genovese. Kotlugh Timur concedeva inoltre ottime condizioni doganali nei porti del suo dominio: Provato (ossia Provando), Soldadia (ossia Sudak), e infine Otuz (identificazione probabile per il Caylitra del documento).*

*Tornato in patria, il Bon riprese la sua attività politica nei consigli. Partecipò alle discussioni sulla situazione di Creta, dove i feudatari veneti e gli arconti greci erano insorti contro la Signoria, nell'estate del 1363. E appunto a Candia fu inviato nell'ottobre 1364, per restarvi fino all'arrivo dei provveditori Piero Mocenigo, Paolo Loredan, Andrea Zeno, Lorenzo Dandolo e Giacomo Bragadin, il 25 marzo 1365: ignoriamo però il carattere dell'azione da lui svolta durante il soggiorno cretese. Non si conosce la data della sua morte.*

From *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, Roma, 1969, pp. 412-13.

#### THE PIGEON'S SWIM (September 19, 1995)

I was gazing at Ca' Bon-Rezzonico across Canal Grande from Palazzo Grassi when I noticed a dead pigeon floating on its back in the water beneath my window. As its wings moved with the waves left by the

passing *vaporetti*, it looked as though it was swimming. Thrice derived, the pigeon's swim struck me as emblematic of my elective home.

ZAGREB-LONDON (September 9, 1996)

Lauren had enjoyed Zagreb so much that she started asking about a possibility of my spending a sabbatical there. A professor from the University of Zagreb was most pleased by the news, but she immediately warned us that I would first need to learn the language. She was joking, of course.

*Addendum I* (September 14, 1996)

Marina Gržinić—a Slovene artist of Croatian origin—came to visit us in London two or three summers ago. She was the director of the Student Cultural Center in Ljubljana in its early and heroic years, and we thus had many friends in common. Lauren and I met her in the Slovene capital with one of these friends a year before Yugoslavia split up. One of the stories Marina told us in our garden in London still boggles my mind. Not long before her visit she was invited to speak at an art gathering in Zagreb. She spoke in Croatian, but an interpreter chimed in soon after she had started. Although she was eighteen when she left Croatia, the language had changed so much in the intervening couple of decades that a translation was deemed indispensable.

*Addendum II* (November 7, 1999)

When I told Marina that we were most likely related through my mother's mother, she was not amused. She explained that she was Italian, not Croatian. Her name used to be spelled Grezhinich. That is exactly what some Croats and Slovenes in Istria would do to ingratiate themselves with the Italians during the Fascist rule. Of course, the italianized spelling never fooled anyone but themselves.

*Addendum III* (May 11, 2013)

Returning to the original piece, the professor who told me that I needed to learn Croatian before taking a sabbatical in Zagreb was Mariza Katavić, whom I met through the International Building Council in the early Nineties. She organized the gathering I was attending in the Croatian capital under the auspices of the same organization. Anyhow, Mariza chuckled at her own comment about language, but she was not joking. Far from it. At the time, my Belgrade accent would not do in the Croatian capital. Years later, I had to abandon it entirely to avoid all sorts of problems in Motovun, let alone Zagreb. But it is interesting how I got reminded of this story only yesterday afternoon. I met Melita Richter in the center of the city, and she introduced me to Ruth Betlheim, who was with her. As it turned out, I met Ruth together with her late husband in mid-Nineties at Lutz Becker's in London. She got

introduced to Lutz by Želimir Košćević from Zagreb, whom I told about my troubles with language back in 1996, when we first met. And Ruth heard it from Želimir. She remembered the story to this day. A small world. Indeed, minuscule.

#### THE BRIDGE (August 11, 1997)

My father's childhood memories are now crowding his mind, and he often repeats stories that come to him over and over again. One of these is about the house his father had hired in the town of Krk on the island of Krk. The house was owned by the Gandusio family, and two old Gandusio ladies remained in the house while my father's family lodged there. The older one was Laura, and the younger was Teresa. They had a nephew, a priest from Venice, who occasionally came to visit them. His name was Don Lino Gandusio. The house across the street was owned by the Balbi family, from the illustrious Venetian clan, and a certain Pozzo Balbi was my grandfather's closest friend. The Gandusio and the Balbi households were very close for many years, if not centuries, and there was a bridge across the street connecting the two houses. However, one day something happened, and both families walled off the doors toward the bridge. This was long before my father's family arrived there. My father only remembers that flower pots with dried-up plants could still be seen on that walled-off bridge when he was a little boy.

#### LIKE A GHOST (October 13, 1997)

It is stunning what effect a good map of Venice has on me. The more precise the map, the more potent the magic. The tangled geometry of familiar places draws me inward like a magnet, and the lines and colors of the map instantly dissolve into sharp images. As soon as I land on a square, I can pick my way along canals and across bridges until I take off at another point I have visited time and again. I know every stone on the way, and I can hear and smell the city as I glide through it like a ghost. But some places attract my visits more often than others. One of them is the path from Campo San Barnaba *via* Ponte dei Pugni to Campo Santa Margherita; another is the way between Campo dei Mori and Campo de la Madona de l'Orto across the Rio of the same name; yet another is the path from Campo Santa Maria Formosa *via* Ruga Giuffa to Fondamenta de l'Osmarin with a stunning view of Palazzo Priuli. This is where many of my flights begin and end. On occasion I get lost, the magic melts away, and the map suddenly surfaces again. I crash. These are the places I make sure to investigate the next time I have a chance to visit Venice.

### THE SOUTH OF SOUTHS (December 16, 1997)

I love Italy, but I have never ventured south of Rome. In less than two weeks we will go to Sicily—the south of souths. And I feel the shade of excitement that borders on, well, alarm. The south has always seemed distant, foreign, intoxicating to the point of being hazardous, even treacherous, but I have never been aware of these sentiments. The impending trip to Sicily has brought them to light. An atavistic fear, perhaps. The fear of sailing out of the Adriatic, the Gulf of Venice of old. The fear of the open seas swarming with Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Genoese and Pisans, Turks, Spaniards... The fear of the south itself...

### “I LIKE IT” (January 29, 1998)

Thus I to myself last night, just as I was falling asleep, and thus a girl of about fifteen I saw and heard at the same time. We both responded to a thought or decision of mine, which unfortunately evaporated by the morning. Her hair was pulled back. Wearing a dark dress, which I could see only from her waist up, she stood directly in front of me. She had a high, round forehead, a prominent nose, and brilliant, dark eyes. Her skin was Mediterranean. I recognized her instantly. She was I.

### *Addendum* (February 11, 2000)

I was looking at one of my ancestors, perhaps not a distant one. From her dress and demeanor, as well as the make of the stone wall behind her, I guessed we were separated by a few centuries only. There was no doubt in my mind that I was looking at someone who had somehow survived in me, stayed in my body for all these years. And that delighted me, enchanted me, brought me to ecstasy. Not only because she was I, but also because I was she. We were one. We were a part of the same line, same chain, same flow of life. But the greatest surprise of this encounter was that there was no surprise, no revelation. I was faced with calm and easy certainty. I was faced with a simple fact of experience.

### MY MISTRESSES (February 9, 1998)

Lauren gave me a book about Venice for our anniversary. “One of your mistresses I do not mind,” she wrote in dedication. How many mistresses does she think I have? Verona, Padova, Bologna, Genova, Firenze, Siena, Perugia...

### THE BUILDERS OF VENICE (February 15, 1998)

When you fly over Venice, you realize the city is much smaller than you remember it. But it was not meant to be seen from the clouds. Had the



builders of Venice had an inkling of our ways, they would have designed it quite differently. In the event, the city would have appeared to you exactly as large as you remembered it, and perhaps even larger.

#### PROPHETIC (March 16, 1998)

If Venice is reality (or, as some claim, the past), then the future with all its aliases is excluded from it. And perhaps nothing proves this better than modern art, whose poverty alone makes it prophetic. A poor man always speaks for the present, and perhaps the sole function of collections like Peggy Guggenheim's and the similar accretions of this century's stuff habitually mounted here is to show what a cheap, self-assertive, ungenerous, one-dimensional lot we have become, to instill humility in us: there is no other outcome thinkable against the background of this Penelope of a city, weaving her patterns by day and undoing them by night, with no Ulysses in sight. Only the sea.

From Joseph Brodsky's *Watermark*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992, p. 114.

#### SPELLING (March 23, 1998)

Last week I searched the World Wide Web for any and all connections to my family name. When I searched under "Marko Bon," I found several references to my No. 1 son's participation in a debate on drinking at Brown University a couple of years ago. It appears he was one of the champions of the freedom to drink on the campus. I also found a reference to my son's namesake in the Web pages about the Adriatic island of Korčula, which was in Venetian hands for many centuries. According to Živan Filipi, who put together the Korčula Web site, on June 10, 1715, which was a nice and sunny day, some 260 Turkish pirates disembarked from two galleys in the port of Brna and started to plunder the countryside and burn the houses. It is entirely possible these were not pirates, as the attack took place during the last war between Venice and Turkey—the so-called Crete War (Guerra di Candia), which began in 1714 and ended with the Venetian defeat and loss of Crete in 1718. At any rate, the assailants set on fire several houses in Smokvica in the hills above the port, one of which was the parish priest's. The priest, a certain don Marko Bon of Žrnovo, attacked the pirates and killed two of them. He was soon captured and afterwards sold on the slave market in Ulcinj, further down the Adriatic coast. Two years later the priest's family managed to buy him back. The honorific "don" and the subsequent sale into slavery suggests Venetian nobility, which means that the priest's first name must have been spelled "Marco," rather than the Slavic "Marko." However, I would never have found this story had I spelled the name correctly.

#### ILLUMINATING (June 12, 1998)

She was shy when I started fumbling with her bra, but she did not resist being undressed. As soon as both of us were naked, she insisted that the curtains be drawn shut. When I asked her in a whisper why she shaved her pubic hair, she told me she liked being neat. Indeed, everything about her was neat—her hair, her clothing, her shoes. She was a bit more relaxed about displaying herself by the morning, but she still refused spreading her legs open for me to peer into her pussy. She was happy to let me lick her, though. When the sun was already beating against the heavy curtains and piercing into the room in a few places, I turned around in bed, lied down on my back, and pulled her on top of me facing the other way. Lanky and nimble, she responded with ease to my desires. As she straddled my head, I spread her labia open with both hands, and started to lick her. She fondled my cock on the other side. From time to time I would stop licking and sucking her to take a good look of her pussy. It appeared luscious in the twinkling morning light illuminating it from the window. Her many folds were unusually delicate and fine, each one of them distinct and resilient under my tongue and fingers. The bulge of her clitoris was prominent among the dainty but springy labia. Having had my fill of this marvelous sight, I crawled from under her, turned around again, and snuggled up to her. “You have a gorgeous pussy,” I whispered playfully. She just blinked at me with a languid smile, but a few moments later she still refused to spread her legs when I tried to take another good look of her delectable crotch.

#### WITH FEELING (June 29, 1998)

As the time for us to part drew nearer, I took to caressing first her legs and then her feet. Dainty feet for a tall woman. Narrow and smooth feet. I noticed that her little toes were a bit red on the outside. When I lifted her left foot to my eyes and touched the red skin with my index finger, she whispered: “That hurts me a little.” Touched, jarred by her tender flesh, I brought her foot to my lips. Just before she put her stockings back on, I reached for her toes once again and kissed them goodbye with feeling.

#### *Addendum* (February 27, 2018)

Twenty years later, the little toe on her left foot is a bit red still. And it hurts her a little, as well. Which is why it remains one of our strongest ties. I caress and kiss all of her toes whenever I get a chance, but I keep focusing on the most tender among them. With feeling, as ever. In spite of all the marvels of evolution, we are nothing but monkeys. Well, primates. And pain unites us without fail. Enough, though. In a few short hours, my beloved and I will be together again. After she takes her shower, we will spend the evening together. And I will be all over

her feet for hours. The little toe on her left foot will surely get all the care I can muster.

#### IN PRAISE OF MY MOTHER (July 8, 1998)

How good is my mother? She is so good that she has beamed at me sweetly seconds after Croatia lost to France in the World Cup semi-finals: "Now people in Serbia will sleep better." Yugoslavia—that is, Serbia plus Montenegro—got disqualified by Holland two rounds earlier in the football tournament. My mother is from Croatia. Actually, she is from Istria, where justice appears to be the supreme virtue.

#### AVOIDING (July 22, 1998)

We were talking about my father's childhood over dinner. "Were there any nice girls on the island of Krk?" I prodded him. "Well," he said wisely, "there were some nice ones there, too." I wanted to know more. "Well," he smiled devilishly, "there was one I liked very much." "He used to know her name," my mother chimed in, "but now he has forgotten it." As it turned out, she had forgotten it, too. I wanted to know more. "Well," he giggled, "I would throw animal droppings at her whenever I spotted her." I wanted to know more. "Well," he raised his eyebrows, "I would grab anything that was at hand—goat, sheep, or donkey droppings." "How did she respond to your courtship?" I asked. "Well," he joined the uproar around the table with an innocent shrug, "she took to avoiding me!"

#### JOHANNIS BON OR BONUS (September 20, 1998)

Having nothing better to do, this evening I rummaged through many a section of a bookstore not far from Hereford Road. Among the books I picked for closer scrutiny was a magnificent two-volume edition on Venetian art and architecture edited by Giandomenico Romanelli,[11] a renowned student of the subject. One of his books, coauthored with Filippo Pedrocco, which I know rather well is about Ca' Bon-Rezzonico, one of my old flames. Returning to the new book, in the exhaustive index I found a Bon I have not known about—a certain Johannis Bon or Bonus. He had worked on S. Marco as a painter. He is documented between 1185 and 1212. That appears to be all that is known about him. But the Latin version of the family name suddenly struck me as novel and even strange, that is, as strikingly redolent of its Roman origin. The next thing that went through my mind was the Latin proverb of great vintage: *penis bonus pax in domus*. Alas!

*Addendum* (August 15, 2004)

Whenever this proverb comes up around the merry table, and it usually comes up with my help, Zvonimir Milanović, known to all as Zvonko, points out that it is incorrect. In spite of the helpful rime, the last word should be *domo* rather than *domus*. Zvonko is certainly correct. He knows his Latin. After all, he teaches it at the University of Pula. However, a Google search yields interesting findings in this regard. First, the correct version of the proverb is nowhere to be found. Second, the incorrect version is quite popular in Central Europe: Germany, Poland, Hungary, and most parts of former Yugoslavia. In other words, this mangled proverb is of recent origin, and it is spreading from Central Europe. As it comes up often in websites from Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia, it is quite likely that its cradle is someplace in former Yugoslavia. Latin teachers beware: the proverb is spreading!

SEPARATING AND UNITING (October 14, 1998)

Speaking yesterday for Yugoslav television, Slobodan Milošević announced his “victory” over NATO in front of a painting of Venice. I caught only a few glimpses of it on British television, but it appeared to be a good copy of Canaletto in need of thorough cleaning. A calculated and deliberate man, and a man given to myth and legend, Milosevic must have carefully considered the symbolism behind the painting he selected to back him on this occasion. Besides, the symbolism had to work both within and without his orbit. To those inside, the painting had to speak of culture and civility behind power and resolve, and to those outside it had to speak of decadence and impotence behind culture and civility. The paradox of Venice, the gate separating and uniting the worlds of yesteryear, must have struck him as prophetic in its directness and simplicity.

JOYFULLY (November 23, 1998)

If on the great journey of life a man cannot find one who is better or at least as good as himself, let him joyfully travel alone: a fool cannot help him on his journey.

From *The Dhammapada*, translated by Juan Mascaró,  
Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973, p.  
44.

FAMILY (December 6, 1998)

My father remembers that one of their neighbors in Krk, and one of his father’s best friends, was a certain Pozzo Balbi. *Pozzo* means “well” in

Italian, so this could have been a nickname. Balbi is a Venetian patrician name, like Bon. It is interesting to note that a certain Alessandro, son of Fellippo, son of Ottavian Bon, was married to Chiara, daughter of Giacomo Balbi, in 1697.[12] Given that Venetian patriciate was very much interrelated through marriage, there must have been many more Bon-Balbi links I am yet to discover. It is also of some interest that Giacomo Casanova, who was imprisoned in the Palazzo Ducale in 1755, escaped from prison in 1756 with a certain Father Balbi. All this comes to mind as I am going through a bottle of Malbec wine produced at the Balbi Winery and Vineyard in San Rafael, Mendoza, Argentina. Family, no doubt. The wine is far from bad.

*VIVA LENIN* (December 17, 1998)

When my mother was a little girl, the kids from her home town would sing in the street: “*Viva Lenin, chi ga inventá beber, magnar senza lavorar.*” Practically instantaneously, the joke had reached every corner of the globe, including Pazin, the capital of Istria.

*Addendum* (July 24, 2016)

As my beloved and I were sitting on my terrace and staring at the Mirna valley below, the first words of the old song came to me out of the blue: “*Viva Lenin...*” And then the rest of it followed without a glitch. Before I went to my laptop in the house and searched for the first words, I recited the whole song to my beloved and explained where it came from. As I learned a short while later, this piece was written the very year we met. And I have forgotten about the song in the meanwhile. In fact, I do not remember recalling it a single time over the intervening eighteen years. The mysteries of memory...

IN PRAISE OF SENSORY DEPRIVATION (February 7, 1999)

“The Vertical Line” by John Berger and Simon McBurney—commissioned by Artangel and staged in the disused Aldwych Tube Station on the Strand—is conceived as an underground journey to the Chauvet cave in France, painted some twenty-five millennia ago. According to the advertisements for the event, Berger and McBurney will guide you there using lights, sounds, drawings, animals, words, and darkness. Disregarding the exuberant boast, they will still lead you to a magical place in the tangled entrails of London, where silence and darkness do conspire to a true stage for prehistoric art. Standing but a few paces from our thundering guides, last night I prayed that the deep darkness into which we were finally plunged would last and last. More, I prayed that they would let the audience strung along a narrow tunnel experience the thick, oozing silence of that forsaken place. This was not to be—not this time, at least—but I am still grateful to Berger and

McBurney for whetting my appetite for sensory deprivation in its purest, least compromising form.

#### PACIFIC AND ATLANTIC (April 29, 1999)

The last time we met she had a bit of a tan, which made her look even more blonde than I remembered her. The pattern of golden stubble on her tawny skin reminded me of little arrows in maps showing the direction of ocean currents. The Pacific was on her belly, and on her chest, the Atlantic.

#### BACK AND FORTH (May 31, 1999)

Yesterday I met a fellow from Venice. He was roughly my age, or perhaps a little older. When he heard that my family was from Venice, as well, and that I grew up in Belgrade, he immediately warmed up to me. He told me about an old girlfriend of his from Belgrade, who had meant a great deal to him. “She was crazy,” he boasted with a wink. Then we turned to the war in the Balkans, and it was clear he was far from unsympathetic to the anti-NATO sentiments in Belgrade. “Still,” he added, “they see the Kosovo crisis in a peculiar way, even though they regularly watch CNN and Sky News.” As an example, he mentioned that he had heard from some friends in Belgrade that the number of refugees fleeing Kosovo was so improbably large that the only explanation for the interminable columns shown on television was that they were shuttling back and forth across the border. “Back and forth,” he repeated with another wink.

#### MY LITTLE WOMAN, MY LITTLE WIFE (June 8, 1999)

She came to me as I was walking around the park this morning. It was bright and lush everywhere around me. Suddenly, I saw her on her elbows and knees and I felt the sweet tightness, the tight sweetness, in my groin. I felt my hands on her hips, her waist, her breasts. The last time we were together, less than two weeks ago, she turned around and presented her tail with disarming generosity and ease at the slightest indication of my wish. “Thank you my little woman, thank you my little wife,” I kept repeating as I poked deep, deeper, now to the left, now to the right. “I love you, I love you,” I kept repeating as I strode through the park, my eyes shut, my groin tingling, my mind reeling.

#### CUNNING AND CONNIVING (June 11, 1999)

As any Homer’s contemporary would have guessed without trying, Odysseus was an unlucky man, graced by neither heroic victory nor defeat, the only alternative worthy of a Greek man, who saved his life

by sheer cunning, an unlikely trait for a true and mighty warrior, and who survived only to suffer the bitter fruits of mere survival. By the standards of the bard's time, the king of Ithaca was an anti-hero—perhaps the first one ever to grab our attention. As any contemporary would have guessed without trying, Odysseus was the harbinger of a new and despicable order, in which cunning and conniving would be sufficient for bare subsistence. They would also have guessed, albeit with foreboding bordering on disgust, that Odysseus would forever remain a puzzle for the depraved generations to come. But they would never have fathomed, no matter how hard they tried, no matter how long they labored, that Homer's song was shaped by generations long gone.

#### WAVING (July 14, 1999)

Every year the Hill House School in London brings together teachers, pupils, and parents at the Field Day, a sports event on the grounds of Duke of York's Headquarters not far from Sloane Square and the school itself. The Field Day ends with a display of flags, where one-thousand-odd children in all years wave their own national flags. For the second year in a row, Dorian displayed the Venetian flag. Before the event, I worried a bit about the size of the flag Lauren and I once brought from Venice for my father, because it was a bit bigger than the school's strict requirement, but today I realized that the rules are not honored by many parents. For instance, a little girl in the front row was waving an enormous Turkish flag. The next time I go to Venice I will bring the biggest flag I can find. La Serenissima is not dead yet!

#### LOST AND FOUND (July 15, 1999)

This evening I wrote down everything my mother could remember about her family. We were going back and forth, from her parents' families to her siblings' families. The story begins in central Istria and ends mainly in Trieste and Venice, not too far from the hearth, but many of her relatives on both sides have vanished after they have left for North and South America or Australia. I am sure the stories these people remember are similar to the one I am now recording, but different names are missing, different family ties are in doubt. If we would ever meet, we would not even think of kinship, for each branch of all the related families could not go back farther than a few generations. Even if one goes back to one's great-grandparents, one has to contend with eight family names. If one goes forward from those eight venerable ancients, one is already dealing with hundreds of people living today. Which is why it is more practical, as well as more in line with the way things really are, to treat everyone one ever meets as a relative lost and found.

*“HOĆES, NEĆEŠ, MORASŠ”* (July 25, 1999)

Lauren and I met Emma Walker at one of Giles Prince’s Futurist dinners in his shop on Cheshire Street off Brick Lane in Whitechapel, and I immediately declared her family. She is from Australia, but her maternal grandparents are from Rijeka or Fiume, the largest city on the Croatian side of the Istrian peninsula, where much of my family, especially from my mother’s side, still lives. Emma’s grandparents think of themselves as Italians, but they are of Croatian origin, as one look at Emma would testify. We met for dinner last night, and then we went to a party at Dani Tinero’s. In the taxi, Emma told us that her grandmother has become very senile, like my father. She first lost her English, and then her Italian. Now she speaks only Croatian, which no-one around her understands. One phrase she repeats often, Emma told us, is *“hoćes, nećeš, morasš.”* Actually, she says *“oćeš,”* betraying her rural origin. This expression—which Emma had thought was gibberish, but which Lauren understood immediately, as well—can be roughly translated as “whether you want it or not, you must.” An early lesson well learned. We laughed and laughed.

*Addendum* (July 26, 1999)

Lauren did not feel well, and so she left the party early. Giles, who was already there when the three of us arrived, left with her, because he needed to prepare for the Sunday market day, when many people come to his shop. Emma and I left shortly afterwards, because she had to get to Waterloo before midnight, when she thought she had a train for Greenwich, where she is staying for a while. I took her to Paddington. When we settled down in the taxi, I took her hand. She did not resist. Arm in bare arm, we trundled through the dark and empty streets of S. John’s Wood. At the entrance to the tube at Paddington, we held each other in a tight embrace for a long, long time. I do not remember what we said, but we certainly promised to see each other soon. As soon as possible.

ON MY SLOVENE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY (August 10, 1999)

My Slovene is not bad. Given that I left Ljubljana, after four years there, some twenty years ago, my Slovene is actually surprisingly good. I can express myself rather well even on complex issues. However, I do make many mistakes, many of which have to do with my Serbo-Croatian background. The longer I speak, the more this becomes obvious. After a longish talk with some of the people I would meet in the mountains, they would politely ask me where I was from. And I have found a formula that makes them happy: I tell them that my parents are from Istria, but that I have lived abroad for much of my life. When I throw in America and England, as well, all the suspicions of my Serbian or Croatian origins melt away. In Slovenia, Istria is thought of as almost home.



TALL AND FAT (September 26, 1999)

In Sveti Antun we met two sisters, among the last inhabitants of this small town perched in the rocks above the eastern coast of Istria. The older is eighty-eight and the younger, who did most of the talking, is in her early eighties. She was not eager to report her exact age. They offered us some excellent grape brandy of their own on the veranda of their dilapidated house. When we were about to depart, I asked the sisters to let me take their picture for my mother, who would have enjoyed meeting them. They promptly ran into their kitchen. Pictures were out of the question, the younger one muttered from the darkness. "When I was younger," she explained, "I was tall and fat." She was in no condition to be photographed any longer.

TRIESTE-LONDON (September 29, 1999)

On our way home from Istria and Venice we have cried a lot in each other's arms. Whatever happens to our marriage, we are very much in love with each other. Perhaps love is not enough, but it goes a long way toward making life bearable.

ABSYRTOS (October 3, 1999)

Years ago my father told me about two boats his family still had on the island of Krk when he was a little boy. One was called *Stella Diana*, that is, Morning Star or Venus, and the other *Absirto*. He did not know where this name came from.

The connection came to me only last week, while we were on the island of Cres. Lauren was driving, and our friend, Dragoslav Kožul, who was our guide through Istria and Cres, was sitting behind us. Suddenly I realized that the name of the family boat was the same as the Greek name of the island, which I found in a tourist guide of the Adriatic coast. Lauren and Dragoslav kept grinning at me as I was excitedly telling them about my discovery.

The Greeks believed the Argonauts had reached as far as the Istrian islands—Krk, Cres, and Rab. After stealing the Golden Fleece, Jason and Medea are said to have fled to this region. Medea's brother, Absyrtos, caught up with them. Medea convinced him to negotiate, but she was only waiting for an opportunity to kill him. Absyrtos' body was chopped up into pieces and thrown into the sea. This is said to be the origin of Cres and many islands surrounding it. The Greek name for the island was thus Absyrtos, which would be Absirto in Italian. However, the Italian name for the island is Cherso.

SONGS AND DANCES (October 25, 1999)

Few things are as sad as happy songs and dances from Krk, the Adriatic island where my father was born.[13]

*Addendum* (August 26, 2002)

I am listening to the same compact disk after a long pause. The music is sinking deeper and deeper. I got the disk from Dragoslav Kožul in April 1999. Looking back, I can see how hard he has been working to get me back to Istria.

IACCOBVS BON IOANNIS (December 19, 1999)

This morning I returned to the basilica of San Nicola to see the crypt where the Russian saint's relics are held. The first time I came to this Romanesque wonder I missed the crypt. Today is Sunday, and I witnessed the orthodox service, singing and all. On my way out of the church, to the left of the door, I noticed a niche with a painting of St. Jerome in his study, the old lion at his feet. I stopped in front of it, and then I saw my own name on the tomb under the painting:

DOMINVS IACCOBVS BON IOANNIS ALME  
HVIVS ECCLESIE CANONICVS ET SCHOLE  
PRIFECTVS DIVI HIEROMYMI SERVADIS  
OSSIBVS VIVENS HEC PONI IVSSIT ISIO

Under the text I saw a coat of arms that I have seen never before. It was divided into two fields, one on top of another. The upper field showed the upper part of a lion with gaping jaws and raised paws facing left. The lower half was divided into three horizontal stripes. There was nothing else on the tomb. Most important, there was no indication when the tomb was placed there.

Not far in the old city of Bari I found a small church called San Marco dei Veneziani, which was built in the Eleventh century. Having liberated Bari from the Saracens in 1002, the Venetians were allowed to provide a church to their colony there. I was looking for Bons, but I found a little church only recently refurbished. Everything in it was brand new. One-thousand years of memory obliterated forever.

ANGELS (January 19, 2000)

My mother talks about her nursery in Pazin, the capital of Istria, where she was born in the last decade of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with a certain amount of pride. A Czech couple ran it. Close to ninety years ago, my mother and one of her brothers enjoyed all kinds of colorful toys and games that would be difficult to imagine in many parts of the

world even today. Having revisited some of these delights, this evening she mentioned something I had not heard from her before. The nursery, located across the street from her home, had a big metal sign above the door showing in bas-relief several children playing. An old peasant woman coming regularly to the market in Pazin would always stop in front of the nursery sign, get down to her knees in the middle of the road, press her hands together and hold them up, and pray for a while. To the amusement of the children from the nursery, the peasant woman was convinced the children on the sign represented angels.

DESIRE (February 4, 2000)

Crowning the succulent, smooth mound of many a delicate fragrance, a dense row of fine, sparkling beads of limpid, viscous liquid running along a tight, neat slit lined with soft, blond stubble that has escaped the razor.

AS HUMDRUM AS REALITY (June 25, 2000)

I dreamt that I was trying to call a relative from the States—a son of Ljubo Tudor, whose father came to the island of Krk from the Island of Hvar in the Adriatic around the turn of the century and who married my father's aunt Sophia. The phone rang for a long time, and then a message kicked in, to the effect that my relative could be reached between two-thirty and four-thirty in the afternoon. As I was listening to the message I realized that my relative was actually talking into the receiver, but he hung up before I managed to say anything. Then I dreamt that I woke up and that I told Lauren how some dreams are as humdrum as reality itself. When I actually woke up, she was still sleeping by my side.

ADIO (July 30, 2000)

On their way out of a mountain hut, a couple of Slovene boys shout goodbye to one of the girls working there: "*Adio!*" "*Adio!*" she shouts back happily. Adopted from Italian, this is a standard thing to say in Slovenia when people are parting, even if they will see each other again soon afterwards. A couple of Italians sitting next to me are scandalized: "*Che brutto!*" In Italian, this expression is reserved only for situations when people are parting for ever, or at least for an indefinite period of time. It is reserved for ports, train or bus stations, airports. Otherwise, they say "*ciao.*" Chances are the meaning of the expression that is now considered ugly, or even uncouth, has changed over time, and that the Slovenes are using it in a way in which the Italians used it until quite recently, when they parted with it for ever, or at least for an indefinite period of time.

*Addendum* (January 1, 2001)

Roberto Pietroforte reminds me that the correct spelling of this word in Italian is *addio*, not *adio*. He concedes that Slovenes may actually use the latter spelling. Indeed they do, but the reason for this is interesting in its own right. This parting word has come to Slovenia from Veneto *via* Friuli and Istria. Double letters, which must be of Tuscan origin, are virtually unknown there, both in pronunciation and in writing. You can indeed hear them in Tuscany. Now that the “correct” Italian is a bit less popular than it was some fifty years ago, many people in Italy are reverting to their vernacular languages. They are coming back even in literature. Some people I know in Veneto, Friuli, and Istria do not bother about double letters any longer. At any rate, when the parting word came to Slovenia so many years ago, it was probably neither pronounced nor written *in lingua*, the way standard Italian is typically referred at the borders of north-eastern Italy. In short, the Slovene spelling is fine as it is.

TO ISTRIA! (August 4, 2000)

The weather in Slovenia is so bad, and the weather forecast even worse, that we have abandoned our plans to climb together with the children. Instead, we will rent a car and drive to Istria, which is only a couple of hours south from the Slovene-Italian-Austrian border, close to which we are now. To lessen the disappointment, which is especially acute in Dorian's case, Lauren is telling the children that Istria is where I come from. Besides, it is sunny down there. So, everyone is ready to leave the misty mountains. To Istria! To Istria!

“A FAMILY IN SEARCH OF SUMMER” (August 5, 2000)

Thus Lauren with a sigh this morning. We fled from Slovenia because of rain, but it is raining in Istria, too. London everywhere! London forever!

TEMPORARY PROPERTY RIGHTS (August 6, 2000)

Twenty paces from our house in Moščenička Draga in Istria, across the pebble beach, there gurgles the Adriatic. I was the first in the water this sunny morning, but the beach was already alive with holiday-makers establishing their temporary property rights with towels, mats, umbrellas, foldable chairs and beds... Even at six-thirty this morning it was clear every inch of this wonderful beach will be fiercely contested soon after breakfast.

#### A ZOOLOGICAL PHENOMENON (August 7, 2000)

Sipping cold beer at the edge of the beach in Mošćenička Draga and watching the sprawled bodies stretching as far as I can see in both directions, I cannot avoid a feeling that I am observing a zoological phenomenon of great simplicity: most of these people come from places where the sun is scarce. This applies to me, as well, but I still refuse to see myself in any other rôle but that of an impartial observer, if not a student of animal behavior.

#### SEAGULLS AND PEOPLE (August 8, 2000)

If you throw bread to a group of seagulls, the dominant one will get all of it. To adjust for this obvious injustice, people throw bread to each individual seagull and make sure that most of the bread goes to the least aggressive bird. In the name of justice, the dominant seagull now gets nothing. Not a crumb.

#### GLAGOLITHIC ALPHABET (August 12, 2000)

On our return from Istria to Slovenia a few days ago we stopped for lunch at Hum, the self-styled smallest town in the world. Lauren wanted our children to see where my mother's mother was born. Her surname was Gržinić, and the cemetery is crowded with tombstones bearing this family name. The restaurant, where Lauren and I had dinner late last year, overlooks the lush Istrian countryside that must have looked rather similar when my grandmother was there. Hum is now one of the centers of Glagolitic alphabet, brought to these parts in the Ninth Century by Cyril and Methodius, who also spread Cyrilic alphabet in their attempt to Christianize the Southern Slavs. The Glagolitic writing enjoyed a revival when my father's forebears arrived from Venice to Cres, or Cherso in Italian, on the island by the same name. This was in the Sixteenth Century. The revival lasted only a couple of centuries, and thus many of the documents pertaining to the Bons are in this alphabet. In the museum *cum* gallery in Hum I bought a little book about the town and the Glagolitic script. I am trying to learn it now. It is time to delve a bit deeper into my family's history. Besides, the Glagolitic letters— or, rather, characters—are wonderful examples of entoptic forms and thus great subjects for my paintings. I have already painted a fair number of them earlier this year, and I plan to explore them in much greater depth.

#### ALL THESE NAMES, ALL THESE FACTS (December 7, 2000)

My mother just got a call from Trieste. It was Carmen, her sister Nada's daughter. Carmen's father and my mother's brother-in-law, Ettore, died two days ago. They found my mother's recent letter among his personal

effects, as the expression goes. He was a few months her senior. Nada, who was four years younger than my mother to the day, died more than seven years ago, a few days before Dorian's first birthday. Carmen is married to Aldo, the son of my mother's brother Radovan. Yes, this is possible in Italy, but only with the Pope's permission, which they dutifully petitioned for and obtained. The last time Radovan's wife and Aldo's mother, Silvia, heard from him was just after the war. He was passing through Trieste with his second wife, a Russian woman he had met someplace in Germany. They were on their way to Venezuela, where they later had two sons. No-one in the family has any idea what has become of them. Carmen and Aldo have a son, Roberto, who teaches philosophy in a small town close to Udine in Friuli. And all these names, all these facts about people I have never met, and will in all likelihood never meet, burst in unannounced this quiet evening among evenings just because one among them had died a couple of days ago in Trieste!

*DE SANTA LUCIA A NADAL UN PIE' DE GAL* (December 13, 2000)

Thus an old proverb from Istria—and most likely Veneto, as well—that my mother recalls from time to time. Santa Lucia is today, the day my parents got married sixty-four years ago in Zagreb. This was ten years before I was born in the same town. The war came in between, of course. *Nadal*, or *Natale* in Italian, is Christmas. That is, from St. Lucy's to Christmas only a cock's step, which is to say, not very much. All this came up again this morning, when I wished my mother a happy anniversary. She thanked me in the name of my father, too.

CLARITY AND ALACRITY (December 18, 2000)

Returning home from a café on Broad Street in Reading I cursed my luck with weather, as I do a bit more often than I would wish. It is truly abysmal in this part of England around Christmas. It is rarely cold, and it snows only every two or three years, but it is wet most of the time, and it is often dark even around noon. The dejected, pasty faces bobbing wearily through the murk complete the picture. "Old boy," a boisterous and chummy voice popped in out of the blue, "where would you rather be?" The answer was hardly novel, but it still surprised me by its clarity and alacrity: "Venice! Venice!" "But," the first voice stalled a bit, "Venice and Reading are not that different in the winter!" "Nor are the faces," it added in the same breath. "I know, I know," the second voice sighed, "but the sounds, the smells, the sights are different enough—in fact, they are as different as they can be!" "Well," the first voice began to falter, "maybe one day, with some luck..." When the dialogue petered out, I began wondering again about this absurd nostalgia of mine, if this is what it actually is. To wit, how can I feel so blue about a city in which I have never even lived?

N'ANCHE 'L MUS NO LA VOL PORTAR LA BARETA MILITAR  
(December 22, 2000)

Thus my mother to herself this morning as she was putting on her coat to go out shopping. Her beret reminded her of this line from her childhood. In Italian, donkey is *asino*, but in Istria—and perhaps in Veneto, as well—it was *mus* or *muso*. My mother is not sure any more whether or not the entire song to which this line belonged had an anti-fascist tone, but the connection with Mussolini is evident here—if even the big boss would not wish to join the military, why should I have to? At any rate, lines like this one, which now surprise and delight my mother almost daily, all have one feature in common—they rime. Rime is about memory. And so was poetry, once upon a time.

DÜRER, PANOFSKY, ELKINS, AND I (December 31, 2000)

In the last chapter of James Elkins' *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing*,<sup>[14]</sup> there is a diagram reproduced from Erwin Panofsky's *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*,<sup>[15]</sup> which purports to show the interplay of the northern and southern influences on Dürer's art.<sup>[16]</sup> By the way, north and south are reckoned with respect to the Alps, the European bumpy equator. The horizontal axis shows time, and it stretches from 1495 to 1520—Dürer's artistic career. The vertical axis shows the two influences and their sum. The northern influence is predominant at first. It goes through two peaks before plummeting for the third and last time. The southern influence mirrors the above pattern and ends up triumphant. Unfortunately, as well as humorously, the sum of the two influences is drawn with complete lack of understanding of how to add two curves, but that is not my main concern at present. Now, Elkins enlightens us by pointing out that the interplay of northern and southern influences is actually essential for understanding Panofsky's art history rather than Dürer's art. If I were an art historian, I would attempt to show that this interplay is, in fact, essential for understanding Elkins' writing about art history as writing rather than Panofsky's art history or Dürer's art. Being an artist, albeit a reluctant and petulant one, I will merely adopt Panofsky's diagram to my own art. The diagram itself delights me in its mind-numbing simplicity, demonstrating the diagrammatic character of my own preoccupation with northern and southern influences. In my own diagram, which is so simple that it does not need any visual props, and their potentially embarrassing incongruities, the northern influence is predominant at first, as well. However, this influence steadily diminishes while the southern influence, negligible at first, steadily increases. I should point out that I reckon north and south with respect to the Mediterranean, the center of the classical world, rather than the Alps. The sum of the above two curves, which mirror each other again, has a single trough in the middle. This is roughly where I think I am at present, as the two influences are about evenly matched. From here on, I will be following Dürer on the last leg of his journey.

## THE OLD ISTRIAN DIALECT (January 2, 2001)

“*Ciao*,” I waved at my mother from the kitchen door after I washed the dishes we had used for lunch. She was still sitting at the kitchen table, but she was about to take her afternoon nap. “*Ti va su*,” she said, knowing that I was going to my room upstairs to read and write. “*Me ne vo*,” I grinned. She grinned back and waved at me happily. The joys of the old Istrian dialect!

## REPORTING (February 6, 2001)

In addition to a wide variety of books, most of which are classics, my mother reads all kinds of newspapers and magazines in several languages. Every night she also listens to the radio. She reports to me in the morning, before I leave for work, and in the evening, after I return home. Much of the world news I get from her. Over dinner this evening she told me several things she thought were of special interest. In particular, she reported on the conflict between truffles hunting and golf in some parts of her native Istria; the rapid development of the fashion industry in the Czech Republic; the almost certain victory of Sharon over Barak in Israel's elections today; some recent discoveries concerning Nietzsche's adolescence and youth; and the differences in Bush and Gore's social and economic backgrounds. All this took a bit less than half-an-hour to tell. I did not say a word the whole time. After a hard day's work, I was struggling with my meal, let alone the conversation. My mother noticed I was unusually quiet, and she realized that I was very tired, but she kept reporting what she had read or heard with unhampered enthusiasm. For her, this is the stuff of life.

## “IF” (February 26, 2001)

Trembling slightly, I will knock at her door. In a few seconds, she will open it, grinning. We will exchange a few hushed words, which neither of us will hear or even listen to. We will grab hold of each other and mumble a few more words. As I am holding her, I will struggle free of my knapsack. Next, I will peel off my windbreaker. Still holding onto her, kissing her, and mumbling, I will unlace my boots and kick them into a corner. Then I will begin undressing her. She will be stark naked when I will finally let go off her to take off my own clothes. Naked, holding onto each other once again, we will fall on the bed. Our mumbling will become clearer: “I love you, I love you...” Thinking of the condoms in my knapsack, I will open her legs, insert my penis into the mouth of her vagina, and then enter her very, very slowly. Lying on top of her, I will sigh: “At last, at last...” If we could only stop holding onto each other for a moment, it would take us much less time to become fully reunited. But that is a purely theoretical “if.”



#### DEATH IN READING (March 1, 2001)

Some ten years ago, when I came to Reading, I thought I would not stay in England more than five years. Back then, the plan was to end up in Italy, preferably Venice. But it now seems that it will take me at least five more years to leave Reading. Besides, Venice is as remote as ever. The way things stand, I will be lucky to get an early retirement from my university when I reach sixty. I will be fifty-five in April. Without such a deal, and a good one at that, I cannot imagine surviving financially. It would take another stroke of good luck to exchange my place in Reading, which is quite enchanting mainly because of the Reading Abbey ruins next door, for a reasonable place in Venice. As I do not have any spare money anywhere, many things would need to fall into place at the right moment for my plans to come true. Put differently, I may end up staying in Reading. More to the point, I may end up dying in Reading. I am not sure exactly why, but this is not a pleasing thought. This may have little or nothing to do with Reading, though. Rather, it may have to do with my elective home. Perhaps there is not better place to die than Venice, the capital of the Golden Age.

#### KATRINE, HELENA (August 10, 2001)

In early June I bought *The Seven Daughters of Eve* by Bryan Sykes,[17] read it in a few days, and then responded to his offer for a discount on a genetic test to determine exactly which of these seven women was my ancestor along the maternal line. To deal with such requests, the Oxford professor set up a company, Oxford Ancestors. From the outset, I was rooting for Katrine, who lived in the region of Venice some fifteen-thousand years ago. The results of the test arrived today. As it turns out, I am a descendent of Helena, who lived some twenty-thousand years ago someplace between the Mediterranean coast around Perpignan and the Dordogne valley. Disappointingly, some forty-seven percent of modern Europeans come from the same clan, whereas the clan of Katrine boasts only about six percent of Europeans today. But the connection with the Dordogne is still a welcome twist to the story. According to Sykes' attempt to endow Helena with life,[18] she might have witnessed the cave paintings characteristic of the region and the period, such as those of Lascaux. Whence my fascination with cave art, no doubt. Anyhow, I am still waiting for the results of the genetic test to determine my ancestor along the paternal line. According to Oxford Ancestors, there are ten sons of Adam, as it were. The prehistoric connection with Venice is still in the balance.

#### *Addendum* (May 14, 2003)

As is often the case, the more information you gather about something, the less well you understand it. I am a frequent visitor of the Oxford Ancestors' website ([www.oxfordancestors.com](http://www.oxfordancestors.com)), but I am none the wiser about my origins. Here are the pertinent facts, though. The clan

of Helena is characterized by the so-called Cambridge Reference Sequence (CRS), which includes four-hundred bases of mitochondrial DNA. As far as I understand the whole thing, CRS is standard for Europe simply because the Helena clan is the largest here. Now, my sequence shows two mutations from CRS in positions 189 and 311. Both mutations are from T to C. This sequence is not typical, but my second mutation is considered a very typical one of Katrine rather than Helena. It will take some time to figure out what this means, but it may be that my particular sequence is a sort of mixture of the two clans. Concerning my father's line, I have long had the results, which also show two mutations from a so-called modal type of ten Y-chromosome bases. However, there are no indications yet of the geographic concentrations of genetic changes along paternal lines. These will be unveiled as the research proceeds. All I know at present is that my father's ancestors come from Southwestern Europe, pretty much as my mother's. No surprises there, though. This was the farthest the Europeans could go before the ice retreated roughly ten millennia ago.

#### THE IDEA OF SERVICE (August 17, 2001)

A vague idea about my future—something like that I should dedicate myself to the service of others, and that they should not be related to me in any way—is buzzing again in my mind, but all my attempts to sharpen it, the idea, have failed so far. In expectation of a revelation, or at least a clarification, I sat quietly by myself this afternoon, but to no avail. After a couple of hours, I am none the wiser. No matter how vague, the idea of service is popping up ever more often. It is ever more insistent. And ever less forgiving. In the end, I may have not only to sharpen it, but also to bring it to fruition all by myself. Service, anyone?

#### TEEMING WITH GAME (August 27, 2001)

In my writing, I am like an opportunistic hunter. If potential prey crosses my path, I may go for it. Or I may only commit the encounter to memory for future reference. By comparison, most writers worthy of that name set out on veritable hunting expeditions, which often yield loads of game. They bring back a pile of wild boar for every pigeon I can boast when I get lucky. As a consequence, my book is slow in coming, whereas their books take shape in a few years. But, to stretch the analogy a bit farther, I am getting to know my hunting area pretty well. Every time I revisit it, and I do so often for years on end, I get to know it a bit better. To my joy, it is teeming with game. Most important, I can go back whenever I wish. If potential prey crosses my path, I may commit the encounter to memory. Or I may go for it. Yes, I may go for it in earnest and bring back a pile of wild boar. And another. And another.

### WINDING PATH (August 28, 2001)

This evening I searched through my library for translations of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* and found only three. I had at least two more, I am sure, but I could not find them. Perhaps I gave them away. But even the three I did find gave me pause on account of their startling differences in interpretation. From one of the translator's prefaces I learned that there must be at least five score of English translations alone. All in all, there must be about five hundred translations of this slim volume into sundry languages of the world. Reading as many of them as one could muster in a day or two would blow one's mind, I am sure. The old master's winding path would soon stretch into rolling hills, the hills would break up into windswept heights, and the heights would plunge into a vast ocean. Welcome, fellow travelers!

### THAT KIND OF FREEDOM (November 24, 2001)

At first, Dorian was sorely disappointed two summers ago when we had to abandon the Slovene Alps, where the weather forecast suggested a longish period of storms and showers, and go to Mošćenička Draga on the eastern coast of Istria, where our friends invited us for a few days. Now he remembers this change of plans most fondly. In fact, his memories of this small resort town are now associated with something akin to bliss. The weather was nice, but the reason for his fond memories is elsewhere. Together with our friends' two children, Dorian and Maya were allowed to roam around the place in total and complete freedom. "Even after dark!" he now loves to say with a big grin on his face. With a few coins they would have in their pockets, the children enjoyed an occasional drink or icecream. But the joy of being their own masters now strikes him as something worth remembering for ever. When I tell him that this is how I had spent each and every day of my childhood in Belgrade, he just nods incredulously. That kind of freedom is so far beyond our children's reach that it is like telling them that we used to have wings when we were their age. "Yeah, Dad," I can almost hear Dorian's bored sigh, "and you used to fly around the school yard..."

### EXCHANGING GIFTS (November 25, 2001)

There is an entire month to go, but the horror of Christmas is already beginning to take its hold on me. A cold and wet Sunday morning, like this one, does not help one single bit. The streets are empty under a low and dark sky. It takes a decade or so of living in the north to realize why the habit of exchanging so many gifts has become associated with Christmas precisely here, for the commercialization of western culture cannot be the main, let alone the only, reason for this phenomenon. Cold, wet, and lonely people had to invent something to look forward to in this dreadful gloom. It is good to remember that we all come from

the south. In the beginning, there were no northerners. Much of what they do is but compensation for the loss of sunshine.

#### BIRTH, DEATH (December 20, 2001)

Today I went to Oxford to see Dragoslav and Bojana Kožul, my old friends from Ljubljana. Bojana had to go to a meeting, and so Dragoslav and I talked about life over an impromptu lunch. Having covered parents, marriage, children, and world affairs, we talked about retirement, also. I told him that I recently learned that I could not even dream of early retirement, at least not if I stayed in Britain. Then I mentioned that I had been thinking about the Seychelles, Ghana, the Maldives... He waived his hand as if to brush off a silly idea. "No," he said with conviction, "Istria is the right place for you." I did not struggle for long. Dragoslav sold me Istria with ease. And he knows eastern Istria, which faces the islands of Krk and Cres, quite well. With his knowledge and connections, he may be able to help me make the jump. He plans to retire there, as well, and in a place that is practically within sight of little towns where my parents, their parents, and their parents' parents were born. And birth and death go well together. They are complementary, as it were.

#### JOURNEY, STEP (January 6, 2002)

No matter how long the journey, each step on the way is about the same length. Or so one keeps urging oneself forward.

#### NIVEA BODY SPRAY (January 7, 2002)

Every morning after the shower she massages some Nivea Body Spray into my penis and testicles. Four days into her visit, I am becoming attached to the gentle cosmetic product.

#### CAPO D'ISTRIA (March 10, 2002)

Capo d'Istria or Capodistria is a port town not far from Trieste. Still bearing unmistakable signs of its Venetian origin, as do many towns on the Istrian coast, it is now in Slovenia. "Head of Istria" in Italian is now Koper in Slovene and Kopar in Serbo-Croatian. Of course, there is a good Cabernet Sauvignon of that name in the region, which I am drinking as I write. But *capo* in Italian, coming from *caput* in Latin, means not only "head" but also "chief," as well as many other things. For instance, *capo di machina* in Italian stands for the "chief of the engine" or "engineer" on a steamship. But, enough of beating around the bush. Having decided to move to Istria for good, I cannot think of a better title for my very humble self than Capo d'Istria. Actually, one of

my Venetian ancestors held such a post in the Fourteenth Century... Or is this wine a bit too heady for me?

*Addendum* (June 21, 2017)

Fifteen years later, I cannot but shake my head in disbelief as I read this piece. "Capo d'Istria," I mumble under my breath, "me?" Although Istria is roughly the size of Reading, Berkshire, in population terms, my perception of its size has changed over the years. And how. It struck me as tiny back then, but now I see it as huge. By comparison with Motovun, it surely is. Returning to my "very humble self," I would not wish to be the chief of anything in particular, let alone a peninsula. Come to think of it, being the chief of one's own self is an ambition that already boggles the mind. And it takes an entire lifetime to master.

LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF: AN ELECTRONIC-MAIL MESSAGE TO MARGOT ANAND (March 12, 2002)

I found your name in Cassandra Lorus' book (*The Tantric Sex Book*, London: Thorsons, 1999). In fact, your name and the name of the international organization you have set up to spread the tantric message are prominent in her book. After some hesitation, I decided to write to you directly. So, let me introduced myself.

After many years in the academic world—both in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I spent close to twenty years, and in Reading and London, England, where I have been for more then ten—I am ready to retire. I will be fifty-six in April, but I am eager to do new things. Let me add that I am in good shape, too. In a couple of years I will settle in Istria, where both of my parents come from. If you are wondering, my last name is of Venetian origin, and my first name is Yugoslav. I was born in Zagreb and I grew up in Belgrade, so my "return" to Istria is a bit of a sentimental journey. There, I will continue writing and painting, both of which have become central to my life.

You can find my writings under the title of *Residua* on the World Wide Web ([www.residua.org](http://www.residua.org)). Most of this tangled text, which starts unfolding in 1976, is a testimony to my determination and faith. And my meandering. This I recognize in "A Sufi Preface to my *Residua*" (March 26, 1994), among other pieces. If you search the website for any words or phrases of interest to you, you will get to know me rather quickly. For instance, you will learn that I read *Kamasutra* when I was entering puberty. Although I have not written about tantric sex as such, I have long been familiar with the literature on the subject, beginning with Mani Madhukar's book written for Indian readers in the Seventies and translated into Serbo-Croatian in the Eighties (*Kamatantra*, Belgrade: Vajat, 1982).

My paintings are abstract or geometric, not unlike the tantric images or yantras. The connection has interested me for years, but I have not explored it in any detail. I paint on both sides of wooden boards, which I display on battens that cover entire walls, rooms, houses. As you can see from my “Statement for the 1998 EAST International Competition” (February 7, 1998), the geometric vocabulary I have been working with connects cave art and abstract art of Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Malevich. The underlying ideas connect shamanism and altered states of consciousness associated with early rituals, on the one hand, and mysticism in all its forms, on the other. By the way, the three masters of abstract art I mentioned were very much interested in mysticism.

As you can see, there are many things that connect me with tantra. The connection with love and love-making is something I wish to explore a bit more carefully and deliberately, too. The sacredness of sex has been with me from the beginning, as I was lucky to be initiated into it together with a woman I loved deeply for many years. There is a lot I still need to learn, but I also feel there is a good deal I can teach already. I believe I can be of service to others and tantra strikes me as an area in which my motivation to serve would not be likely to flag. Motivation is always a problem. As you will see from my “The Idea of Service” (August 17, 2001), it took me some time to figure out what exactly I could do to be of help to my fellow human beings.

All the books about tantra insist that one can go only a certain way by oneself, but that one eventually needs a teacher. Judging from your website, which I visited today, you are far from an idle woman, but I would like to ask you to serve as my own teacher and counsel, as I embark on teaching others. In my experience, the distance should not be a serious problem. And in my experience with many sexual partners, there is always a need for yet another helper on the path.

#### A GOOD INVESTMENT (April 10, 2002)

This morning I ordered yet another batch of one-thousand postcards from Abacus Color Printers Limited in Cumbria, who have made all my cards to date. According to my records, so far I have had seven of them made. The eighth batch of postcards will perhaps be the last I will order. The front will show about fifty of my paintings in the southeast corner of my livingroom. The reverse side will show my name, which will appear for the first time on a postcard of mine as that of an artist; the name of the show, “Cave Art Now”; the name of the venue, namely Abbot’s Walk Gallery, which will end up having just one show in its history; the gallery’s postal address in Reading; my electronic mail address; and the address of my *Residua* website, which contains a host of pieces about my paintings and their connection with cave art. The picture was taken by Mary Lemley, an American artist living in London, who took many shots of my livingroom last October. I think her picture captures my work very well. I hope the card will help me start selling

my paintings in earnest. That is the main reason for ordering this batch, which will cost me about hundred-fifty pounds. At one-thousand pounds per painting, the price at which I have already sold a few, this is a good investment.

*Addendum* (May 28, 2002)

The package from Abacus arrived by courier this morning. It is late afternoon, but I have already sent out more than one-hundred and seventy postcards. About a half of them have gone to gallerists, art critics, and artists in Istria and the neighboring countries—Slovenia and Italy. Another forty or so cards will follow in the next few days. My fingers are sore from all the pasting, which took some four hours, but I am glad everything is going according to plan. Although I know that only a few people will respond to this avalanche of postcards, that is how things are in the world of art. Perhaps this is how things ought to be, too. Were it even slightly easier for artists to make ends meet, the world would be crawling with them. An unpleasant prospect, to say the least.

*IN TERRA VERITAS* (April 14, 2002)

Thus a wine advertising showing a bottle of Refosco, typical of Istria and Friuli or Furlania, which I found in the in-flight magazine of Air Dolomiti, a small airline associated with Lufthansa. I discovered the ad as I was landing in Trieste. The land is right, indeed. The right house comes next. And only then the wine.

*UMBRELLA* (April 15, 2002)

It was pouring when I woke up my first morning in Istria. The first thing I bought in the promised land was an umbrella. I left mine in England, the country of umbrellas, which was sunny yesterday morning. Actually, it had been sunny for a week at least.

*JUST A BRIDGE* (April 15, 2002)

I am sipping a decent red in a decent café on the very bridge that once separated my family living in Fiume, the Italian part of what is Rijeka today, from those living in Sušak, the part belonging to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia since the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Together with most of her siblings, my mother first went to Sušak, and then to Zagreb, where she met my father. On her way, she crossed this bridge. The two sides of my family could only see each other across it. The Fascist Italy was not very well disposed toward the Croats and Slovenes, the Slavs who lived on the other side of the Yugoslav border. Both of my maternal grandparents died in Italy virtually alone and

destitute in spite of their many children. And now, some seventy-five years hence, I am sipping red wine on this bridge, as though it is just a bridge. Just a bridge.

#### ALL KINDS OF DICTIONARIES (April 15, 2002)

Strolling through central Rijeka, I came upon a window with all kinds of dictionaries: Kroatisch-Deutsch, Croato-Italiano, English-Croatian, and the like. But there was not a single dictionary bringing together Croatian and Serbian, presumably two different languages. Or Croatian languages of different historical and political epochs, such as those of Tito and Tudjman. These are different languages, alright.

#### CORSO (April 15, 2002)

Almost everyone living in Rijeka passes through the *corso* a least once a day. All one needs to do to see most of the inhabitants of the city in a single day is spend a few hours in the cafés along this pedestrian stretch, which has been paved with red granite quite recently. It is amazing how many greetings one can observe. Friends, colleagues, relatives, acquaintances stopping to say a few words to each other. A city without a *corso* is like a ... city without a *corso*.

#### A WELCOME RELIEF (April 15, 2002)

After an entire day of carefully observing the fine points of human behavior, spotting the unguarded enthusiasm of a dog is a welcome relief.

#### “IT’S BETTER TO GO WITHOUT SOMETHING THAN TO LOSE IT” (April 16, 2002)

Thus a man to his friend in a Rijeka café. His friend nodded knowingly. The adage is emblematic of these parts. Wise words, no doubt, but not words that urge one to do much about anything. To paraphrase, it is better to do nothing than to see it undone.

#### GOOD PEOPLE (April 16, 2002)

An old peasant woman dressed in black is worried that the bus will not stop in her village along the Adriatic coast. Everyone is reassuring her. “They will stop there for you,” people refer to the driver and the conductor, “they are good people.” This seems to work for a while.



## BORN ON AN ISLAND (April 16, 2002)

I just passed close enough to my father's hotel in Tučepi, some five minutes by bus from Makarska, to make my eyes water. When the hotel was designed and built in the late Forties, there was nothing around it but a handful of fishermen's stone shelters, but Tučepi is a little town now. There are three or four hotels besides the one my father has built. What made my eyes water was the loggia on top of the hotel, which looks a bit like the bridge of a large ship. It comes complete with a mast. Born on an island, my father never stopped dreaming about the sea, boats, and ships. Which is perhaps why I am here right now.

## *Addendum* (January 19, 2004)

A friend from Zagreb sent me a recent article from a leading Croatian newspaper about the hotel in Tučepi. A separate section goes into a little bit of history. The hotel was the first to be built on the Croatian coast after World War II. My father is mentioned by name, but he is referred to as an architect from Belgrade. Built between 1949 and 1951 for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Office of Internal Security, the hotel had a bit more than three-hundred rooms. It was initially built by prisoners of war, who were later joined by political prisoners. The article mentions that the hotel has become a symbol of the coast around Makarska, but that it is now in ruin. During the recent war, it was used to house refugees, and later it had fallen into disrepair. About a decade ago it was purchased for a song by a Lithuanian businessman, who now intends to replace it with a five-star hotel with as many as eight-hundred rooms. The project will take two years and cost some fifty-million euros. According to the article, people around Makarska are somewhat sentimental toward the old hotel, which brought many of them livelihood. They wonder whether the new hotel will in any way remind them of the old one. As for me, I can only hope that the loggia on top of the hotel and the mast will miraculously survive.

## SO MANY TOWNS (April 16, 2002)

My bus stopped in many places between Rijeka and Dubrovnik, apparently by special arrangement with the driver and conductor, who alternate in these unequal duties, but the regular stops were many, as well: Crikvenica, Senj, Karlobag, Zadar, Šibenik, Trogir, Split, Makarska, Ploče. Actually, I had to take another bus in Dubrovnik. Cavtat, my destination, was only half-an-hour farther south, but it took me much longer to get there. Still, the long trip was worth it. I passed through so many towns I associate with my childhood.

### BOOK OF COMPLAINTS (April 21, 2002)

The Rijeka Bus Station at four in the morning: piles of luggage, roaming drunks, stinky toilets overseen by a jolly hunchback, sleepy travellers leaning against each other, surly staff, blaring popular music, floors covered with cigarette butts, blinking lights of gambling machines. Yes, the station doubles as a casino, as well. On the top shelf behind the bar, out of reach, there faces the drowsy crowd a large book clad in fake leather. It appears to be untouched by time's passage. This is a Book of Complaints, the gold lettering proudly declares in five languages including English. After all, this is a port of world renown.

### *Addendum I* (April 24, 2002)

The very same book can be found everywhere in Croatia, as I learned later. It must be required by some demented law that applies to the entire country. It goes without saying that every single book of complaints I have seen the last few days has looked equally well preserved. They are nothing but ornaments.

### *Addendum II* (February 1, 2004)

And the law is demented beyond any doubt. By and by, I have learned that the book of complaints must remain unsullied by customers. Or else. Inspectors of cafés, bars, and restaurants are merciless when it comes to customers' comments. They could not care less about the customers, it goes without saying once again, but they relish punishing the hapless proprietors by any legal means available to them. When his or her friends want to tease a proprietor of a drinking hole, they yell at the top of their voices: "Give us the book of complaints!" Of course, the precious book remains out of reach at all times. Innocent pranks can cause a lot of grief.

### IN PRAISE OF PROVINCIALISM (April 21, 2002)

Few cities are attractive on a cold, windy, and wet Sunday morning, but Rijeka does not appear attractive even under the best circumstances. It has a long way to go. A long, long way. The city is provincial to boot. Am I complaining, though? Not in the least. Actually, I am only consoling myself. The longer the way to sophistication, the better.

### TALKER AND LISTENER (April 21, 2002)

Two old men walking up and down the *corso* in Rijeka. One of them talks most of the time, while the other appears to listen. The talker has a habit of stopping to make his point, but the listener never stops or even slows down, so that the talker, who is much heavier and perhaps older, has to make a few quick steps to catch up. The listener may not be

listening at all, but the talker is not about to change his habits on account of this possibility. Which is why their friendship appears to be secure.

#### IN BLISSFUL IGNORANCE (April 24, 2002)

As soon as I stepped onto the plane in Trieste, I was confronted with a wide choice of newspapers. I picked the *Financial Times*. Feeling a bit guilty about ten days spent in blissful ignorance of world affairs, I leafed through it rather quickly. As it turned out, nothing spectacular had happened in this period, but the feeling of guilt is still with me. After all, something spectacular could have happened.

#### MY FAVORITE (April 26, 2002)

According to the current telephone book of Istria, there are four Bons in Motovun, two in Labin, and one each in Pazin and Višnjan. No prize for guessing which town is my favorite.

#### *Addendum* (December 14, 2014)

Goodness gracious! This is strange to read after so many years in Motovun. It is hard to imagine the state of my own mind before the last stage of my life, geographically speaking. What I find surprising about this piece is that my mother's maiden name, Flego, is not even mentioned. To the best of my recollection, I checked it in the telephone book of Istria at the time. And there were plenty of Flegos in Motovun, too. One way or another, all the Bons and Flegos in these parts must be my relatives, no matter how distant. It is a question of up to five centuries at most. Returning to this piece, I can only hope that I will move never again. As far as stages of life are concerned, I have had my fill already.

#### “YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO RETIRE!” (April 27, 2002)

Thus many of my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances when I tell them that I will retire from my professorial duties in September 2003. “Actually,” I can hardly wait to reply, “I'm young enough to retire!”

#### MY GLORIOUS ARMY (April 29, 2002)

I can already see myself spending an entire day or maybe two on a single piece of writing. I can already see myself arraying my words with the care of a general preparing for battle. Even now, more than a year before I move to Istria, this vision gives me such comfort that I am already sure of it, the vision, convinced of my purpose, and confident in my glorious

army. Words will be my soldiers, sentences my battalions, paragraphs my divisions. And we will march forward into untold victories.

#### THE RUINS (May 1, 2002)

Once again, I woke up at five-thirty to the strains of Morris dancing. I immediately recognized the music, the bells, the clang of staffs. A dozen or so men in their forties and fifties danced in the Reading Abbey ruins until six. Having thus celebrated the first day of May, they departed, their bells tinkling. It was a joy to hear and see them prancing about, as ever, but this time the old tradition enticed slightly different thoughts. In two days we will be celebrating the first Friday of May in my place. There will be dancing, as well. This tradition, begun in June 2001, has only a year to run, though. My last party will take place in July 2003. Soon afterwards I will leave England and move to Istria. The ruins will be forgotten once again. Except by Morris dancers.

#### AS I LIE IN BED AND STARE AT THE CEILING (May 9, 2002)

This morning I was in my office at six. I woke up before four, but I got up at five. As of late, this happens to me a bit more often than I would wish. Now I do not have many worries at work, but the sale of my home and the purchase of a new one in Istria keep me awake. Although there is plenty of time still, there are so many things that must happen before I settle down again that I sometimes panic when I think of so many things that are yet to be done. All kinds of things come to me in the middle of the night. For tax purposes, I must make sure that I am not treated as a resident of the UK past September 2003, when I will become a resident of Croatia. I am yet to contact the Croatian embassy on this score, as well. All my pensions must come to the same bank in Istria, which must have a branch in my new town. For security, I must have two bank accounts in Istria, only one of which I have already opened. As soon as my place is sold, which I hope will happen by the end of June 2002, I must shift most of the money into euros, with which I will buy my new home. The sooner I have the proceeds of sale, and the more I manage to get, the smoother will be the negotiations surrounding the purchase of my new place. My Croatian passport must be renewed by October 2002, but it may be more practical to renew it before this summer, when I will spend close to four weeks in Istria. While I am at it, perhaps I could also renew my British passport, which expires in November 2005, when it will be more difficult for me to renew it. Before my stuff is moved across Europe at the end of July 2003, I must buy all kitchen appliances, as well as a washing machine, which are not a part of a house purchase in Croatia. I will also need several beds for my guests, and some other essential pieces of furniture, like chests of drawers or wardrobes. I am sure that I will have pensions from the University of Reading, MIT, and the Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia, as well as both the US and UK pensions, but I am not sure

whether I am entitled to any pension from Northeastern University, where I had taught for three years. In addition, I have two annuities, one in the US and the other in the UK, both of which need figuring out. And so on, and so forth. Every now and then, one of these things flashes through my mind, and I make a mental note to look into it as soon as possible. As I lie in bed and stare at the ceiling, I also have to figure out whether to keep trying to go back to sleep, or to abandon all hope and get up at once. And that is often the most difficult problem I am indeed facing.

#### FIVE LANGUAGES (May 12, 2002)

I dreamt that I was writing a book in five languages: Croatian, Serbian, Slovene, Italian, and English. As I was writing, I was pronouncing every word. Although Croatian and Serbian are almost the same, much care is needed to differentiate them. When I woke up, I realized that these are the five languages I will be practicing in Istria daily, or perhaps weekly. My five languages.

#### IN TRAINING (May 13, 2002)

It is not yet dark out there, but I have already lit the brass oil-lamp I have inherited from my parents. The intricate contraption with four spouts and several utensils dangling from chains must be at least a century old, but its design is of a considerably older vintage. Staring now at one flame, now at another, I am in training for retirement. Early retirement, that is.

#### FEAR OF DYING (May 16, 2002)

For the first time in my life I am experiencing something akin to the fear of dying. It comes in bursts, winks, and flashes. In particular, I am afraid of dying before I experience the bliss of retirement. Wait, have I not written something of this ilk not so long ago?

#### HOMECOMING (May 19, 2002)

Yesterday was Bob Collén's birthday, and so we exchanged a few electronic-mail messages. Otherwise, we communicate *via* our pieces pasted on postcards. Electronic mail is reserved only for extraordinary circumstances. Thus he writes in his last message:

From your postcards I understand why you have a sentimental pull to Istria. *Nostos*. Homecoming. In keeping with your Odysseus-like character. I admire your command of so many languages, and especially

your style in English. The Armenians say the more languages a man knows, the more of a man (human being) he is.

Bob's wife, Gloria, is of Armenian extraction. He is referring to my recent piece about the languages I will be speaking back in Istria ("Five Languages," May 12, 2002), which must have just reached him on a postcard. But I was quite enchanted by his reference to Odysseus. His words struck me as true. Twice true, in fact. The very name of Istria comes from Greek, and might have passed Homer's lips, too. In search of the Golden Fleece, the Argonauts went up Danube, or Istros in Greek, which was believed to have several sources and mouths. They named the peninsula when they sailed into the Adriatic down an Istrian river, probably Mirna.

#### *Addendum I* (September 17, 2002)

Open any translation of *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes and you will find a slightly different map of Jason's tortuous journey in each one of them. In some maps, the Argonauts going up the Danube reach the Adriatic close to the Istrian islands, Krk, Cres, and Rab, but in others they emerge further south on the Dalmatian coast, someplace between Zadar and Split. Of course, there are Argonautic legends all over the Mediterranean. The story of Jason is considerably older than Homer's *Odyssey*, in which it is mentioned as something known to all Greeks. It has long stuck to every river and rock of the cradle of our civilization. However, it is pretty clear from the very name of Istria that the peninsula is directly associated with Danube, or Greek Istros. No other place or region down the Adriatic coast goes by that name or any similar one. River Mirna, which used to carry Venetian ships into the Istrian interior, is thus a good candidate for the Argonauts' homecoming. From the terrace of my house in Motovun or Montona, I will gaze upon it every single day and rejoice.

#### *Addendum II* (September 6, 2021)

Luigi Papo's book about Motovun has much to offer concerning the hilltown's ancient past.[19] To my joy, he pins down the connection between the Argonauts and the Mirna river, as well. According to Papo, Diodoro Siculo noted in 178 B.C., when Romans conquered Istria, that Mirna or Quieto in Italian was then known as Istro or Danube in Greek, whence the name of the entire peninsula and its inhabitants at the time.[20] The connection with the ancient myth is also mentioned on the same page, where Papo relates the unsuccessful attempts by the conquering Romans to find the connection between the two rivers. Greeks were wrong, of course, but the Mirna and the Istrian peninsula remain connected to Danube and the Argonauts for ever and ever. Indeed, there can be little doubt that Greeks used to be familiar with these parts quite a few centuries before the Romans. The Adriatic coast was their turf for at a least an entire millennium.

GIUSEPPINA'S SPIRIT: FROM AN ELECTRONIC-MAIL MESSAGE TO ALBERTO MARTINUZZI (June 6, 2002)

It is wonderful to have someone like Giuseppina Martinuzzi in your family. Judging by her photograph, she was a formidable woman. I know that there is quite a bit of feeling for her in Labin or Albona, where a street is also named after her. God knows, my great-grandfather might have known her, as he was born there a couple of decades after her. She would have been a poet of note by the time he went to school.

The job of ever-closer integration of Italians and Slavs, both Croats and Slovenes, in Istria still remains. Giuseppina's spirit is very much needed now. As a region in Europe, Istria has an opportunity to explore its cultural heritage on all three sides of the language divide. As a region in Croatia, however, Istria is always pulled toward problems that are in large part not its own.

One trend I notice in Europe today is an ever-larger number of people who can not only speak other languages, but who can easily switch from one to another. Some people are becoming bilingual, as many Istrians have been, but some are truly multi-lingual. In time, this facility will be a marvelous asset, primarily in terms of cultural exchange. I hope Istria will keep its multi-cultural character and develop it into something truly wonderful.

PUTTING TWO AND TWO TOGETHER (June 9, 2002)

One occasionally wonders how one has gotten from there to here? Precisely here! When one survives a serious climbing accident—helicopters and all—one is liable to start thinking about one's roots. This is how Istria returned to my life. The land of my parents, but my own land still. One is also liable to start thinking about one's priorities, including one's way of making a living. This is how writing and painting shifted into focus. Being a professor in England is nice, but not nice enough. Putting two and two together, one is liable to cast for some radical changes in one's life. Writing and painting in Istria, that is. Simple. And thus surprising, stunning.

COOPERATION, COMPETITION (June 11, 2002)

One of the Istrian artists who responded to the avalanche of my missives, both by electronic and snail mail, suggested that I might set up my own gallery in Istria. By implication, no gallery there would fit my bill. Today I wrote to two Istrian artists who are still in art school—both of them in Ljubljana, and both of them among the few responders—that it would be a good idea to set up something like a salon instead. Just like the Hereford Salon in London, which is now in limbo, the Istrian salon could be dedicated to cooperation among artists. Work in progress could

be at the focus, as well. Not a bad idea, this. No matter how many times artists fail to respond to the challenge of cooperation, it is worth attempting ever anew. Competition will certainly get us nowhere. Besides, competition is a lonely business.

#### UPGRADING (June 12, 2002)

The *Residua* website is about to be upgraded. Simon Rae-Scott is currently implementing the changes we have agreed already. The main menu, which appears on every page, will have two new items—that is, two new buttons. One is about the project itself, entitled “Re *Residua*,” and another is the publication record, entitled “Publications.” A brief history of the project, a short professional biography of mine, which will need to be changed when I move from England to Istria next year, and two quotes about *Residua* from Dario Dandolo will help readers understand the entire project. The publication record, which is getting rather long, will help understand its history, as well. I began by publishing mainly in philosophical journals, but now I publish chiefly in literary and art journals. In addition, the search mechanism will be improved in several ways. All this will be available on the World Wide Web before the end of the week. Each time the website upgrading comes to mind, I feel happy, happy. More, I feel physical pleasure, which is sometimes quite intense.

#### THE LAST STAGE (July 12, 2002)

As of this afternoon, I am my neighbors’ tenant. Having sold them my apartment, I am renting it from them through July next year, when I will leave England for good. My neighbors have done well. Now they own an entire Georgian house surrounded by parks and flanked by the Reading Abbey ruins. It is in good nick, and the value of the property will most likely double in the next five to ten years. I have done well, too. Now I can buy a house in Istria. As luck would have it, yesterday evening I agreed on the price of a house in Motovun or Montona, which has grabbed my heart. If everything goes well, in a couple of months I will again be a proud owner of a marvelous place. From Reading to Motovun, the last stage of a long journey—my own and that of my ancestors.

#### IT HURTS TO KNOW (July 15, 2002)

Sitting in a café at the main square of Koper or Capodistria, I am sinking into the sounds of a world without cars, motorcycles, mopeds. The sounds of people talking and walking, of birds flying, of bells tolling, of dogs barking in the distance. Still, it hurts to know that much of the world out there has been spoiled for good. As the wise have always known, one cannot save oneself alone.



#### HANDS DOWN (July 15, 2002)

Old women unabashedly looking out of their windows. Not only looking out, but leaning on pillows. Not only leaning on pillows, but giving their opinions out loud from time to time. Beats television hands down.

#### NOT EVEN RAIN (July 16, 2002)

Just like last April, rain welcomes me to Istria. Back then I had to buy an umbrella, but this time I am better equipped. Although I left my umbrella in Reading once again, I have in my knapsack an impermeable cape. This is a standard item of my climbing gear. Besides, nothing would stop me in my decision to move to Istria. Not even rain. A good try, God!

#### AN OMEN TO MY LIKING (July 16, 2002)

Call me superstitious, but I was quite pleased to find a cat that just caught a rat in front of the house in Motovun that had captured my imagination a few months ago. Proud of its achievement, the cat kept mewling, the limp rat resting securely in its jaw. An omen to my liking, especially because this was the first time since April that I walked up to the house. It, too, will be resting securely in my jaw in a few weeks, or maybe months.

#### *Addendum I* (July 31, 2002)

As it turned out, this was the cat of the previous occupiers. They have moved out more than a fortnight ago to a house nearby, but the cat still refuses to move. I got the keys to the house late last night from the owner's lawyer. The deal is done. This morning I put the key into the front door for the very first time. The cat was waiting for me on the terrace, which it can access through the garden. As I sit on the terrace overlooking Mirna valley, the cat is trying to ingratiate itself with me, the new owner. I will not be living here until next July, though. Its options are few, rats or no rats.

#### *Addendum II* (January 23, 2004)

After a year and a half, the cat comes to my terrace still. I see it almost every day, and I get a bit worried when I do not see it for a few days. But it flees as soon as it sees me coming out or opening a window giving onto the terrace. It is a shy cat, I suppose, for I have never tried to scare it away. I have done nothing to keep it, either, as I often see it by the house of the previous occupiers of my place. We are friends and I visit them on occasion. On foot, their new house is only a few minutes away. Although they feed it regularly, the cat seems to be quite aloof with

them, too. It now has two houses but no home. And all the rats in the world.

#### FROZEN IN MOTION (July 16, 2002)

I am sitting in a café with an almost identical view of the Mirna Valley as that from the terrace of the house I hope to buy. The land below looks like a green ocean frozen in motion. Of course, that is exactly what it is.

#### NICE THINGS (July 16, 2002)

A British couple not far from my table is going through all the nice things they have seen in Istria. The list is long. But every now and then she gives me the old eye. Of all the nice things she has seen, she must have missed at least one.

#### THE OLD MOTOVUN LOGGIA (July 17, 2002)

As I sit in the old Motovun loggia, where the town's elders used to gather, low clouds are slowly dispersing from the Mirna valley below. It is just past seven in the morning. The town is quiet. The river glistens through the fluffy clouds, and the road parallel to it is already alive with traffic, going mainly toward the coast. The buzz and whine of cars, trucks, campers, cisterns, and motorcycles, is audible up here. Somewhere high above, hidden by yet more clouds, an airliner grinds its way. Much is happening around this little town, but little is happening in it. Just as I like it.

#### BEING FUSSED OVER (July 17, 2002)

A rich, vibrant rainbow is arching over the Mirna valley, much of it still crawling with morning mists. High above, there are dark, threatening clouds, whose shadows glide across the lush valley. The shadows occasionally occlude segments of the rainbow. As I write, one of its ends is vanishing while the other is coming into view once again. A newcomer to this place, I have a feeling I am being fussed over a bit. I am being shown everything at once.

#### *Addendum* (July 19, 2002)

And now, out of the blue, I can see a tornado on a hill to the south of Motovun. I saw it reach down from the dark clouds, which were spewing rain, touch the ground, and then move slowly toward the west. This is the very first tornado I have seen with my own eyes. I am being

fussed over for true. And I am beginning to wonder what else is in store for me, as I will be here for a few more weeks.

#### LANDSCAPE, SKYSCAPE (July 17, 2002)

Perched on a rocky outcrop and surrounded by rolling hills, Motovun is endowed with a fabulous sky: billowing bursts, shimmering wisps, shifty fogs, misty streaks, flashes of distant thunderstorms, luminous swirls... Besides, clouds at different altitudes are often flying in different directions. Framed from below by a lively landscape of every color, the town's skyscape provides an ever-changing playground for the mind. More, it is the mind's very map.

#### *Addendum* (July 28, 2002)

Today I have heard for the second time that Motovun is a place of special interest in terms of electro-magnetic phenomena. That is, geomancy. But this time I have heard a bit more. The Venetians, who put this town on the map, were particularly interested in these phenomena, as well. Venetian archives are thus worth investigating in this connection. And I probably will. But the first step is to learn a bit more about geomancy itself. Chances are that splendid landscapes and skylscapes go together.

#### GOD KNOWS WHY (July 18, 2002)

Even at the height of the tourist season, Motovun offers but a couple of places to have coffee, a few more places to have a meal, and a couple of shops with bare necessities. The inhabitants of the old town are few and most are far from enticing. If there is anyone to meet here, it is oneself. Well, myself. Am I ready for this momentous encounter? God knows why, but I think I am. I feel this is the meeting that I will not regret. Not the least bit. God knows why, but I believe this encounter will change my life for good.

#### *Addendum* (December 7, 2016)

Motovun has changed a great deal in the intervening years, and there are many more places to have coffee or a meal during the tourist season, but the inhabitants of the old town are ever fewer, as well as ever less enticing. Most of them are in their dotage, anyhow. If there is anyone to meet here, it is no-one else but oneself. So many years ago, I thought that I was ready for this momentous encounter. As it turned out, I was. And how. Indeed, I am convinced that this encounter has changed my life for good. Even more, I now know why this is the case. To meet oneself, one needs some distance from others. Put differently, it is nigh impossible to meet oneself in a pressing crowd. The only thing that now annoys me in this piece is the hackneyed expression that not only appears in it twice in spite of its brevity, but that also defaces its title.

Indeed, it is I who now knows why Motovun has changed my life. “God” actually stands for “who” in the silly expression.

#### SUSPICIOUSLY GREEN (July 19, 2002)

It is raining cats and dogs. Really raining, like it rarely rains in southern England, from which I am to escape. The sky is uniformly gray, and there is no reason to believe that the deluge will stop soon. In fact, people here in Istria tell me that this year has been quite wet, and that it may well be that the region will get wetter with climate change. One of them even joked about the tropical climate moving in from the south as the Mediterranean climate moves further north. Of course, not even the weather would make me change my mind about my move south, but I do feel a bit funny about this little twist in the story. I can only hope that this is but a blip in the weather pattern here, although the whole region is suspiciously green whenever I come for a visit. Suspiciously green, indeed.

#### SAVORING MY LUNCH (July 20, 2002)

Sitting in the shade of chestnut trees in front of the hotel in Motovun, I am savoring my lunch: boiled potatoes, boiled Istrian cabbage, and olives. One plate each, sprinkled liberally with olive oil, a carafe of which is glowing in the sun at the side of the table. Together with another, but bigger, carafe of Teran, a ruby red grown locally, this is pretty much an ideal meal. “*Una spisa per i dei*,” I smile at the waitress and point at the dishes in front of me. She nods with a big smile. She still remembers what gods used to eat.

#### MIRO (July 20, 2002)

I saw him coming down the street with his obligatory Australian cork hat. I stopped to greet him. “Ranko,” I extended my hand, although we had been introduced already. “Miro,” he shook my hand. “And your protection against the flies,” I added pointing at the corks dangling from the hat's rim. “Wine flies!” he corrected me with a raised finger and grinned. It was early morning, but his breath suggested he was not kidding. Cork hats have many uses!

#### THE NEXT OUTBURST (July 24, 2002)

Motovun is famous for truffles, as are the neighboring towns in central Istria. Dogs used to find this delicacy are kept in pens that can be found all around the town. They bark all the time, but their barking can be a real nuisance at night. Every unusual sound can set off a barking spree that spreads from one pen to another. It sometimes takes a long time for

the racket to subside and stop. It is late at night, and the dogs are barking like mad because someone has just walked down one of the streets. I know it will be quiet again quite soon, but I am waiting for the next outburst already. If only the dogs could anticipate it as well as I can.

#### CITY OF ARTISTS (July 25, 2002)

Visited Grožnjan or Grisignana some ten kilometers west of Motovun. Came too late to the self-styled city of artists. The town is already lost to good taste.

#### FLEGI, BONI (July 26, 2002)

Just before one reaches Grožnjan, which is in the hills above the Mirna valley, one passes by a village called Flegi, the indigenous plural form of Flego, my mother's maiden name. Motovun, some ten kilometers to the east, is visible from Grožnjan. Some five kilometers south from Motovun is a village called Boni, the plural of Bon. The place where I have chosen to live seems to be smack in the middle of places where the two families used to live for long enough to give birth to these toponyms. The surprising bit is that my choice came long before this discovery.

#### MOTOVUN FILM FESTIVAL (July 27, 2002)

As this year's film festival is drawing nearer, Motovun is rapidly changing. There are ever more people, many of whom are volunteering their services. All kinds of equipment—from humble chairs to mysterious electronic gear—is carried to the places where film projections and other events will take place from July 30 to August 3. Even though I have never experienced this town out of season, the hubbub is exciting. A few years from now, when I will be so much more in tune with the town's ebb and flow, the excitement will be so much greater, I reckon. Or am I already anticipating tomorrow's joys?

#### THE FIRST STEP (July 28, 2002)

Walking barefoot, one better feels these hills and valleys. These towns and villages. These woods and fields. These mists and clouds. The trouble begins with footwear. Increasingly based on rubber and plastics, it insulates the body from the world. It short-circuits the electromagnetic flow. The first step toward emancipation is simple: kick off your shoes!

### THREE GOATS (July 30, 2002)

After too much to drink last night, as well as too little sleep, I made it to Zamask to the east of Motovun. On top of a steep hill, the village has a grand view, including that of Učka, the highest peak in Istria. Zamask is a part of a region known as Sveti Bartol or San Bartolo. One of the villages in the area is Flegi, the second of that name around Motovun. My mother's maiden name pops up everywhere around here. But the greatest joy of this "climb" is right in front of me. No less than three goats are watching me as I write into my notebook. Although it is emblazoned into the coat-of-arms of Istria, the goat has become a rare sight in these parts. Not in proud Zamask, though.

### THE ELEVENTH THESIS ON FEUERBACH REVISITED (August 1, 2002)

We are sunbathing on the terrace of my new house. Both of us are naked. Somehow, the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach comes up in conversation. "Wait," she says, "I used to know this stuff." Stumped, I sigh: "I used to write about it, too!" A few minutes later she sits in my lap, and I enter her. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world," she begins slowly, "but the point is to change it." We both burst into laughter, and I promptly lose my erection. This morning we have made love twice already, and so we get up for a drink.

### NOT SUCH A GOOD IDEA (August 9, 2002)

Together with Jože Dekleva, who was with me when I fell in the Julian Alps last year, this morning I went to the spot of the accident. It was cloudy, but we still decided to go up. By the time we reached the area, it started to rain. And in earnest. In addition, it was quite foggy. The rain and the fog got so bad that we decided to turn back before we reached the rock I hit when I slipped on the snow. We must have been less than fifty meters below it when we gave up. By the time we returned to the foothills, the rain abated and the fog lifted. It was as though visiting the spot where I had almost snuffed it was not such a good idea.

### *Addendum* (August 29, 2002)

A few days later, in Ljubljana, in the company of several friends who assembled for dinner, Jože teased me about the decision to turn around: "You got scared!" "Not at all!" I protested forcefully. "Perhaps you did not know it?" he tried to be helpful. "Well," I waived my hand, "anything goes with that kind of argument." I reminded him that he had agreed with me then and there to turn around. But that was neither here nor there. "In fact," I added with gusto, "I would have been delighted if I experienced any strong emotions around the spot where I fell last

year!” Jože gave up at this point. However, he might have been right. Perhaps I did not know I was scared.

#### MY NEW ADDRESS (August 11, 2002)

My new address, as of July 2003, flashes through my mind every now and then. Borgo 18. It pulsates for a while. Montona 52424. It fills my heart with joy. Istria, Croatia. My heart soars. My new address is my last!

#### THE COMING ICE AGE (August 11, 2002)

The coming ice age, which struck me as a great secret several years ago, now appears to be on the lips of many. It rolls off the tongue with ever-greater ease. Be what they may, the consequences are rarely discussed, though. Horrendous as it is likely to be, the coming ice age is still not making people think about their next move. My decision to move to Istria has nevertheless been considered a very wise move among some Slovene friends in Ljubljana today. And precisely on these grounds. Great Britain has been written off already. The Gulf Stream has been switched off already. And I have become the first fugitive from the coming ice age. Already.

#### AHEAD OF MYSELF (August 15, 2002)

I am on my way to England after a full month in Istria and Slovenia. Having been away for such a long time, I feel a bit uneasy about the trip. In my mind, I have already moved to Istria, but I still have a while to go before I actually move there. I am way ahead of myself. And this is the biggest problem I am likely to face in the period ahead.

#### THE END OF THE JOURNEY (August 16, 2002)

In Ljubljana, only a few hours before my flight to Reading, I felt such peace, such silent joy, and for such a long while, that I was convinced nirvana was nigh. Only a matter of time, that is. Perhaps there is such a thing as the end of the journey. And I am the lucky one in generations to experience it. Brash as these words may seem, they feel right. Or that is how they felt only yesterday.

#### IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE (August 20, 2002)

On my way to my dentist, I spotted a new development in a fork of the ring road around Reading. Both sides of the fork are, in fact, busy highways of many lanes. The elaborate roofs of the new neighborhood,

which is still under construction, suggest something fancy. I bet its name offers hills, meadows, woods, vast views. The lousier the place, the fancier the name. Sadly, the threadbare pretense will not stop people from buying property right in the middle of nowhere. In a few years, they will become proud of it, too. By then, even more horrible developments will have sprouted around them.

#### THE BINDING CONCEPT (August 22, 2002)

Now that my upcoming book, *Belgrade Postcards*, is squarely in Miša Jovanović's hands, I have begun working on the next book of mine in the same series. *Istrian Postcards* is the already agreed title. As Miša has recently published a book about intellectuals from Belgrade in Rovinj or Rovigno in Istria, and as I wish to connect Belgrade and Istria once again, the connection, at first glance tenuous, makes a lot of sense. I conducted the first trawl through *Residua* on my website, with its insuperable search engine. The search words that came to me without much thought were many toponyms: Istria, Krk, Pazin, Rijeka, Trieste, Venice... I immediately printed out everything I found and put it in chronological order. The whole thing, which I just finished reading, strikes me as helter-skelter, though. The binding concept is still missing. But it did not take me long to understand what that concept ought to be: path, road, journey, trek, voyage, way... Or is it *Tao*?

#### Addendum I (October 27, 2002)

Yesterday morning I got from Miša the galley proofs of *Istrian Postcards*, and today I completed my corrections. It is Sunday, and so the galleys cannot go back to Belgrade before tomorrow morning. Having twice read the book from cover to cover, I decided to add a few words. Right here. In my mind, the book hangs together. It flows. Most important, it says what I want to say. Neither more nor less. Once again, I feel that my journey has come to an end. And it promises to be a happy one.

#### Addendum II (November 5, 2016)

This piece was written less than a month after I bought my house in Motovun. I was quite ecstatic at the time, it goes without saying. As both the piece and the first *addendum* demonstrate, the binding concept of my *Istrian Postcards* was my journey, which was about to come to its end. And a happy one, no less. Not surprisingly, the very first piece in the book is about Odysseus ("Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," October 6, 1977). In retrospect, the vaunted end turned out to be far from happy. After much struggle, I reached my liberation earlier this year, nearly thirteen years after the journey's expected end. Not even liberation spells its end, though. The journey continues, albeit under fundamentally different circumstances. Returning to my book about Istria, the happy end belongs squarely to the realm of fiction.



#### A METER IN LENGTH (August 25, 2002)

Redlands Road is being dug up again. This must be the fifth or the sixth time in a bit more than a year. Yet another pipe or wire will run along this street, which connects central Reading with the University and beyond. In preparation for digging, a surveyor had measured the course of the new line. I actually saw him do it a couple of days ago. Every ten meters there is a line spray-painted on the pavement and a number next to it showing how many meters each line is from the top of the street, where the digging will begin. As I breathe regularly when I am in my stride, two steps in and four steps out, this morning I noticed that I took exactly ten steps between the lines on the pavement along Redlands Road. I counted again and again, both going up and coming down the street, and I always came very close to ten steps per ten meters. That is, my step is roughly one meter in length. The funny thing is that I am tickled pink by this coincidence. I could have been a land surveyor, I guess. I would have been a natural, as the expression goes. Come to think of it, this is precisely what my paternal grandfather actually was.

#### THE MOVERS ARE COMING (August 31, 2002)

I have started packing today. I am reusing the boxes I have kept from 1998, when I moved from Lauren's house in London, which was sold late in the year, to my house in Reading. My boards that are not on display around the house and copies of the 1996 edition of my *Residua* that are still in my hands are going into boxes first. Each box takes fifteen boards and nine books. Today I packed, sealed, and marked five boxes. There are many more to go, but this is a beginning. I have plenty of time, though. The movers are coming in a bit less than a year.

#### POSTSCRIPTUM VIII (September 1, 2002)

When I make a selection of pieces on a particular theme from my *Residua*, the last of which is about Istria, at some point I feel that it is finished. It becomes difficult to imagine adding to it or subtracting from it even a single piece. Although fully aware of the fact that the selection charts but a path among paths through my vast book, and that it would look rather different were I to attempt it anew, I just know that I never will. And I never do. A funny kind of knowledge, this.

## ENDNOTES

- 1, Cf. Horkheimer, M., and T.W. Adorno, *Dialectics and Enlightenment*, "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," pp. 43-80, New York: Seabury Press, 1972 (first published in 1944).
2. Wilde, O., *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, New York: Random House, 1968, p. 434.
3. Barthes, R., *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1978 (first published in 1977), p. 34.
4. Borges, J.L., *Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965 (first published in 1952), p. 165.
5. Brown, N.O., *Love's Body*, New York: Vintage Books, 1966, p. 264.
6. Cassirer, E., *The Myth of the State*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975 (first published in 1946), pp. 160-161.
7. Horkheimer, M. and T.W. Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, New York: Seabury Press, 1972 (first published in 1944), p. 57.
8. *Op. cit.*, p. 99.
9. See, e.g., *Masnavi i Ma'navi: Spiritual Couplets*, translated and abridged by E.H. Whinfield, London: The Octagon Press, 1979, p. 326.
10. See, e.g., A. Zorzi, *La Repubblica del Leone: Storia di Venezia*, Milano: Rusconi, 1979, pp. 36-7.
11. *Venice: Art and Architecture*, Vols. I and II, Cologne: Könemann, 1997.
12. *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, Roma, 1969, pp. 405-6.
13. Cf. *Narodne pjesme i pleasovi Krka* (Folk Songs and Dances from the Island of Krk), Kastav: Melody, MCD 007 HDS.
14. New York and London: Routledge, 2000 (first published in 1997).

15. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948.
16. Elkins, *op. cit.*, p. 276.
17. London: Bantam, 2001.
18. *Op. cit.*, Chap. 17, pp. 221-233.
19. *Montona*, Padova: Liviana Editrice, 1974.
20. *Op. cit.* p. 18.

## SHORT BIO

Ranko Bon writes and paints. He has published several collections from his *Residua*, the Mother of All Blogs ([www.residua.org](http://www.residua.org)): *Residua I-XX: Selections* (London: The Hereford Salon, 1996), *Belgrade Postcards* (Belgrade: Vračarski Breg, 2002), *Istrian Postcards* (Belgrade: Vračarski 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 Diplome 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.