

# MOTOVUN POSTCARDS

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Motovun, Istria

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## THE ROOTS, TOO (December 15, 2002)

I arrived in Motovun rather late yesterday evening. I was lucky to find one of the few restaurants open. It is called *Pod voltom* or Under the Arch—the arch being the main entrance to the old town, which is still surrounded by a Medieval wall. I was the only guest, and so the owner, Benjamin, and his wife sat with me while I ate. The conversation inevitably ventured to my house. They knew the previous owners quite well. Jakub Samokovlić, originally from Mostar in Herzegovina but living in Belgrade at the time, known to all as Kuba, built the house in the traditional way following a Venetian template. It is all in stone. Most people in Motovun mention this with a touch of pride, as many of them were involved in the project in one way or another. Benjamin then asked me what I intended to do with the garden, where Kuba had planted many a fine fruit tree. I told him I was not a gardening type, and he smiled back. But then he told me a story about Kuba and his wife, Ljiljana, from whom I bought the house last year. One day Kuba was planting one of the fruit trees and Ljiljana noticed that he did not dig very deep. “Why so shallow?” she asked. “So that the roots, too, can hear the bells,” he answered cheerfully. Benjamin told me that he had heard Kuba tell the story himself to a number of Motovun people assembled for a few glasses of wine. There was much merriment back then, but the story touched everyone's heart. And so it did yesterday evening, some two decades later and more than a decade after Kuba's untimely death.

## *Addendum* I (December 16, 2002)

When I met Mr. Benčić in front of the post office this morning, I asked him about his wife's health. She had her fourth heart attack last summer, as I learned soon after we first met in his souvenir shop off the town wall. He told me she was poorly, but the good news was that she was still alive. I reminded him of who I was, and he perked up at once. However, he forgot which house I had bought, and I reminded him. “Everyone in Motovun tells me they were involved in the building of Kuba's house,” I smiled. “No,” he turned serious again, “only I was involved with it!” He told me that he was the director of the construction company that built the house. “I bought all the materials and I employed all the craftsmen,” he added sternly. It was a matter of pride with him, and so I dropped the subject, but it was clear

that it would take a few years to better understand who built my house. I will have to hurry, though, for Mr. Benčić is in his eighties, as are many other protagonists of the story.

*Addendum II* (December 17, 2002)

After lunch today at Cotić's at the foot of the Motovun hill, I struck up a conversation with a man who lives nearby. As soon as he heard which house I had bought, he told me that his father had built at least half of it. I told him that many people in town tell me about their involvement with Kuba's house, but then I also mentioned my encounter with Mr. Benčić. The fellow made a dismissive gesture with his hand: "Whenever you hear of anyone by that name, walk around him at a safe distance!" He also told me Mr. Benčić had been retired most of his life on account of ill health. Be all this as it may, I can tell my house is a marvel of building arts. Under no other circumstances would so many people claim it to their name, or to the name of their fathers.

THE THREE PHASES (December 16, 2002)

Renata and Ivo Vrtarić, whom I met last summer, came to Motovun sixteen years ago. They love to listen to my ravings about all the wonderful things I will do here. This they call the first phase. Judging by their knowing smiles, they are in the third phase. They know the little town rather well, and their expectations are in line with its actual potential. It is the second phase that must be the clincher.

*Addendum* (June 2, 2012)

I mention this piece to all and sundry at least ten times every single year. It was the first warning upon my arrival in Motovun. When I decided to read it again a few minutes ago, I was stunned to discover that it was bereft of *addenda*. And I expected at least two! How is this possible that a piece so important to my life has remained without a single comment? Anyway, I seem to be at the very end of the second phase at the moment. The end will come with the conclusion of three court cases the mayor of Motovun has lodged against me in the meanwhile. The way things are moving, that will be in a year or maybe two. And then I will be blessed with the beginning of the third phase. I will love to listen to anyone's ravings about all the wonderful things they will do in Motovun. Following Renata and Ivo Vrtarić, I will call it the first phase.

SEVEN PIANOS (December 28, 2002)

According to Mariano Maurović, an electrician by training who knows more about Motovun and Istria than anyone else in this little town, the

exodus of Italians after World War II left Motovun rather deserted. Among other things the refugees took with them were seven pianos. Back then, someone had counted such things and left a record, which Mariano eventually discovered. The town has had not a single piano ever since. There can hardly be a more poignant measure of the cost of post-war policies toward the Italian minority in Istria than this unique statistic.

#### THE BREATHING OF THE EARTH (December 29, 2002)

A karst region, Istria is full of pits, crevices, sinks, caverns, holes, and caves. Rivers dive and surface again in the strangest of places. A thin layer of soil covers the porous rock. Combined with abundant rains, especially in the spring and fall, this pockmarked soil produces grunts and snorts reminiscent of wild boar—perhaps the most important game in these parts. In the morning and evening mists, these sounds are awesome, indeed. The breathing of the earth is conducive to all kinds of ideas about the subterranean world of spirits. I only wonder how the wild boar conceive of their habitat.

#### ALL THIS (January 1, 2003)

I am sitting on the terrace of my house and gazing at the Mirna valley below. The day is perfect. There is not a cloud in the sky and it is quite warm. Bells from two churches are tolling in the distance. A rooster can be heard from time to time from a garden close by. On the first day of this very year, all this strikes me as fitting.

#### *Addendum* (January 21, 2003)

Three weeks hence and very far from that enchanted perch, I am watching on my computer screen the pictures of the valley taken with my digital camera on the first of the year. There are five shots showing the view from my terrace from left to right—that is, from south to north. The entire house faces west. To the south, I can see the road to Kaldir, Karojba, and Pazin. Southeast is Kaldir, which can be seen on its hill, but Karojba is behind another one, while Pazin is some distance away. Southwest, Brkač and Bataji are in the foreground, and Vižinada is on a ridge in the background. Straight ahead are Mirna and the Adriatic, but the silvery sliver of the sea can be seen only when the sun is directly above it, which was not the case when I took the shots. The blue river and the white road twist their way toward Poreč on the coast. Northwest is Groznan on its own hill, and north is Livade, as well as the road to Oprtalj, which is hidden by a ridge. Northeast is the road to Buzet, which is almost as far as Pazin and Poreč. Vineyards and fields dominate the view from the terrace. The vineyards are still green, as is a wide swath along the river and the road, but the fields and woods are different shades of pale brown. The

woods are a bit darker than the fields, some of which are partially flooded. Like the river, the submerged patches reflect the blue sky. The next time I will be able to smell the valley will be in late March, when the green will be at its most luxuriant. By the time I move to my new home in late July, many of the fields will be pale ochre already. Some will have been harvested by then, too. In a few years I will be able to tell each season, and perhaps each and every month, by the shifting colors of the Mirna valley.

SO AVERSE (January 6, 2003)

I am getting so averse to travel, and especially air travel, that I am beginning to wonder what would entice me to take a longish trip. It just crossed my mind that I would not even go as far as Stockholm to collect a Nobel prize. The trouble with the prize goes deeper, of course: I would never accept it in the first place.

FRIULI - VENEZIA GIULIA (January 11, 2003)

In a gas station half-way between Venice and Trieste I bought a map of my new world. It is a part of a series covering all regions in Italy in the 1:250,000 scale. The region is Friuli - Venezia Giulia, but the map covers a good chunk of Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia, as well. Of the major cities, one can find in it Venice, Padova, Ferrara, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Udine, and Trieste in Italy; Lienz, Villach, and Klagenfurt in Austria; Ljubljana, Kranj, and Koper in Slovenia; and Rijeka, Pazin, and Pula in Croatia. The entire Istrian peninsula and all the Istrian islands—Krk, Cres, and Rab—are on the map. The Alps, including the Julian Alps and a part of the Dolomites, are there, too. In short, the map embraces so much more than one would guess from its title. And that is its main virtue, to be sure. By the standards of the region, the map is almost ecumenical. By my own standards, it is all-embracing, indeed. My new world is in it entire. Which is why I love to spread the map on the floor and stare at it for a long, long time, as though I could somehow soak it in once and for all.

*Addendum* (November 17, 2015)

And I love to spread the map on the floor and stare at it for a long, long time to this very day. Which I do every few months without fail. But I do my best to keep it in perfect shape, for I cannot imagine that I would ever be able to find an adequate replacement for it. For me, it remains the one and only map of my new world. Nearly thirteen years later, though, I realize that I have done very little to explore it on the ground. When I bought my house in Motovun, I thought that many buses and boats would be at my disposal whenever I wished to travel in the region either by land or sea, but that turned out not to be the case. Nowadays, people in these parts travel by car, as well. For better

or worse, my beloved is not fond of driving, either. And so the map must be hopelessly out of date in terms of highways in the region, and especially in Croatia and Slovenia, where many new ones have been built over the recent years. Be that as it may, the map of Friuli - Venezia Giulia is always close at hand. And I love travelling across it in my own mind. Many a place on the map comes alive as soon as I read its name.

#### MY FEVERISH PREPARATIONS (January 13, 2003)

In preparation for my departure from Reading, I am going to the three outdoors stores in town and buying everything I can imagine needing in Motovun in the years to come. Whenever I find anything to my liking, I buy two or three identical pieces or pairs. Soon enough I will be spotted by the sales attendants, who will begin wondering about my feverish preparations. Am I going to another world?

#### “MY LHASA” (January 31, 2003)

Thus I to myself at a whisper over this morning’s tea as I gazed at a photograph of Motovun I took last summer. This picture will appear on the cover of my *Istrian Postcards*, which is about to appear in print in Belgrade. But is this what I really think of Motovun—my Motovun? Or is “my Lhasa” but an innocent slip of the tongue?

#### “AS MANY AS FLIES!” (March 24, 2003)

Thus a retired teacher in Motovun when I asked him how many children there were when he was still teaching in the town. In his eighties, he retired some twenty years ago. The town itself had close to three-hundred pupils at one time, whereas there are only six now. The whole municipality has less than ninety pupils, but it had close to one-thousand some fifty years ago. Now the municipality has as many people all told.

#### *Addendum* (September 10, 2015)

I was talking with Miho Sviličić, known as *barba* Miho by all. He died a few years after I moved to Motovun. But now I talk to his son, Davor, known by all as Mihec after his father. “Mihec” would translate into “little Miho” in the Croatian vernacular spoken in these parts. And I talk to his grandsons, Mihael or Miki, Laren, and Mario. *Barba* Miho is still alive, as it were, and he comes up in conversation often enough. It takes a long time to die in small towns. To be a bit more precise, it takes four to five generations.

#### READING, MOTOVUN (April 8, 2003)

The sun blinded me as I was crossing a street on my way to work this morning, and so I stepped in front of an approaching car. It appeared out of nowhere. Startled, I pulled back, but a split-second later I did it again. The second time it was an approaching motorcycle that seemed to come out of the blue. I pulled back again and waited for a while until the street was empty. I felt unsettled. No more chances, I decided. This has been happening to me lately. I keep reminding myself that I must be vigilant whenever I am close to the traffic, but these near-misses are recurring nonetheless. What is going on? Body and mind, I am in the best of shapes. I am nimble and far from absent-minded. In fact, I pay careful attention to everything around me. And in me, for that matter. I am awake and observant. So, what is happening to me? At the moment, I can find only one explanation for this paradox: now I am living in two worlds at the same time. A part of me has already departed. The other world I inhabit moves at a different pace. It knows no traffic. Nothing jumps at you out of nowhere in that world. It is gentle and calm. Yes, now I am living in Reading and Motovun at the very same time.

#### DYING TO KNOW (May 16, 2003)

At the highest spot of St. James's church, just above the bell that calls to prayer on Sundays, I often spot a bird. It is never a pigeon, wood-pigeon, dove, or magpie. Or seagull, for that matter. Seagulls sometimes rest on the roof of the church, but they always stick together. On a rare occasion, and only briefly, the bird I spot on high is a sparrow. It checks the view and dives down in haste. A bit more often, but still quite rarely, it is a blackbird. The rest of the time it is a crow. A big, fat crow. No matter how carefully I look, though, I cannot tell whether it is always the same crow, one of a few crows, or any old crow. Curiously enough, I am dying to know, but I know that I never will.

#### *Addendum I* (May 26, 2003)

In Greek, *kataskopos* has a number of meanings. Perhaps the oldest is "looker-down," a word meant for gods. This comes from *kata* for "down," which refers both to space and time, and *skopos* for "looker" or "watcher." However, another meaning of the root *kata* is "intense," leading to meanings of *kataskopos* such as "scout" and even "spy." One way or another, crows looking down from on high must have impressed our ancestors, the wordsmiths of prehistory, as formidable creatures. Their fellow birds seem to concur. And that impresses me, too. Who knows, the crow that has just landed on top of St. James's may be watching me even as I write.

### *Addendum II (June 2, 2003)*

According to my Greek friends, several of whom responded to my inquiries about the meaning of the word *kataskopos*, its primary meaning in modern Greek is “spy.” At first I was horrified. Such a beautiful word with such an illustrious origin! But this is not such a bad name for gods, after all. However you turn it, spies they were.

### FRAMING (May 22, 2003)

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

### ON DEMOCRACY (June 16, 2003)

Statistically speaking, democracy makes good sense as a first approximation. To wit, let everyone be equal if there is no prior information about anyone. As a second approximation, democracy is already problematic. Not everyone is equal, as is plain to see as soon as one begins gathering information about people. This one is a scoundrel, that one is a lunatic. The more information is gathered, the less sense the assumption of equality makes. The posterior information looms ever larger. Some people should have only a fraction of a vote, and some none at all. In the limit, democracy is nothing but ignorance about people raised to the level of a principle. It runs counter to everything known about the human species. As a consequence, it is pernicious and even immoral. Democracy is about disregard of knowledge and abdication of reason. Statistically speaking, of course.

### SOME DIFFICULT EXERCISES (July 18, 2003)

To be small and weak. To let be. To forget. To love. To let oneself sink. To drop out. To whimper and whine. To need. To drool. To surrender. To ask and keep asking. To bleed. To go limp. To trust. To throw in the towel. To forgive. To open up. To fall and keep falling. To throw up. To turn the other cheek. To moan. To drift away. To stop fighting. To kneel. To beshit oneself. To let go. Yes, to let go and go and go.



### THE FATE OF AIR TRAVEL (July 19, 2003)

I have been telling everyone who would listen that today's flight to Trieste will most likely be my last. "God willing," I would say, "I will see an airplane from the inside never again." Today's strike by British Airways staff has sealed the fate of air travel in my eyes. The mess at Heathrow was complete and total. Although I ultimately managed to book a flight to Venice instead, the misery I have witnessed will never go away. Airplanes, goodbye!

### KATASKOPOS (July 20, 2003)

Looking down from my terrace, I wonder how will I ever leave this place again. How will I ever venture to descend, I wonder. Looking down, I feel above it all. Above pleasure and pain. Above love and hate. Above life and death. Looking down, I feel blissfully silly. Like a giddy god.

### "THE LAST BOX" (July 25, 2003)

Thus I to myself as I was walking to the eighth box left for today, the last day of my move from Reading to Motovun. When I pulled the box from its corner by the main door, I saw a black scorpion the size of a large coin. It raised its tail menacingly. "*In cauda venenum*," I was tempted to say, but Istrian scorpions are not poisonous.

### THE LIGHTS OF VENICE (July 26, 2003)

Judging from a kink in an airliner's path high above the stretch of the Adriatic visible from Motovun, I reckoned that Venice must be just beyond. It must be in the straight line through the sliver of the Gulf of Venice of old. Later in the day I learned that the lights of Venice could be seen from the church tower on a good day. The map vindicated the hunch and the tale. Just beyond that stretch of the sea on the horizon, the crumbling navel of the old world...

### THAT FESTIVAL (August 2, 2003)

Having witnessed the Motovun film festival for the second time in a row, I can clearly see two concurrent festivals wrapped in one. One is about film; the other has nothing whatsoever to do with film. Having completed its fifth year, the festival has split into two. However, the organizers seem to be unaware of the second—and increasingly important—festival, which is about drinking, fucking, and brawling. That festival now needs a different and more competent management.

### UNINTERRUPTIBLE POWER SUPPLY (August 7, 2003)

Several months before moving to Motovun I learned from friends who live in Istria that I should get something called uninterruptible power supply or UPS. The electric current in Istria is subject to all kinds of troubles, including jolts that can fry electrical appliances. Fearing most for my computer I got a UPS system of choice. I realized only upon arrival in Motovun that I could not connect it to my Macintosh because of plug incompatibility. I now use my computer only sparingly lest I lose it in one fell swoop. Whenever I turn it on I feel jittery. Writing in peace is unimaginable. One of my friends who suggested I get the UPS will come tomorrow to help me connect it properly. He is an expert, too. This accomplished, I will be able to start developing a new daily routine, which will be dominated by writing, editing, and managing my writings, including the selection available on the World Wide Web. In the meanwhile, I am on vacation, as it were. Uninterruptible power supply be praised.

### THE COLOR OF MY HOUSE (August 17, 2003)

The mayor of my little town is not famous for garrulousness. He is appreciated for his ways with administration and finance, but he is quite stiff and reserved with people. He rarely smiles, let alone laughs. I introduced myself to him a year ago, as soon as I bought my house in Motovun, and I told him that I would move here for good. As there are few people who live here permanently, that was supposed to be good news. Ever since our first meeting we have been exchanging greetings, but only on my own initiative. He behaves as though he has forgotten who I am. Or so I have felt. A few days ago I approached him again at a small ceremony at the town piazza. "You know," he started without greetings, "I have received a number of complaints about the color of your house." I agreed it was a bit strong, but I explained that my builders had instructions to find a color the house was painted a couple of decades ago, when it was built. It had always been rather strong, but it had faded over the years. More to the point, it will fade a bit after a year or two once again. "Anyhow," the mayor concluded flatly, "you may have problems with historical preservation people in Poreč." Welcome to Motovun!

### *Addendum* (February 19, 2004)

The color of my house is a frequent subject of conversation in and around Motovun. One way or another, many people here find it a bit grating. Expecting to hear from the good people in Poreč, I have had many opportunities to practice my arguments in favor of my choice of color. Well, my builders' choice of color, to be precise. First, I explain to everyone that Venetians would be appalled to see Motovun today. It used to be alive with color, as can still be gleaned if one looks under the eaves of old houses. Abandoned by its original

inhabitants in the late 1940s, the town has been populated by people from Slavonia and Medjimurje, who painted their houses white, as was their custom. In addition, the paint has fallen off many of the now derelict houses, exposing the yellowish stone underneath. People living in and around town have become used to this unusual condition, but that does not mean that color should not return to Motovun. And in earnest. Second, I explain to everyone that the few colors officially allowed by the authorities in Poreč have little to do with the variety that can be seen in Venice itself. After all, that is the only relevant model. Again, Venetians themselves would be stunned by such restrictions. If circumstances permit, I add that the Venetian pink is a color of renown, and that my builders may have missed it by a slight margin only. Third, I explain to everyone that I am of Venetian origin myself, and that I am the relevant authority when it comes to Venetian colors. If circumstances permit once again, I mention that I probably have more education in architecture, urban design, and urban planning than the entire Poreč establishment put together. By this stage in the argument, my poor interlocutors are usually exhausted. Their eyes glassy, they just nod at me wearily. God only knows whether the preservation people will be an equally easy prey if and when it comes to blows between us. Which I can hardly wait to happen, I must add with some pleasure.

#### A WOUND THAT STILL FESTERS (August 21, 2003)

Today I met a fellow who was born in the house that once stood roughly where my house now stands. Eugenio Maisani is his name. He told me that the original family name, which can still be found in the cadastral records, used to be Maizzan. His family fled to Italy in 1947, when the town was nearly deserted. Only a handful of Italian families remained. Many Italians left Istria around this time, when there was a great deal of tension between Italy and Yugoslavia over the fate of Trieste. The exodus has left a wound that still festers. In his late sixties, Eugenio now lives in Turin. He comes to Istria for vacations only, but he uses every opportunity to return to Motovun. He is sad to see his old house gone, and he finds the architecture of the new house incompatible with the rest of the town, but he accepts that its new terrace is its greatest asset. I invited him to visit me whenever he comes around, and we exchanged addresses and phone numbers. He did not strike me as a man who would appreciate the way I had refurbished the house, but I know that he would relish such visits nevertheless. Who knows how much more I will learn from him over the years, but I certainly hope we will see each other a few more times. Old wounds merit special care.

#### *Addendum I* (August 22, 2003)

As I was leaving the post office this morning, I bumped into Eugenio. We shook hands. "Would you like to see the house now?" I asked. He

said he would. He had nothing else to do. We chatted about the Motovun of his childhood on our way down Borgo. He is on the portly side, and we walked quite slowly. When we reached my house, I pulled out the key and walked to the door. “But this is not my house!” he said. Then he pointed to the next house down the street: “This is where I was born!” The old house was long gone, though. I invited him to my place, anyway. “The family that lived here was called Marin,” he said, “but I am not sure whether they actually owned the place.” Eugenio remembered that they had a grocery store. “Your house is in the spirit of the town I know,” he commented, “but the house next door is an abortion!” He loved my terrace, but he kept looking sideways. “That terrace is nice, too,” he smiled. One way or another, we will remain close, I am quite sure.

#### *Addendum II* (December 4, 2003)

Having unexpectedly accomplished several administrative feats in Pazin, this morning I decided to go to the Cadastral Office and check the ownership history of my house—that is, the house that once stood in its place. Another feat awaited me. The office was open and there was no line. The woman on duty was quite pleasant, too. She brought out several cadastral books, all of which looked pretty ancient. Before Ljiljana and Maja Samokovlic, from whom I bought the house, the owner was Jakub Samokovlic, their husband and father, respectively. The ownership was entered into the register in 1976, several years after the house was built. The property was in public ownership since 1955, when it was nationalized. To the best of my knowledge, the house that was there before mine was already derelict by that time. From 1940 to 1955 the owner is listed as “Paolini Francesco fu Marino.” The original family name was thus Marino, the Italian version of the Venetian Marin. This bears out Eugenio Maisani’s story. According to the woman on duty, going further back in time would be much more difficult, but my curiosity was sated already. God only knows how the older cadastral books now look, though.

#### *Addendum III* (August 6, 2004)

Eugenio is back in town. Although he is retired, he comes to Motovun every August, when most of Italy is on vacation. This time he brought me a copy of an old photograph of his house, which also shows the house that stood in the place of my own. To the best of his recollection, the photograph was taken around 1950, several years after his family’s departure. Some Italians must have remained this late after World War II to take this photograph. To my surprise, my house looks very much like the one that once stood in its place, minus the ground floor, where the grocery store used to be. The main door was at the same place, but there was another door and a few stone steps leading to it. This must have been the store. However, Eugenio’s house was pretty different than the one that has replaced it. It had a large door graced with an ample arch. To each side of the door there

was a large window protected by an elaborate grill. Eugenio says he is dreaming about buying the house back and restoring it to its original shape. Whenever I see him walking slowly down Borgo, I can almost feel his quiet anguish. That missing arch must be painful, indeed.

*Addendum IV* (August 4, 2017)

I just learned that Eugenio Maisani is no more. He was quite ill for a while, and then he passed away. The news struck me pretty hard, and I did my best to control my tears. Although I had not seen Eugenio for a few years, he was very close to my heart. He was my neighbor, as it were. His old house belonged to Istra Toner when I came to Motovun, and it belongs to Jakov Vrtarić since a couple of years ago, but it still belonged to Eugenio in my own mind. His spirit will cling to it in the future, as well. Farewell, dear neighbor!

“AND NOW WE WILL NEED A LITTLE BIT OF LUCK!” (August 27, 2003)

Thus the Croatian Telecom man who came today to install the telephone line required for the Internet connection. These were his first words, too. He appeared nearly a month after I submitted the requisite form. As it turned out, the two telephone outlets in the house were stone dead. An hour or two later he appeared with another man, who inspected the line outside the house. After some fiddling with a box down the street, the outlets in the house came alive. However, all tests showed that the connection was not reliable enough for the Internet service. An old-fashioned phone would be just fine, but a computer would need a steadier signal. “We’ll be back,” said the first man gravely as we shook hands at the door. It now seems that we will need much more luck than the Motovun telephone network is capable of delivering, though. Even if everything turns out all right, it will take weeks. Besides, who knows how reliable the service will ever be. It is time to start considering older technologies for staying in touch with the world. The Internet is a technology of the future. In Motovun, at least.

CA’ BON (September 5, 2003)

Thus a stone plaque the size of a postcard attached to the wall by the front door of my house. I had it made in Reading at the funeral home that took care of my parents’ remains. Perhaps this is the smallest tombstone they have ever made. I brought it to Motovun last December, just before the refurbishment of the house had started. It has three meanings in Veneto, the Venetian dialect. *Ca’* is short for *casa* or “house.” However, *casa* also means “family” or “clan.” Together, the two words mean “good house.” The third meaning is closest to my heart at present. After some six weeks in Istria, I feel it

is a good house indeed. Although it now bears my imprint, it still remains the house built by Jakub Samokovlic, known as Kuba. He died more than ten years ago, not long before he could retire to Motovun together with his wife, Ljiljana. I feel ever more fortunate to have kept the house essentially the same as it was when Kuba had finished it. Day by day, I feel closer to him. Soon we will become family.

#### TOWARD A MAP OF MOTOVUN (September 11, 2003)

Motovun has two main streets—Gradiziol and Borgo—that reach the top of the hill from two sides. Well, there are few other streets, anyhow. Gradiziol is a two-way street. From the top, where it faces north, it spirals eastward. That is where most traffic and almost all shops can be found. Borgo is a one-way street going down. It spirals from south at the top toward east. Perhaps the most important among the remaining streets is Barbacan, which curves around the eastern part of the town wall. It now serves as the main parking lot. Barbacan connects Gradiziol and Borgo, but the link with the latter is too narrow for cars. Then there is Rialto, which is too steep and narrow for traffic. It used to be the main thoroughfare for donkeys and mules. All these names go back centuries to Motovun's Venetian origins. Returning to Borgo, it used to have many shops. At present, it has the only daycare in town. A few paces down from my house, it caters to a dozen children at most. Many mornings I wake up to the sound of children walking there with their parents. Every ten or twenty minutes a car rumbles down the street, its motor idling. Gaggles of tourists sometimes pass up or down Borgo, but it is quiet most of the time. Today I woke up to the sound of two of my neighbors exchanging greetings and pleasantries.

#### THE SOUNDS OF MY HOUSE (September 12, 2003)

It is windy today. The wind is picking up strength, too. *Bura*, or *bora* in Italian, can be quite blustery. I am still getting used to the sounds of my house. As well as the houses across the street. The bang I just heard must be from one of the loose shutters over there... The houses at Borgo 21 and 23 are both dilapidated. Roofs caved in, top floors full of holes, collapsed stairs, broken windows and shutters, crumbling mortar... One of the rotten shutters from Borgo 21 came off in yesterday's storm, and I wrote a letter to the municipality regarding the danger to the public. There are many houses at various stages of disrepair in Motovun, and they are all at risk of collapsing one day. This happens quickly in this climate even with stone structures typical of this region. The water leaches the old mortar away once the roof and floors are gone. Another bang, but a different one this time... It must be from the ruin further up the street, at Borgo 15.

PREMONITIONS OF A HAPPY END (September 15, 2003)

God only knows what is afoot, but I feel that something wonderful is about to happen. Something that would fill my heart for good. Strangely, two things come to mind in this connection: the end of Proust's *Remembrance* and the end of Arthur C. Clark's sequel to *2001*. Premonitions of a happy end, I suppose. The tears in my eyes tell me I am onto something.

*Addendum I* (September 16, 2003)

"Sounds like Nirvana," wrote Diane Pernet in response to this piece circulated as an electronic postcard. Hope so, I whispered to myself as I read these words. But then she added: "I know that I can look forward to you sharing this magic with us." This touched me. "The story goes that it is impossible to tell the experience," I wrote back at once, "but I will strive for transparency." And then I thanked her for her trust. A good reader is the writer's greatest reward. The only reward, rather.

*Addendum II* (September 18, 2003)

Better than power over all the earth, better than going to heaven, and better than dominion over the worlds is the joy of the man who enters the river of life that leads to Nirvana.

From *The Dhammapada*, Translated by Juan Mascaró,  
Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973, p.  
61.

*Addendum III* (September 23, 2003)

The copy of *The Dhammapada* I was reading on a beach in Mošćenička Draga, from which I copied the above quote into my notebook, was bought in London on November 26, 1998. I always record the place and date of purchase on the first page of every book I buy. I finished reading the book on the very same day, and I jotted the following words on the last page:

Strange reading. Occasional pearls, many funny bits.  
Still, one feels good when one strives to cut one's way  
through this thicket.

By the way, I always date comments of this ilk. On September 18, the date of the previous *addendum*, my feelings about the book were not the same. Far from it. This is what I wrote beneath the above assessment of one of the paramount Buddhist texts:

On this reading, things are different. Different is the  
word. I was not ready five years ago!

Indeed, when I read the paragraph quoted above, I burst into tears. This I take as a sign of truth, I must admit at once. Real truth. Or “the truth revealed by the great,” to quote from *The Dhammapada* once again.[1] For better or for worse, I take my tears seriously. As witnessed by the original piece, as well as many others I have written in recent years, they are my guides. The older I get, the more I let myself be guided by something as fickle as tears. This may well be sentimentality of old age, but the truth thus revealed is so much more soothing than the truth of any other kind that it cannot be forsaken. More, it must be transmitted, as well.

#### A GOOD WHACK (September 17, 2003)

I am sitting on the terrace of my house. A fly starts annoying me. I end up by giving it a good whack, and it falls on the floor. It is not dead, but it is badly hurt. It is as good as dead. Feeling a bit guilty, I whack it again, this time with my sandal. Its head comes off, but it keeps trying to get up. Tiny ants that live in the terrace wall immediately spot the dying fly. They come out in numbers. First they carry the head to their nest. The twitching body follows at a clip. The fly is now gone, but I am left in a quandary. What is the moral of this story?

#### WOBBLING SLIGHTLY (September 21, 2003)

After a few days away from home, I am banging at my computer with abandon. Thus I spot a huge praying mantis on my desk only when it reaches the keyboard. Bright green, wobbling slightly on its spindly hind legs, it holds its barbed front legs forward and swivels its head to see me better. It does not seem to be impressed by my size. I walk down to the kitchen, find a glass bowl, return to my study, push the funny insect inside, take it to the garden, and push it onto a leaf on top of a tall stalk. It obliges me all the way. Clinging to the leaf, it swivels its head around to give me another good look: “Who is this guy?”

#### THIS NUISANCE (September 25, 2003)

Croatian president is coming to Motovun today. Hooray! To the best of my knowledge, this is the first such visit. A pity, too. I wish he would come more often. Once a week, at least. Perhaps he could move here, as well. Why? The town is glorious without cars, and there is no-one but the president who can sweep away this nuisance of our civilization.



*Addendum I* (September 26, 2003)

Having written this piece and circulated it to my friends as an electronic postcard, I was so pleased with my wit that I decided to send a similar letter to the Motovun Municipal Council. And this is what I did. The letter is in the fine tradition of humble proposals, and that is how it is entitled. It starts with my enthusiastic welcome of the president; proceeds to the idea of inviting him as often as possible to all kinds of gatherings, as well as the idea of offering him a house in Motovun; mentions that many people I have talked to agree with the idea wholeheartedly; and then concludes that the town is simply glorious without cars. Ah, if it could only be like that every day! The letter ended up in a box recently installed in the town loggia, intended for all complaints to and praises of our local administration. Anonymous letters are presumably acceptable, and maybe even encouraged, but I proudly signed my humble proposal.

*Addendum II* (September 29, 2003)

A well-informed and well-meaning person close to the municipal officials and administrators has warned me that such intellectual stunts as my letter would never work in Motovun. To begin with, their subtlety is lost on almost everyone. Moreover, letters like this one may only make my life difficult here. The car is too sacred to too many people in power, or close to power, and all my attempts to challenge these people will ultimately come to grief. While we were talking, the well-informed and well-meaning person kept repeating that all this is being said so as to make sure that I understand the consequences of my stunts. And it was all said with my own interests in mind.

*Addendum III* (December 19, 2015)

Pray, who was this well-informed and well-meaning person from the previous *addendum*? It was Mariano Maurović, with whom I had a close albeit somewhat guarded relationship since my arrival in Motovun. Unfortunately, he died only three years afterwards (“Our Own Historian,” June 25, 2006). I always hoped to establish a more cordial relationship with him because he knew a great deal about the hilltown’s history (“The Last Motovun Historian,” November 26, 2009). My own book on the subject is thus dedicated to him. Returning to my intellectual stunt, his warning was right on the money. My letter signaled the beginning of a fraught relationship with the then mayor and the municipal council as a whole. Live and learn.

POISON AND ARSON (October 9, 2003)

Motovun is famous for truffles. And for the barking of truffle dogs, caged around town in tiny chicken-wire kennels. There are about two-

thousand such dogs in the area, and about one-thousand people dedicated to truffles. One often hears that there are too many dogs and people in this lucrative trade. The woods around Motovun are being depleted. Every year there are fewer and fewer truffles. This season the price of this delicacy has reached almost three-thousand euros per kilogram. "This is our just desert," say many people in earnest. Everyone I know tells me that they have had no luck this month, which is supposed to be the best. They found nothing at all. Zilch. Simply put, it is high time to regulate the overheated market. But when I mentioned all this to some friends from abroad, who had lived here for years, they laughed: "The story is the same each and every season." "But," I interjected, "even my closest friends tell me the same thing." "Everyone lies about truffles," the argument went. "Why?" "Because the best dogs are regularly poisoned and the best kennels have a habit of catching on fire." Poison and arson... I could not but think of my mother, who loved to say that Istrians were the mildest people of all.

*Addendum* (October 10, 2003)

"Remember," writes one of my friends from Motovun upon receiving this piece as an electronic postcard, "there are few real Istrians in our town." True enough, almost everyone here came by bus from Slavonia and Medjumurje when the Italians left in droves after World War II, although the proportion of indigenous Istrians is considerably larger in the surrounding villages. My mother would have been relieved. No, she would have been elated.

THE LITTLE NUISANCES (November 18, 2003)

Most insects are a nuisance, and some are an outright headache, but it is still strange and even disconcerting that so few of them are around this time of year. From early spring to early autumn, and especially in the middle of summer, they are everywhere, absolutely everywhere; by late autumn or early winter, they crawl into the house only to give up the ghost in the comfort of a dry place. Here and there, but ever more rarely, one still finds an upturned corpse with six spindly legs tucked in at the rigid chest. The seasonal carnage is nearing its end, though. Millions upon millions of tons of these tiny corpses are strewn about the countryside, slowly returning their juices to the depleted soil. But millions of tons of their eggs are in waiting, as well. The little nuisances will be back with the first signs of spring, to be sure. At their first sighting, one will be surprised by a sentiment not all that different from rejoicing.

SUCH A TINY PLACE (December 6, 2003)

As I stride through my little town and wave merrily at someone or exchange boisterous greetings with someone else, I am often

overwhelmed by good cheer, which sometimes borders on joy. On occasion I feel that the affection in my bosom is a bit too strong, blown out of proportion, and maybe even contrived. In fact, when I calmly examine anyone I am liable to encounter on my daily round, I am a bit perplexed about my emotions. Their faults and foibles are plain to see and sometimes painfully obvious. Still, I know that my feelings are genuine. It has taken me a while to realize that my affection—nay, love—is of a kind I have experienced never before because I have never lived in such a tiny place. It is joint, collective, all-inclusive, broad, communal, all-embracing, shared, catholic. Take your pick.

*Addendum I* (January 28, 2004)

Before going to sleep last night, I was seized by a thought so strident and so resonant that it immediately struck me as the purest and noblest among truths: behind my nascent love for this tiny community there is an attempt to fight apoptosis. Briefly, apoptosis is something akin to a suicide mechanism that overpowers those who are no longer useful to the larger community. This was first noted on the cellular level, where individual cells self-destruct if they are no longer needed, but it was observed in the behavior of entire organisms, as well. Once isolated, their dysfunctional immune systems and behavioral patterns vastly increase their odds of death. For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see “Apoptosis” (January 9, 2002). Back to my last night’s thought, love is about self-preservation first and foremost. And it may well be that nothing beats love in this respect. Whence its hallowed place in all major religions.

*Addendum II* (January 29, 2004)

Only consider the sequence of events that leads to my discovery of Howard Bloom’s *Global Brain* (New York: Wiley, 2000). Or is it the other way around—the book’s discovery of my humble self? First, my then wife decides to return to the States and takes our children with her. Soon it becomes clear that our marriage is over, as is my second attempt at fatherhood. Second, my mother and my father die in my arms four months apart from each other. Third, I almost snuff it in the Alps soon after my father’s death. Fourth, I decide to retire from professional life and to move to Istria for good. Fifth, I realize that I am in love with a woman I already consider my fourth and hopefully last wife. As soon as I stumbled upon the notion of apoptosis I was convinced it was crucial to my interpretation of the world around me, as well as my own place within it. Thus the quote I plucked soon after I started reading the book. And here it surfaces again, as if by magic. As if by the miracle of love, that is.

I LOVE *BORA*! (December 8, 2003)

Yesterday's *bora* was so strong that today's newspapers are full of pictures of its devastation in Istria and Dalmatia. Upturned roofs, toppled walls, uprooted trees... But the view from my terrace is stupendous. Cold, dry, and ferocious, the wind has swept away every trace of water in the air. Gone are the mists and clouds. Gone are the distances. Although the *bora* has subsided today, the few clouds that managed to form in the pale morning sky were shredded by noon. The thin stripes and wisps only suggest the clouds' original shape. And the afternoon sun is melting them away at a clip. Standing on my terrace, I cannot suppress my feelings. I love *bora*!

A QUICK LESSON IN POLITICAL ECONOMY (January 2, 2004)

My heating-oil tank takes one-thousand and nine-hundred liters of the good stuff. The gauge on the top of the tank indicated that there was no more than a quarter of the oil left, and so I called Marino Gasparini from Mandrac near Novigrad to fill it up again. His gas station is the only one close to Motovun with a cistern small enough to navigate the town's narrow streets. In fact, the cistern takes exactly two-thousand liters. He filled my tank at the end of September. As it turned out, there were about seven-hundred liters of oil left in the tank, making my call quite premature. Anyhow, I asked Marino about his cistern. Mounted on a small Fiat truck, it was built in 1967. After its recent overhaul, it is in good shape, but its days are clearly numbered. "I hope it will last a few more years," I chuckled. "That's the least trouble," he smiled back and raised his eyebrows. He pointed first at the logo of the oil distributor on the cistern and second at the name of his gas station on the truck door: "Slowly but surely, that company is choking this company." And then he raised his shoulders and spread his arms: "There is ever-less air there, and we may go under well before this old thing gives up the ghost." It goes without saying that the oil distributor could not care less about a few small Istrian towns like Motovun. According to Marino, they are not even aware of the service he provides with his ancient cistern.

VLADO (January 25, 2004)

Another death in town. Cancer this time. A friend took me to see the dying man just before Christmas. "I am still waiting for the results of the last test," he told us helpfully. I felt good about the visit for weeks. Actually, I felt proud of it. The myriad of petty signs of the encroaching end... The last few weeks I would ask about the dying man ever more often. "Not good," was the standard answer, accompanied by the shaking of the head. Ever since New Year's, it was a question of days. The news hung in the air, waiting to burst. As always, the well-rehearsed news is more difficult to bear than one

expects. “Vlado died,” people are saying to each other today. A man well liked, he was confined to bed for nearly a year. “Perhaps it is better this way,” people are saying to each other today. “Perhaps,” is the standard answer.

*Addendum* (May 1, 2017)

It was Vlado Vugrinec, of course. So many years later, I can still remember the visit, which took half an hour at most. His pain was in the air, but he was chipper nonetheless. In spite of the debilitating illness, there was much hope around his bed at the time. And it was Miro Kopčalić who took me to his house on top of the Motovun hill. We even told jokes to help Vlado along. There was much laughter, too. In my mind’s eye, I can still see the sprawling bed and the massive handle hanging from the ceiling right above it. Without it, he could not move around. But the waiting was excruciating long after the brief and jolly visit.

Several deaths preceded Vlado’s, and many followed it. All told, more than forty people died in Motovun since my arrival fifteen years ago. Here is the list of all the others in the order in which they passed away: Mara Mičanović, Miljenko Beletić, Ernest Benčić, Marija Benčić, Ana Benčić, Jürgen Braunschweiger, Vera Jerman, Benjamin Dagostin, Jadranko Ferluga, Toni Jerman, Miroslav Šutej, Mariano Maurović, Božena Nemet, Attilio Salamon, Anton Sirotić, Ana Srdoč, Miho Sviličić, Josipa Bakša, Stella Matiassich, Pierina Sirotić, Paul Müller, Josip Nemet, Liza Braunschweiger, Anton Benčić, Marija Sviličić, Elizabeta Nicić, Mileva Benčić, Orelia Handjal, Ivo Vrtarić, Renata Sandalj, Josipa Ščulac, Milan Babić, Iseo Serafin, Ljubica Handjal, Zdravko Drča, Viktoria Vivoda, Lucian Benčić, Viktoria Pavletić, Attilio Benčić, Dana Brečević, Dorotea Kuzma, Aldo Kaligari, Anastasia Ivašić, Eržebet Adžva, and Slobodan Brečević. Indeed, the list is almost frightening to behold.

While Vlado was still alive, his pain was with me whenever I went to the upper square or anywhere else within the town walls. Although I had barely arrived in Motovun, his suffering was with me day after day. It weighed on me like a stone. New to the community as I was, I quickly became one of its members. It was a new experience for me back then, but now I feel it whenever anyone else in the hilltown is seriously ill. Sadly, there are quite a few of them at this particular time. To the best of my knowledge, most of them are beyond medical help at this juncture. It is but a question of time. Which is why the memory of Vlado is coming back to me ever more often. And ever more insistently. Wherever I go, I can feel the old stone...

#### MY NEW NEIGHBORS (January 31, 2004)

Today's excursion to Venice numbered a hundred and fifty people in three buses loaded to the gills. Some were young and some were old. Some joined the excursion in small cars and some in big ones. Many I knew, but some were new to me. Those I did not know had come from several small towns and large villages along the road between Motovun and Pazin: Karojba, Škropeti, Trviž, Beram... I talked to quite a number of them. And I learned a couple of things about my new neighbors. On the way there, I learned that no-one had been to Venice ever before. "It is so close, we kept putting it off," they explained. On the way back, I learned that no-one intended to return to Venice ever again. "It is so dirty, so very dirty," they explained.

#### THE FIRST WOODPECKER (February 5, 2004)

Sitting outside, early this afternoon I heard the first woodpecker. The first sign of spring, as everyone around here agrees. But the chain of causality leading to the telltale rattle of this enterprising bird tells a different story, of course. It is the insects that start stirring first. All manner of caterpillars are munching their way through the shells of their eggs. They are creeping and crawling out of their cosy nests. Woodpeckers come in their wake, and so do other birds. Long live the creepy crawlies!

#### CENTER, PERIPHERY (February 17, 2004)

There are two centers of Istria. Both are quite old and are not far apart. One is Pazin, the Austrian Mitterburg. Smack in the middle of the peninsula, Pazin is at the hub of so many roads connecting Trieste, Rijeka, and Pula. The other center of Istria is Motovun, the Venetian Montona, which is only twenty kilometers north of Pazin. Nowadays, Motovun is off the main road. It was central to the maritime republic because the river Mirna was navigable well past the town. Looking at a map of Istria, the Austrians saw land, while Venetians saw the sea and navigable rivers. Their views of the world were complementary, though, and the borders between the two empires shifted but rarely. Both empires are long gone, and so is the importance of the center. Pazin has less than five-thousand inhabitants today, while Motovun has shrivelled to no more than three-hundred. Trieste, Rijeka, and Pula, in that order, are now the three major centers of the peninsula. Together, they boast close to one-million people, many of whom are originally from central Istria. Remembering Pascal, and blasphemously inverting his divine formula, we can say that Istria is a triangle whose center is nowhere and periphery everywhere.

## THE HORN (February 25, 2004)

The horn: a traditional game hard to explain. It is played in Motovun and Buzet, the only two towns in central Istria where the game has taken root a century or so ago. A whole bunch of guys throw pieces of crooked wood after a horn. Down a crooked road, from the Motovun cemetery to Kanal, which is in the town's foothills. It must be slightly different in Buzet, I assume. The winner of each round throws the horn down the road, followed by his own piece of crooked wood. Which is a T-shaped affair made of a thicker piece of wood with a thinner but longer handle extending from its middle. A jumpy sort of thing. Unpredictable to boot. Crooked beyond belief. Which is the best thing in the whole competition, if this is the right word, indeed. Competition of the best kind. The kindest, or the least painful, of all competitions. The horn: a whole bunch of guys laughing their way down the hill. Drunk from the start. And ever more drunk on their way down the steep hill. This year among years, and my first, I ended up the winner: I scored the greatest number of points available. Forty-four in total. No less. That is, out of forty-four throws I have never been close enough to the horn. The closest five throws do not count, and the guy who comes the very closest to the horn at any one time throws it in the next round. In other words, I was the worst guy around. Across the board, across the entire fucking board. A victory of sorts, of course. Until next year, I dare say. My very second year. The horn: the game you lose only once. This year, the "real" winner scored twenty-four points only. The fucker was within the five throws closest to the horn no less than twenty times. A score to remember.

## TRUE ISTRANS (February 26, 2004)

My mother liked to say that Istrians were a mild and gentle people. She was proud of that, too. Although all generalizations are suspect, my experience in Istria confirms my mother's recollection. By and large, Istrians are a mild and gentle people. True Istrians, that is. If you bump into someone here who is quarrelsome, intimidating, aggressive, threatening, belligerent, churlish, bullying, cantankerous, menacing, or boorish, chances are that the person is a recent transplant. Again, all generalizations are suspect, but this is a pretty safe one. I only wonder whether my dear mother would ever see me as a true Istrian.

## *Addendum* (December 18, 2012)

It is strange to read this piece so many years later. At the time, I was in Motovun full time for less than a year. Much has changed in the meanwhile, but I have also learned quite a bit about Istrian messy history. As it turns out, there are many recent transplants on the peninsula. For instance, nearly everyone in the hilltown is there only since World War II. The same holds for not-so-recent transplants.

Istria was nearly depopulated in the Seventeenth Century, which means that nearly everyone there is a transplant since then. In addition, these centuries were hardly peaceful. Which is perhaps why quite a number of Istrians are quarrelsome, intimidating, aggressive, threatening, belligerent, churlish, bullying, cantankerous, menacing, or boorish. Returning to my mother, it is good to remember that she was born in the Austro-Hungarian empire. This could well be the only good reason why she thought of her contemporaries as mild and gentle. As for me now, she would probably find me a far cry from a true Istrian. Among other things, I am too clever, too.

#### THE FIRST MENTION (March 2, 2004)

This summer Motovun will celebrate one-thousand and two-hundred years since its first mention, I just learned this evening. The first mention we know about at present, that is. At an assembly of representatives of Istrian towns in Rižana near Kopar or Capodistria, which took place in 804, Motovun shared the fifth place in the region with Labin or Albona. Pula or Pola was first and Rovinj or Rovigno second, but the other two towns have escaped Mariano Maurović, the unofficial historian of our town. This evening, at least. He did not know exactly how this order of rank was established, either. According to him, however, the town's participation in the Rižana Assembly is beyond dispute. And this is all I can say at the moment. As the unofficial chronicler of our town, I record only the facts and nothing but the facts.

#### *Addendum* (November 22, 2016)

It took me a while to learn a bit more about the Rižana Assembly, but everything I learned ended up in an innocuous *addendum* to a piece written the same year as this one (*Addendum III* of September 29, 2004, to "In Print," August 16, 2004). Namely, one of the several reasons for the medieval assembly was to complain to Charlemagne's hand-picked representatives that his governor of Istria, a certain Duke Iohannes, had let too many Slavs onto the Istrian peninsula. They were coming across the border of the Holy Roman Empire in droves since the beginning of the Seventh Century. Harmless though they were, they and their sheep were becoming a growing nuisance. Amazingly, this bit of Motovun's history is rarely if ever mentioned. The first mention not to mention, as it were.

#### OOZING STUMPS (March 7, 2004)

Zvonko Tarandek took me yesterday to the bottom of my garden and asked me what to do with several fruit trees, of which there are quite a few down there: cherries, apples, apricots, plums, figs. Some are in the way of others. They need to be cut down. The remaining trees need



radical surgery. Otherwise, they will bear no fruit. Of course, Zvonko knows perfectly well I know nothing about gardens. He had already cut so many “useless” trees and hefty branches of “useful” ones, but I still presented a happy face. “Go ahead,” I winced at so many oozing stumps and nodded bravely, “you know what you are doing.” Speaking today with Dragan Vivoda, the first man I met in Motovun, and another gardener of note, I was reassured. “It is always best to let someone else put your garden in shape,” he chuckled, “for you only screw things up by keeping this tree or that branch.” He knows perfectly well that my garden is an orphan. Jakub Samokovlic, who lovingly planted all these trees, died some fifteen years ago.

#### THE SPIRIT OF QUIXOTIC REBELLION (April 21, 2004)

The memory of 1968 seems to be fading into insignificance, but it remains crucial to me. The spirit of quixotic rebellion will stay with me as long as I am alive. For some reason, I am convinced I am not alone with such sentiments. Although I do not wish to explore the tumultuous events in any detail, and certainly not with some overarching idea in mind, I keep hoping that the spirit that has swept the world so many years ago will eventually bear fruit of some kind. My generation may not be willing or able to round off the intoxicating experience, but the memory of those glorious days will live on while we are around. It will keep yearning for expression of some kind. When I ruminate about this expression, I cannot avoid a feeling that the people born shortly after World War II will end up by fomenting a religious revival of sorts. God will be wished back, and earnestly, but mainly as a glorified punch-bag.

#### A BUDDING POLITICIAN (May 17, 2004)

This evening was my second Motovun Municipal Council meeting, its forty-first. Once again, I was the public, as it were. The sixth item on the agenda attracted me most: the nomination of the committee for celebration of one-thousand and two-hundred years of the first mention of our town. I had a funny feeling I could have been nominated for this pleasant chore. As the names of the eleven nominees were read aloud by the chairman, I kind of waited to hear my own name. I was not on the list, though. However, one of the council members proposed my name in the brief discussion that followed. The proposal was unanimously accepted without much ado. Sitting some way away from the council table, I was somewhat embarrassed by the turn of events, but I was nevertheless delighted by it. I have no idea what will happen next, but I am tickled pink by this opportunity to become directly involved in the public life of the town. A budding politician, or what?!

*Addendum* (September 3, 2004)

A brief account of the Municipal Council meeting appeared in *Glas Istre* (*The Voice of Istria*) a few days later. Concerning the celebration of the town's first mention, the composition of the committee was there in black and white, as well. A couple of weeks afterwards I went to the municipal office and asked what to do regarding my nomination. In particular, I wanted to know when would the committee start meeting. At the time, everything was still up in the air. I was told that I would be informed in due time. Nothing happened ever since, though. Except that I have learned quite by chance that Mariano Maurović, another member of the committee, has organized an exhibition about Motovun's history in the gallery of the hotel. Apparently, he has done it single-handedly. This I learned only today. To crown my involvement in the committee, I have not been invited to the opening of the exhibition, either. The event is to take place at seven o'clock this very evening. A budding politician, my ass.

THE STONE EXPOSED (May 31, 2004)

While I was living in Ljubljana with my first wife and son, sometime between 1975 and 1979, we once visited Istria together with my mother. She must have come to spend a few days with us in Ljubljana, and my wife must have driven us south on a propitious weekend. Come to think of it, it must have been her idea, too. If I remember correctly, the weather was quite wonderful. We went to Pazin and Buzet, as well as a few other places associated with my mother's youth. We drove past Motovun, but did not visit it. I remember that my mother was quite excited by this excursion, for she had not seen Istria for many years. It is quite possible that this was her first and last return since her flight in the early 1930s from Italy to Yugoslavia *via* Rijeka and Sušak. Anyhow, on our way out of Pazin we passed through Lindar, a small town on top of a hill. My mother wanted to see it because her family used to go there for picnics. It was etched in her mind as a beautiful place. However, she was aghast by what she saw there: all the houses were in drab yellowish stone, whereas she remembered them covered with mortar and painted in many lively colors. Since the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the original inhabitants of Lindar must have left for good, and many of them must have been Italians, the mortar had fallen off. It was never replaced. And this is how most Istrian towns still look today. Except that people have gotten used to the color of stone, and now they cannot even imagine how wonderful these towns used to be before the end of World War II. Worse, it is now fashionable to strip the mortar from old houses and leave the stone exposed. In the past, only stables and uninhabited buildings were left in stone, whereas mortar was an additional protection from dampness. Even the historical preservation authorities now favor this emerging fashion. Nearly one thousand years of Venetian history is being obliterated for good.

#### YET ANOTHER MYSTERY (June 3, 2004)

The spring almost over, insects are back in full force: wasps, bees, ants, flies, spiders, ladybugs, beetles, grasshoppers, butterflies, moths, mosquitoes... Many of them I cannot name, and some I cannot even recognize. But it is difficult not to notice them. If anything else, the winged ones buzz around the house and bang against windowpanes. With a few exceptions, I leave them in peace. Moths, mortal enemies of my rugs, are my bitter enemies, too. And so are mosquitoes, little nuisances that they are. I would gladly let them suck my blood if the bulges they leave behind would not itch so badly! But no matter how gently I deal with most of these funny creatures, they die in numbers every day. Each morning I find piles of them on the windowsills, whence I remove the carnage as often as I can. Among all the upturned cadavers, I often find little black balls. Hard and shiny, they attracted my attention. When I inspected them with a magnifying glass, I established that they were so many insect heads. Chances are that they come off when I clean the windowsills, but so many detached heads are still a mystery. Yet another mystery of the inscrutable countryside!

#### ABOUT IMAGINATION (June 8, 2004)

Sitting at Klaudio's close to the closing time, I am talking with Paul Müller about the decline of publishing business, to which he has dedicated much of his life. The subject comes up every now and then. "How do you explain it?" I shake my head. "There are many reasons," he begins slowly and looks down. The first one he mentions is overproduction. "That is the main reason," he jabs his finger downward. The last one he mentions is the decline in imagination. "Reading is about imagination," he frowns and pauses. "Take fashion," he raises his eyebrows, "where one is supposed to leave to imagination as much as possible." He gives me a long, pointed look. Then he raises his hands: "How little is left to imagination nowadays?!"

#### TOWARD A SHORT HISTORY OF MOTOVUN (June 9, 2004)

Even before I moved to Motovun, Miro Kopčalić pleaded with me to put together a booklet about Motovun. Before all else, he had in mind the town's history. Nothing of the sort existed. I agreed at once, but I was aware of the difficulties involved. It took me quite a while to gather my thoughts about such a project. About a month ago I decided to put together a short history of Motovun in about one-thousand words. Translated into four or five languages and enlivened by a good selection of pictures and maps, such a text would be a sufficient foundation for a useful booklet about the town. Of course, a short history of anything—let alone a small town perched on a hill—is a tall

order. Thus I decided to start with Motovun's chronology. In fact, I started it only yesterday. As I read about Istria, I put down all the relevant dates and events, as well as the bibliographic information involved. I do this in all the languages in which I read: Croatian, Italian, English. I hope to find some German sources, too. Once the chronology is more-or-less complete, I will attempt the first draft of the short history. Judging from my rate of progress, it may take me an entire year to get to one-thousand words worth reading, but I will get there. As of today, my chronology already boasts more than one-thousand words.

*Addendum I* (June 18, 2004)

After a bit more than a week, my chronology counts some five-thousand words already. More important, this information comes from about twenty sources. The general outline of Istrian history is gradually emerging in the chronology, but the rôle Motovun has played in the region is murky still. Perhaps this is how it will stay, though. After all, it has always been a fortified town on the small side. No matter how much I dig into history books, and no matter how illuminating these books may turn out to be, Motovun will remain a town on the margin. Which goes a long way toward explaining why it is still in such a good shape, at least by comparison with the rest of Istria. As a matter of fact, several tourist guides celebrate it as the best-preserved medieval town in the region.

*Addendum II* (January 3, 2007)

My chronology has been stuck at more than eleven-thousand words for quite some time now. The number of sources has grown, including an important German one, but there is no oomph to it still. As the chronology grows, it becomes ever more disjointed, too. The diverse bits and pieces refuse to gel ever more stubbornly. In short, there may be too much information in it already, but the history of one-thousand words I have had in mind remains a distant dream. As I guessed soon after I had embarked upon this project, something may forever be missing from any account of Motovun's past, no matter how scholarly. Or how inspired. But one reason for this has nothing to do with its less-than-remarkable history; rather, it has to do with its uninspiring future. At best, it will become a Disneyland of some renown in this part of Europe. At best! And no Disneyland is about history, either.

IN PRINT (August 16, 2004)

This morning I wrote a short piece for the Postcard Section of *Danas*, the best newspaper in Belgrade. So far, I have published six short pieces in it. But this one is special. Very special. It is about Motovun. Actually, it is about Ljubica Handjal, our clandestine mayor, known to

all as Grandma Ljubica. Or just Ljubica. Our heart and soul. I am so excited about the piece, I can hardly wait to receive a copy of the newspaper with my postcard in it. Actually, I can hardly wait to see Ljubica's face when she spots her name in print.

*Addendum I* (August 28, 2004)

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

*Addendum II* (August 30, 2004)

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

*Addendum III* (September 29, 2004)

At long last, two copies of *Danas* arrived from Belgrade. In fact, there were four in the parcel, but I will come back to the other two copies in a moment. The parcel was sent by Velja Ilic, a friend from Belgrade who has a house in Motovun since the early Seventies. He is a journalist—reportedly a good one. This time around, he was my link with the editorial office of *Danas*, as well. Anyhow, Ljubica got her copy minutes after I picked it up from the post office. In the meanwhile, a whole bunch of people had read it at Klaudio's, including one of Ljubica's grandsons, Daniel. And everyone was well pleased. She was tickled pink, of course. Back to the other two copies of *Danas*, though. They contained my second postcard about Motovun, which was about the first mention of the town at the Rizana Assembly in 804. It appeared in print last weekend, on September 25-26. I used this opportunity to mention the ticklish fact that one of the several reasons for the medieval assembly was to complain to Charlemagne's hand-picked representatives that his governor of Istria,

a certain Duke Iohannes, had let too many Slavs onto the peninsula. Following their sheep, they were coming across the border of the Holy Roman Empire in droves since the beginning of the Seventh Century. One copy of *Danas* with the second postcard I kept, as well, and the other I sent to Mariano Maurović *via* Dragan Vivoda, who works in the municipal office next door to Mariano's own office crammed with books and papers about our little town. Mariano organized the current exhibition at Hotel Kastel celebrating the first mention, which will remain open for a few more days. By the way, Dragan was the first man I met in Motovun. And he just happened to be at Klaudio's this morning.

#### SUCH WIMPS (August 31, 2004)

Such wimps, scorpions. They amaze me ever anew. Slow and awkward, they impress only the innocent. I just found one caught by a spider. The net was set close to the floor, apparently with scorpions and other creepy-crawlies in mind. The black spider, at least ten times smaller than the scorpion, was still inspecting its prey, but it might have taken a nibble here and there already. I plucked them from the net with a pair of chopsticks, which are always on hand for this particular purpose, and tossed them into the garden. The scorpion wriggled sluggishly in my firm grip, but the spider clung onto it with fierce determination. It would not let go. It would not run for cover, chopsticks or no chopsticks. With some luck, it will finish its meal away from its net. As I said, scorpions impress only the innocent.

#### POSTURING IN VAIN (September 30, 2004)

I could learn a great deal about praying mantises by searching the Internet, but I do not. I just watch them do their bit whenever I get a chance. On such occasions, in late summer or early fall, I do everything I can to ingratiate myself with them. To confess, I like the beasts. I find them endearing in their own way. And so it was rather sad to see a magnificent green mantis being mauled over by a cat this afternoon. And in the middle of Borgo. I know the cat, too. It was Black, one of my favorite neighborhood cats. Had I caught it in the act a bit earlier, I would have saved the mantis. In the event, it was too badly hurt already for me to intervene meaningfully. And so I watched Black play with the mantis. The poor thing kept posturing in vain—its praying legs spread wide open, ready for a strike, its back turned sideways, and its wings displayed. It was clear it could not fly, though. A couple of weeks ago I saw a young mantis fly. Half the size of the beauty between Black's paws, it flew somewhat awkwardly, but it flew. Once it had enough of my attentions, it escaped quite effectively. Apparently, once the insect reaches mature size, its wings are used only for threatening displays. Which hardly impressed my cat friend, of course. Having had his fun, Black dashed off, its tail raised

victoriously straight up, and all I could do was to help the mantis meet its maker a bit sooner than it otherwise would. As it turned out, I could not do anything else even if I knew a great deal about these wonderful insects.

#### THE LADYBUG'S PROSPECTS (November 10, 2004)

And now I have a small ladybug on my well-lit table. As I read Miljenko Jergović's stories about the ins and outs of survival in bombed-out Sarajevo, which are quite gripping, the stories, I cannot but cast an occasional look at the wandering insect. About a third of the size of a full-grown ladybug, if it is indeed an adolescent rather than a different species of ladybug, it is investigating every object on the table with exemplary thoroughness, but some of these objects get more of its attention than others. The chopsticks I use to catch and toss out larger insects, such as grasshoppers and praying mantises, as well as occasional scorpions, are particularly interesting to my tiny visitor. And so are the grips of the pair of steel exercisers I use every few days to strengthen my hands. Made of some kind of synthetic foam, which is quite porous, the grips may hide a little something for the ladybug to munch on. Or so I would hope. The insect takes to the air from time to time, but it never lands very far from where it took off. As I read about the horror that took place for years within a driving distance from Motovun, as well as so many other European towns small and large, I cannot but cast an occasional thought toward the ladybug's prospects. I am afraid it is too late in the season for it to find much that is to its taste. Or dietary requirements. And I am afraid I will find it belly up in a day or maybe two. If only I knew what to offer it by way of food... As I read about an episode of European history few people would be able to imagine more than a decade or so ago, I get worried whenever I look at the table and miss the ladybug. And I feel relieved when it appears behind a pen or an ashtray, as busy investigating as ever. All is well, for now.

#### POSTSCRIPTUM IX (November 11, 2004)

Whenever I have an opportunity to browse at leisure through my *Residua*, as has been the case the last few days, I am a bit surprised by it all. Quite positively, too. There are occasional duds among my pieces, no doubt, but there are plenty of gems, as well. The rest is, well, just fine. Just fine, indeed. But I am not here to boast. Nor am I here to wine about my lot. All I wish to say at this juncture is that my *Residua* may keep going for a while longer, and perhaps much longer, but that I do not expect it to become much better. Or worse. Actually, all I wish to say at present is that this is pretty much it, folks. Have I had a million years to write, my *Residua* would not be very different. Only bigger. And so much more impenetrable.

#### MUNCHY, MUNCHY (December 7, 2004)

On a narrow ledge in my kitchen, I spot many a tiny, dead fly. I look up and see a hefty spider by the ceiling. I wag my finger at the rascal: “Munchy, munchy!”

#### SETTING A TREND (December 7, 2004)

There is now in Motovun a house even brighter than mine. On the small side, set in a winding row half way down Rialto, it faces southeast. I noticed scaffolds around the house late this summer, but I saw it freshly painted only a few days ago, on my return from the Health Insurance office in Pazin. I was delighted, to be sure. On my walk around town, this afternoon I went down Rialto to inspect it from close up. More red than orange, it sure is bright. The day was glorious, and the house positively glowed in the afternoon light. To the best of my knowledge, a Belgian couple now owns the house. We are setting a trend, I surely hope. In a decade or two, Motovun will be bursting with color once again, like it used to do in Venetian times. The gray, peeling façade that is now the norm, which is only occasionally broken by a patch of insipid whitewash, will be gone for good. And the Lion of Venice will be roaring from many a merry wall with renewed vigor, as well as a fresh dash of longing.

#### STRIPPING (December 11, 2004)

Every time I walk by the terraces of Emil Soldatić and Zlatko Ujčić, and I walk that way several times a week, I remember Ivan Matejčić. And I get all worked up. Matejčić is the head of an office in Poreč that is concerned with the preservation of the Istrian architectural heritage. I know very little about this office, but I know that one is supposed to get Matejčić’s blessing before touching anything in Motovun, one of the best-preserved towns in Istria. For instance, I was supposed to ask for his permission to repaint my house, but no-one had told me about this before it was too late. For some reason, my builders had no idea about it, either. However, Emil asked for permission to repair the wall under his two terraces. The upper terrace sits on top of something that looks like a fortification tower, and there is a tall wall under the lower terrace, which continues under Zlatko’s terrace, as well. The tower and the wall were a part of the fortification that surrounded Borgo, an area of Motovun wrapped around a good part of the original fortification on top of the hill, or Mure. It was clear that the tower and the wall used to be covered with mortar and painted. Until recently, there was a large patch of mortar left on the wall, and it was painted in a nice shade of terracotta. So, Emil proposed to cover the tower and the wall with mortar and restore the paint. Zlatko joined him. Matejčić was against it, though. He wanted the tower and the wall cleaned and spaces between stones rendered with mortar, thus leaving



the stone exposed. This was done. The old mortar was removed. On one of my walks, I took a chunk of the old painted mortar as evidence of Matejčić's school of historical preservation. Besides, he did not allow Emil to paint some other walls of his house in any color, and now they are plain white. It is enough to walk down Borgo and look under the eaves of old houses to see that they were all rendered in vivid color. When I told all this to Emil, he shrugged his shoulders. To begin with, Matejčić is Matejčić. You cannot argue with him. Also, he may well know how these walls used to look before they were covered with mortar and painted. How long ago would that be, Emil could not know. But I have a hunch that Matejčić is systematically stripping Motovun of its color. That is, any color is fine as long as it is white. And he is stripping stone walls of their mortar. If he is allowed to continue doing what he is doing, Motovun will eventually look like Groznjan, most of which is now in exposed stone. God knows why Matejčić is doing all this, but I have a hunch that he is systematically stripping Istria of Venice.

#### WHAT GOES NEXT? (December 16, 2004)

There have been all kinds of rumors that the only bank in Motovun will be closing, but now it is almost official: the bank will close at the end of this month. This is what I learned from Klaudio Ivašić this morning, just after he had talked on the phone with the director of the bank in Pazin. Originally Riječka Banka and now Erste Bank, an Austrian giant that has gobbled up the Croatian upstart a couple of years ago, it is cutting its costs. No surprise here, of course, as the wave of bank closures has started years ago, first in America, and then in Europe. If anything, Motovun got lucky to be in such total and complete sticks that it took a few years to even consider the closure seriously. Luckily, the automatic teller machine will stay in town, and that is all I need to draw my pension, as I like to put it. With roughly two-hundred thousand visitors a year, Erste Bank would be foolish to leave us without our ATM. And that is that. The end of the story. But a bitter feeling nevertheless lingers in the mouth. For what goes next? The post office? The store? The pharmacy? The daycare center? The municipal office? The school? The health center?

#### *Addendum I* (December 29, 2004)

Erste Bank decided today to stay in town. This is wonderful news, of course. But the reason for the bank's decision is even more wonderful: many people in Motovun have done everything in their power to prevent the closure. It now appears that the petition signed by most organizations and individuals in town has been crucial in this regard. It also appears that the fifty-odd organizations had much more weight than the individuals, no matter how many. But there is no doubt that every single phone call and every single letter helped. We all saved our bank from closure, and we will be so much more ready to fight

against the closure of any other institution in town. And that is the best news today.

*Addendum II (September 15, 2006)*

The local newspapers are announcing today that Erste Bank is leaving Motovun and two other small towns in Istria, Brtonigla and Rasa. This time around, chances are that this decision is final. No matter what we do, and we will surely do something, we may not be able to influence this decision. And thus the original question is coming to the fore once again: what goes next? To put it slightly differently, how many years will it take for Motovun to lose all its institutions, including the municipal office? In my estimate, it will take between five and ten years for us to be stripped of everything we now believe belongs to us. The demographic collapse of the town will by then be almost complete. And then what? Well, that question is a bit more involved for a breezy answer.

*Addendum III (October 20, 2006)*

Today is the last day of our bank. The ATM will stay, at least for the time being. There is vague talk of another bank coming to Motovun, but the question is where could it locate its facilities. The closing bank owns its facilities, and would be unlikely to sell them to a competitor. There are a few potential locations on Kanal in the foothills, but it would take six months to a year for a new bank to open there. The way things go in Istria, even this is rather optimistic an estimate. Buying or renting of real estate, refurbishment, and fitting out of a bank may take a couple of years. In short, we are up shit creek. The real question is the one I started with nearly two years ago: what goes next? Judging from my previous experience, both in the US and UK, the post office is next to pack up and go. When could that happen? Taking the sluggishness of the postal administration in Istria into account, I would give them two to three years to figure out that it makes little sense to keep a post office in Motovun.

*Addendum IV (June 21, 2011)*

After many a mysterious twist and turn, the erstwhile branch of the Erste Bank has turned into a pizzeria only a few days ago. The owner is Klaudio Ivašić, who also owns the Montona Gallery café next door. Luckily, the ATM is still there to everyone's delight. And it is still operated by the Erste Bank. A couple of years ago, another bank has found an outlet on Kanal in the foothills. The post office is still there, too. Motovun is, as it were, thriving. Except that the lower square is now graced with no less than two pizzerias. The other one, which came to town several years ago, is operated by Miroslav Milosavljević, known to all as Miško. The space is owned by Ernest Benčić, known to most as Braco. What will happen with the surfeit of pizzerias is an open question, though. The new one has cut not only into the profits

of the old one, but into its own profits, as well. A slightly different gastronomic offer could have helped everyone on the lower square and beyond, but this is Motovun. Returning to the initial question, one of the two pizzerias will go next. Which one?

*Addendum V* (April 1, 2012)

As of the end of 2011, Miško's pizzeria is no more. Klaudio's is still there, though. Although Marko Fakin has rented out the place from Ernest Bencic, he is not about pizzas. He is selling his own wine and he offers a wide range of standard Istrian food. Coming from Bataji within sight of the lower square, he has a better chance in Motovun than Miško has ever had. But the question still remains the same: what goes next? Or is it who?

TWO CYPRESSES (December 16, 2004)

There are two cypresses in my garden that I will have cut down this year or maybe next. When I sit on the terrace and look toward Brkač, I can see the tips of the cypresses. Although they have been planted right next to each other, they are growing quite well. In a few years, they will become a real nuisance, always waving in front of my nose. When I mentioned this to Zvonko Tarandek, who takes care of my garden, as well as several other neighboring gardens, including that of his mother-in-law two houses down Borgo, he agreed without much ado. "Right," he nodded, "this is not a cemetery!" I thought he would defend the two handsome trees, but he actually appeared quite eager to cut them down. Although a gardener at heart, he conceives of the cypresses in terms of their symbolism rather than their beauty. Jakub Samokovlić, the previous owner of my house, who planted the cypresses in his beloved garden, must have seen things differently. Coming from Mostar, once a marvellous town in Herzegovina, he probably saw no connection whatsoever between cypresses and cemeteries. Neither do I, of course, but I am glad Zvonko does. So many words less.

*Addendum I* (April 17, 2005)

As it happened, the two cypresses were cut down today. My birthday. In other words, the most appropriate day for removing symbols of death from under my nose. I will remember them most fondly, too.

*Addendum II* (June 19, 2005)

As it happened, too, Zvonko Tarandek died today. Heart attack. He had been suffering from a heart condition of some sort for quite a while. Which is why he was about to retire soon. Anyhow, today is Dorian's birthday, as well. My second son is thirteen on this very day. None of this has anything to do with the two cypresses, of course.

#### THE LAST SURPRISE (December 19, 2004)

If confessions are needed, I enjoy bragging about my unexpected love affair with the people of Motovun. No warts of theirs can deter me, it seems. Surprised by my sentiments ever anew, I enjoy reporting my surprises, as well. But they keep multiplying. Hard to imagine, I have a soft spot even for Motovun's teenagers, including the rowdy boys. Whenever I meet Vanja Benčić, Leo Mičanović, Luka Mikić, Filip Vrtarić, Ivan Babić, Matea Flego, and others whose names escape me at the moment, I greet them with unfeigned relish. I wave at them. I squeeze their hands. I pat their backs. And now for the last surprise: by and by, they are responding in kind. Not so long ago, at a raucous impromptu party at Klaudio's, Vanja and Leo approached me and shook my hand. "If you ever need anything," Vanja said with seriousness bordering on conviction, "please let me know." Leo confirmed Vanja's words with a solemn nod. I melted, of course. With teenagers such as these, Motovun's future shines bright.

#### GLISTENING, HOPPING (December 19, 2004)

As I am turning the page of my book, I spot a small, black bug crawling across the table. I get up to squash it, but then I notice that its back is glistening quite splendidly under the lamp illuminating the table. Amused, I gently prod the bug with the tip of my index finger, but it takes to hopping about. Not amused, I squash it at once. What a wily divinity am I! Glistening is good, but hopping is bad—nay, fatal. Just like that.

#### LIKE IN MID-SUMMER (December 21, 2004)

Ivan Hrvatin and I were the last to get out of Klaudio's tonight. This morning, that is. When we walked out just past midnight, the sky was clear. The moon, which will be full in less than a week, hung above us enthusiastically. The air was crisp and dry. It was quite chilly. And the *bora* swayed the balding acacias under the wall of the deserted square facing the Mirna valley. "Gorgeous," I said dreamily. "After a few days like this," Ivan shook his head, "the woods down there can burn like in mid-summer." I gave him a blank look. "The *bora* dries everything," he nodded grimly. "Really," I mumbled and kept staring at the dazzling lights of Vižinada and Grožnjan. Ivan is a fireman, after all.

#### SMOG IN ISTRIA (January 14, 2005)

Looking west from Motovun, I have often seen a dark, dense blanket over the stretch of the Adriatic visible from the town, as well as the adjoining lowlands. Smog, a few people have told me gravely, having

to do with pollution mainly from Trieste and Venice, but also from Kopar on the Slovene coast. Industry, home heating, cars... Indeed, the reddish lining of the low, brownish stretch on the horizon looked very like the smog I have seen hovering above cities all around the world. But, for as long as I have been living in Istria, this looked like someone else's problem. This seems to be changing, though. And rather abruptly, too. The purplish smog with orange lining has been moving up the Mirna valley since a month or two ago. This is something new, some people are telling me. Some of them are convinced this is smog. As I write, the impenetrable curtain is hanging above Ponte Porton, less than ten kilometers west from the town. Grožnjan is behind this curtain, completely invisible. And it appears it is edging this way. Day by day, it is coming closer, blotting out everything in sight. Getting a bit anxious, I have been looking for an article about this new phenomenon in the local newspapers, but to no avail. It appears no-one is concerned enough as yet. Coming from the north-east, the next bout of *bora* will quickly clean up the mess, but all the other winds blowing in these parts are liable to push the smog further up the Mirna. Smog in Istria... Only a month or two ago I would have thought this was a contradiction in terms. Like smog in paradise.

*Addendum I* (January 15, 2005)

And the *bora* began last night. Gently it began, and gently it kept pushing the clouds toward Italy. It pushed and pushed, all night and all day. By now, hardly an hour after sunset, the ragged edge of dark clouds has been pushed well beyond the coast of Istria, revealing a cold, clear sky. "God be praised for the *bora*," I kept whispering to myself as I watched the wretched clouds from the window, "God be praised..."

*Addendum II* (January 17, 2005)

Predictably enough, the *bora* weakened yesterday. Today it weakened even more. And the smog slowly returned to Ponte Porton. By the time the sun set this evening, the third clear evening in a row, the gathering smog acquired its purplish color with its tell-tell reddish lining. There can be no doubt about it any longer: the smog is spilling into the Istrian peninsula from northern Italy. Of course, it will take good scientists a few more years to prove this to their own satisfaction. And it will take the good politicians another few more years to figure out how to deal with the growing environmental problem.

THE WINTER FOLKS (January 18, 2005)

The uglier the day, the nastier the weather, the closer we "winter folks" get in deserted Motovun, and the more we pat and hug each other whenever and wherever we happen to meet—the street, the post office,

the store, one of the two squares, the church, the bank, the municipal office, one of the two cafés. More, our chance meetings are graced with a sense of elation, and maybe even love, that makes our smiles broader and our eyes softer and more luminous on the bleakest of winter days. For the “summer folks” are but a memory now. But a fading dream. But a dash of lingering desire. And only the winter folks are real. As real as folks ever get.

#### LIKE EVERYONE ELSE AROUND ME (February 10, 2005)

This evening I am shaking with fever. It began late this afternoon, but I am quite sure I got whatever it is that I got while playing the horn yesterday afternoon and evening. Although we spent more than four hours on the road from the cemetery to Kanal, and it got colder and colder as the increasingly rowdy game progressed in gathering darkness, I think I got the bug by drinking Teran directly from the bottle, like everyone else around me. As I write, several of us are likely to be down with the same bug. But it was worth it, it goes without saying. This time around, my absurdly crooked stick was among the five closest to the horn thrice, which means that I did not get three penalty points out of the maximum of about thirty, equal to the number of throws of the horn. In addition, my stick was the closest to it twice, and so I had the honor of throwing the horn before going after it with my stick. The main point is that I ended up far from the last, which I was last year, when I got all the penalty points I could possibly get. But the whole thing was also worth it in another, more fundamental, sense. A little bit of fever will not kill me, and whatever does not kill me will only make me stronger. Next year I will drink Teran out of the bottle once again, like everyone else around me. Let the bugs, too, have some fun with the horn.

#### *Addendum* (February 16, 2005)

As it turns out, many people came down with the flu after the horn. This is what I just learned from Klaudio Ivašić, who was ill himself. In all the cases he knew about, the flu lasted three or four days, just as in my case. The only mystery that remains is the source of this local epidemic. Who was silly enough to come to the horn while suffering from an ailment so very disagreeable?

#### MY LITTLE SOMERSAULT (February 17, 2005)

Perhaps I am deluded about the world I hail from. Perhaps that world has never existed. Perhaps my fury is completely misplaced. But I remember as my world that of Fellini and Kurosawa. That of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. That of Salinger and Hesse. That of Manzoni and Klein. That of Fromm and Marcuse. I do not remember the film directors, the music bands, the writers, the artists, the

philosophers of “our” culture almost at all. Or those of “our” generation. When I was young, the entire world was ours. Everything around us was our playground. Our clay. And here comes my verdict. My little somersault. My punchline. After 1968, the year of our flopped rebellion, or soon afterwards, the world I hail from shrivelled up. It turned inward. It became incestuous. Whence “our” culture. Or “our” generation. Our little pile of shit, which I do not even recognize as my own. Luckily for me, I left the world I hail from in 1968, the year of our botched-up revolution, or soon afterwards. And the entire world is still mine. All mine.

#### THE FAINT BUT DEEP RUMBLE (March 1, 2005)

Every couple of months I hear an aircraft fly over Motovun. It always goes east. It flies quite high. And it is quite big. Actually, enormous. Somehow, I can tell all this from the faint but deep rumble it leaves in its wake. More often than not, I hear it at night. It is past midnight now, and the rumble of just such an aircraft has only quieted down. There are no commercial flights this early in the morning, of course. Besides, commercial aircraft do not fly over our town. All their routes from Trieste and Venice go over Pula, which is way south. And those aircraft are inaudible from here. In short, the aircraft I have just heard is most likely a military one. Most likely it is an American aircraft, too. If this is the case, it must be coming from Aviano, in the Italian Alps, where there is a large American airbase. Anyhow, the faint but deep rumble always startles me. It makes me uneasy. And anxious. And even apprehensive. Whatever these aircraft are doing, it cannot be a pretty thing. Not a pretty thing, at all.

#### GERMAN AT TWO (March 15, 2005)

Thus I to myself upon waking every Tuesday morning. There are so few things I now must do that an hour a week with Paul Müller is enough to make me a tad anxious: German at two. Every Tuesday morning I get up as quickly as I can, for I must study a bit before I meet Paul. He is so serious about the whole thing, too. Thus I rush through my morning ablutions, as well as my coffee at Klaudio’s: German at two. Often enough I must also rush to the store to get some fresh bread. By the time I am back home, my books and papers arrayed around me, there are only a few hours left for study. But my mind keeps pulsating feverishly: German at two, German at two...

#### YET TO BE RECOGNIZED (March 20, 2005)

There is one hefty tome of European history yet to be conceived, let alone written and eventually digested: the one about the last arrivals, the Slavs. Bit by ignored bit, step by wary step, and hill by rugged hill,

the Slavs have slowly pushed deeper and deeper into the European subcontinent. Only look at all the Slavic states on the map of Central Europe today, most of which would have been unimaginable even a century ago. The gradual process has taken its final shape only decades—nay, years—ago. By stealth, endurance, and cunning, they have populated so many mountain chains, river valleys, and seashores that took vast armies to grab and hold until a few centuries ago. By perseverance, inquisitiveness, and stubbornness, they have learned the ways of their erstwhile masters. And who is to say that this is not a momentous historical achievement, given how little blood has been spilt by comparison with Europe's horrendous past? The last arrivals, the Slavs, are yet to be recognized as gentle victors.

*Addendum* (September 23, 2005)

I have been a bit surprised by the reaction of some of my Croatian friends to this piece of mine. When I thought I was quietly lauding Croatians, too, they felt quite indifferent. When I thought I would reinforce my point by mentioning Croats and Slovenes, for example, the same friends became quite miffed. What do Slovenes have to do with Croats? But if I went so far as to mention Serbs, as well, they turned outright hostile. How could I even bring up Serbs and Croats in the same breath? It took me a few months to understand the reason for such reactions, but the current controversy in Croatian newspapers explains everything. Or nearly everything. It involves the Croatian Minister of Education, who is a member of the right-leaning party now in power. A medical researcher and a geneticist of sorts, he has been involved in scientific research purporting to show that Croats are not Slavs at all. *Voilà!* Forget about that hefty tome of European history, at least for the time being.

A RIOT OF COLORS (March 30, 2005)

Many houses in Motovun are being repaired. People are thinking about colors for their houses, and I am exciting them all to civil disobedience. Down with Ivan Matejčić, the doyen of bogus historical preservation in Istria! Down with the few paltry colors he has prescribed for our town! Down with laws that give him his dictatorial powers! And I am begging everyone to walk around and look under the eaves of old houses, where a riot of colors can still be seen: peach, plum, sky-blue, terracotta, salmon, violet, lemon, pitch... Any of these would do for a start, but any old color is better than the gray that now disfigures so many of our houses. The brighter, the better, too.

*Addendum* (March 31, 2005)

"I wonder how successful you will be," wrote back Will Hughes. "Would Ivan, perhaps, rent a crop-duster and fill it with gray paint to fly over your hill and reduce the rainbow to the regulation color?"



This has never crossed my mind, I must confess. “Great idea, at least for Ivan,” I responded at once. “I will make sure he never gets the wind of it!” But what if he stumbles upon my *Residua* on the World Wide Web and starts searching for his name? Oops!

#### BLACKOUTS DOMESTICATED (April 7, 2005)

Here in Motovun, blackouts come in different lengths. There are short ones, which sometimes last less than a minute. Most of them are associated with storms. Then there are medium ones, of less than an hour. We just had one of those. Such blackouts usually happen in the middle of the day, most likely because of some work on the power lines. And then there are ones that last for hours upon hours. Sometimes they take much of the day. Most of these have to do with serious problems with power lines. Such blackouts are rare, though. They happen once or twice a year. Now, I always know there is a blackout because the Uninterruptible Power Supply system that feeds my computer with electricity starts beeping at once. As soon as I hear the first beep, I try to guess the length of the blackout. As there were more than two or three beeps today, as the weather is stable, and as the blackout struck around noon, I quickly guessed this one would be of the medium variety. And so it was. It lasted about thirty minutes. Which made me feel quite comfortable with the incessant beeping. Blackouts domesticated, as it were.

#### AT A SLIGHT DISADVANTAGE (April 28, 2005)

There will be municipal elections in Motovun in a bit more than a fortnight. Two parties are vying for thirteen posts: the municipal council of twelve members and the mayor. A week or so ago, each party has put up a list of so many candidates. The lists are numbered. Depending on the election results, each party will put on the council the topmost candidates from its list. The top man on the winning list will be the mayor. In a municipality of a bit less than one-thousand inhabitants, about a quarter of them could qualify for these posts, which means that roughly a tenth of that number is on the two lists. Not surprisingly for such a small municipality, the programs of the two parties are of little interest in the upcoming elections. In fact, they are hardly ever mentioned. The two lists are all the voters are concerned about. Each voter is weighing the pros and cons of each candidate in terms of his or her most specific interests: house extension, purchase or sale of agricultural land, new pavement on an access road, parking rights. As everyone knows everyone else, and well, voting is a fine art. And this is where I am at a slight disadvantage this time around, for I have not even heard of a few candidates on the two lists. Alas, I could learn only so much in less than two years since my arrival in Motovun! Four years from now, though, things will be entirely different. In four year's time I will be a voter to be reckoned with.

#### BEFORE THEY FLY OFF (May 2, 2005)

As I sit on my terrace, so many flying insects large and small come to check me out. They hover above me for a while, or they make a few cautious circles around me. “Nah,” I can almost hear them before they fly off in search of a proper meal or a willing mate. Disappointment all around.

#### NOT ENTIRELY UNREQUITED (June 6, 2005)

The yucca on my terrace is in bloom. This is the first time I have seen the profusion of its meaty, whitish flowers hanging off a thick, vertical stem that rises high above the long, spiky leaves. All manner of flying insects are crawling about the flowers, but bumblebees are the most noticeable. I do not remember seeing any other yuccas in Motovun, though. The feeding frenzy is thus in vain, it flashes through my mind, at least from the yucca’s point of view. Overcome by compassion, I caress the seductive flowers. Love not entirely unrequited.

#### REGULATION GRAY (July 3, 2005)

Late afternoon. Quite hot. I come out of my house and lock the door. A few steps up Borgo, leaning against a house facing toward the Mirna just like mine, I see a young woman. She is taking pictures with a digital camera. A tourist, I think at first. Then I notice that she is focusing on the three houses across the street from mine. They are all in different stages of being refurbished. An architecture student, I think next. But then I look at her face. It is grim. I have seen it before. And only then I recognize her. She works for Ivan Matejčić, the guy who is supposed to protect Motovun from ruin. As well as the rest of Istria, I suppose. The woman is taking pictures of the just-finished façade of one of the three houses. It is canary-yellow. Matejčić will not like it, I realize at once. A moment later I see the woman taking a picture of my own house. I already know Matejčić does not like the color. In fact, he hates it. Even its name he must abhor—Venetian Pink. As I walk past the young woman, I realize that she is leaning against a house that is illegal to boot. One addition extends it over a major public pathway, which used to run parallel to Borgo. Another addition extends it over a minor public pathway, which used to connect the two. Both are the property of the municipality, no less. But the woman does not take a single picture of the house. To be sure, it is painted gray—Matejčić’s color of choice. Regulation gray. If he could, he would surely rename it into something a bit more spiffy—say, Croatian Gray.

## EYESORE, EARSORE (July 7, 2005)

Close to the bottom of the Brkač hill, just under the few huddled houses that go by the collective name of Bataji, there glares a huge white sore of Istrian stone. Roughly the size of the neighboring Bataji, it is the site of a couple of villas and a swimming pool. Little is known about the developer, supposedly from Germany, or the development itself, but this is to be for tourists rather than a couple of owners. Luxury for rent, as it were. Judging from the gaping hole in the hill, it will be an eyesore, as well. But the method of construction is an earsore, to be sure. A tireless jackhammer has been nibbling at the hill for some four months already. The machinegun staccato goes on day after day. Week after week. Month after month. The most interesting thing about all this is that no-one in Motovun seems to be complaining about the new development. Just like me, my neighbors are thankful it is not a cement plant. Or a sardine-packing factory. Or a power plant. Or a garbage-disposal site. Phew!

### *Addendum I* (September 1, 2005)

After a pause of about a month, the jackhammer is back. Looking from the town, the development is now much clearer, as well. There will be two single-storey villas, one perched above the other, each one on its own ample terrace of sheer stone, and a large swimming pool on yet another terrace beneath the two villas. This is where the digging is still going on. And in earnest, too. The eyesore is now bigger. The white Istrian stone now shines brighter. Judging from this development, all the others on the Brkač hill will be hard to watch. And hard to listen to. There will be jackhammers aplenty as the hill will slowly be nibbled away so as to give way to so many villas. So many swimming pools. And so many fat cats gawking at Motovun in their peace and quiet.

### *Addendum II* (November 17, 2005)

Confound the town gossip, but the third platform now sprouts the walls of yet another villa, the third. God only knows what is going on, but the swimming pool seems to have evaporated from the development beneath Bataji. Well, someone else in the municipal council or the municipal administration must know what is going on, too. But, at the present level of development of Croatian democracy, this seems to be quite sufficient. Between elections, which fall four years apart, there is not a peep from those elected to those who have elected them. Not a single peep. That is not required by the law, either. Besides, the electorate is not used to democracy, anyway. They demand next to nothing from those elected. Which is why the town is left to gossip with its many irksome faults.

*Addendum III* (December 1, 2005)

Make that four villas! On top of the three under construction, there is an abandoned old house. It is a ruin, in fact. And it will be turned into the fourth villa. This I learned from friends who live in Bataji. They learned about it from the construction workers engaged in the project. But they are not sure exactly how many swimming pools there will be. Perhaps only one. Perhaps four. Including the fourth villa, the development will be at least twice the size of the neighboring hamlet. The Brkač hill will look rather different, to be sure. And this is just one development. There are many more to come, it appears, and it will take time to figure out how they will affect the view from Motovun. But affect it they will, for they will all have a splendid view of the medieval town on its charming hill. Besides golf and polo, this will surely be their main attraction.

*Addendum IV* (January 25, 2006)

Bafflingly, the jackhammer is with us again. Since the end of last year, one can hear it on and off much of each and every day. The fourth bloody villa, I suppose. The shapes of the first three are a bit clearer now, but they are still vague. It is not yet easy to tell what shape the eyesore will ultimately take. At this pace, the development will need another year to be finished in the rough. If this is a reasonable guide to the development of the rest of the Brkač hill, which is slated for tourist facilities of all kinds, we can expect that it will take another decade or so. By the time the whole thing is finished, we will get used to the earsore. Actually, the staccato sound of the jackhammer will become like a song to us. And it will take us a while to get used to its eventual disappearance.

THE VERY LAST NIGHT (July 29, 2005)

At the risk of sounding like an old curmudgeon once again, I must say that the Motovun Film Festival offers few dreads greater than that of the very last night.

THE DEBRIS (August 1, 2005)

By today, the third day after the film festival, much of the festival's infrastructure is gone from Motovun. Gone are the rickety food and drink stands. Gone is the thundering diesel generator under the town walls. Gone are the tangled cables and wires used by the festival crews. And gone are the organizers, too. However, a careful observer cannot but spot the debris that still litters the cobblestone streets. The overgrown gardens. The tumbling ruins. And the debris is rich: broken bottles, trampled food packaging, torn clothing, scraps of paper of all sorts, crushed cigarette boxes and a profusion of cigarette butts,

used condoms... All this will stick to the town for ages. One fine day, archeologists will sift through it all and categorize it by type and age: the first festival, the second, the third... And they will be able to tell about these events so much more than their reckless participants ever could. How grateful the archeologists will be for the glorious debris, too!

#### LIKE LIGHTNING (August 5, 2005)

Of all the creepy-crawlies that find refuge in my house, I am least fond of centipedes. This has nothing to do with their looks, though. Scorpions are much more impressive, of course. And so are praying mantises and grasshoppers, both of which can grow frighteningly large. The most annoying thing about centipedes is their speed. They move like lightning. Which is why I squash them at first sight. And without much ado. Having just squashed a sizable centipede, which was hiding behind my towel in the bathroom, I realized that one of its greatest evolutionary advantages is also its undoing. At least in my own house.

#### A LOUD CRUNCH (August 7, 2005)

I return home late at night. Early in the morning, that is. I turn on the light in the hall and go to the toilet. Much wine. Much too much wine. As I am at it, I notice a dark spot on the marble threshold of the bathroom. It is too dark to figure out what it might be. So as to be on the safe side, I step on it. There is a loud crunch. Having finished my business, I turn on the light. Sure enough, a large scorpion is wriggling underfoot. Whence the crunch, of course. A bit disgusted, I step on it once again. The beast stops wriggling. I collect it with some toilet paper, and toss it into the toilet bowl. Then I flush. Whoosh. Scorpions make me sick. So stupid. So feeble. So uninspiring. So untrue to their billing.

#### THE LAST GULP (September 19, 2005)

Half way down Borgo, I see a street cat. Like most cats living by their own wits in Motovun, it is on the scrawny side. It is chewing something in a hurry. At first I cannot see what it is between the cobblestones, for it, too, is on the small side. And then I see that it is still moving. It is a snake. Green. Shiny. Delicate. A bit less than a foot long. By the time I come closer, the head is gone. Only a bit of its gut hangs out, spewing blood. But the snake is still wriggling. Which is why the cat pays little attention to me, an unwelcome intruder. A trespasser. It keeps chewing hurriedly until the snake disappears in its busy mouth. Having taken the last gulp and blinked, the cat slinks away. I have come too close to its prey for its comfort.

The snake will be wriggling in its gut another few minutes, but it will be safe from all and sundry.

#### THE LONG LIST (September 27, 2005)

No later than my early teens I acquired a habit of doing something mindless but “useful” whenever I felt that I was not up to more “creative” pursuits. The habit had served me well throughout my academic career. The fallow bouts came more than handy when making routine calculations, building elaborate tables and charts, or compiling bibliographic references. My retirement has made little or no difference in this regard. Whenever everything else fails as of late, I return to my Motovun chronology. It boasts close to nine-thousand words at the moment. Much of the summer I have been compiling useful bits from Luigi Morteani’s *Storia di Montona*,<sup>[2]</sup> which Antonio Flego has graciously lent me. He, too, is a historian of sorts, and he must be missing the book. At the moment, I am copying into my chronology the long list of Venetian governors of the town. Luckily for me, each *podestà*, as the governor was called back then, stayed in power for a short while only—typically a year or two. So far I have managed to reach no farther than the beginning of the Sixteenth Century. Hooray!

#### *Addendum* (October 3, 2005)

As it turns out, two Bons were governors of Motovun. From 1570 to 1571 it was Alvise Bon, and from 1688 to 1690 it was Zuanne Bon. Now I have to figure out how the three of us are related, for related we most likely are, and the fame is mine. All mine, as I am the only Bon in town. Kidding aside, I hope I will never get silly enough to get on the long list of Motovun’s governors. Nowadays they are called mayors, and their job is much easier than it used to be in Venetian times, but it is still a horrendous job. Yuck.

#### *IGNOTI NULLA CUPIDO* (October 6, 2005)

When I woke up, I discovered that there was no water. No shower. No shaving. I dressed and went to Klaudio’s for my morning coffee. “No water,” I said to those at the bar. “No water,” they giggled. An hour later, the water returned, but the pressure was considerably lower. It came out in a trickle. No shower. No shaving. I went to Klaudio’s for another coffee. “No water pressure,” I said to those at the bar. “No water pressure,” they giggled. And then I remembered their reaction to many power shortages earlier this year. “No electricity,” they giggled time and again. Ideal subjects, these.

WITH A BANG (November 16, 2005)

Like their brethren around the world do on a cold day, our cats seek warmth on top of parked cars while their motors are still warm. But it is quite an art in Motovun, especially on a drizzly day. To begin with, the streets are steep, and it is not easy for a cat to find a spot on the chassis of a contemporary aerodynamic car that is flat and large enough for a comfortable snooze. In addition, the modern metallic paint is pretty slippery when wet even for a cat. And I am not saying all this from the top of my head. I just saw a street cat jump expertly onto the edge of the windshield next to one of the rear-view mirrors, tiptoe forward on windshield wipers, step gingerly onto the warm metal above the motor, slip on its side with a bang, struggle frantically with all fours to find a foothold on its quick way down the slippery front of the car, and slump awkwardly onto the cobblestones next to one of the front wheels. A bit puzzled, it sat on its haunches, looked at me, and meowed plaintively. For a brief while, it even let me pet it consolingly.

*POSTSCRIPTUM X* (November 17, 2005)

Why do I write? What is the purpose of my relentless scribbling? Where does this swelling river of words ultimately lead? Such questions come to me quite often. And they come to me ever more often. As of late, they rarely leave me. I rack my brain over and over again, and I always come up with the same answer, albeit not always worded in exactly the same way: I am leaving a trace of my path to enlightenment so that it may be of some use to me in my future meanderings. Also, and even more important, I am leaving a trace so that it may be of some use to others on their own tortuous path to enlightenment. Or *satori*. Or awakening. Or *samadhi*. Or salvation. Or nirvana. Or paradise. Take your pick. Again, the gist of the answer is always the same, no matter how it is worded exactly. And the answer is always abundantly clear. Why do these questions keep pestering me, though? And the answer to this question is coming to me only as I write about my quandary: because I am afraid of writing the answer down. And why am I afraid to spell out the answer in plain English? For fear of ridicule, of course. Well, for fear of self-ridicule above all.

GOOD RIDDANCE, IVAN MATEJČIĆ! (November 18, 2005)

Happy news in the local newspapers today: Ivan Matejčić, the bungling arbiter of Istrian architectural and urban heritage, as well as much more besides, is leaving his lofty post for personal reasons. His recent heart attack must be behind this happy decision. Those in the know about his department, attached to some ministry or other, swear that his replacement will be even worse. Even less enlightened. Even

more vociferous. I do not doubt any of this, it goes without saying, but it is still a real joy to see Matejčić go. He has left Motovun in a heartbreaking shape. Over the years, he had been perfectly happy with every calamity as long as it was painted in the obligatory Croatian gray or left in exposed stone. And this in a Venetian town will a myriad traces of wonderful colors left on dilapidated façades! For a fine example of his notorious attention to detail, it is enough to take a cursory look of the house neighboring mine up Borgo. The house was illegally extended on several occasions, completely transforming what was there until a few decades ago. Even worse, the awkward additions brazenly sit on top of two ancient pathways, both of which are communal property. One of them is completely blocked, while the other is partially obstructed. However, the house was painted Croatian gray. The newest addition, left unpainted, bears the merry color of unadulterated cement. On Matejčić's many visits to Motovun, this house has been completely overlooked. For the arbiter of everything Istrian, this was just fine, for the color was right. In short, good riddance, Ivan Matejčić!

#### HAPPY TO HELP: A LETTER TO THE MOTOVUN MUNICIPAL COUNCIL (November 22, 2005)

I have learned from local newspapers that the Municipality of Motovun, together with other Istrian counties, will soon be in possession of a large amount of land currently in state ownership, and that a third of the revenues generated by the leasing or sale of the land will go to the state, a third to the region, and a third to the municipality itself. From local newspapers I have also learned that a part of this land will be leased for golf and polo grounds, including all the complementary functions, such as a large number of villas and apartments.

This will certainly be a major undertaking for our municipality, which will require numerous consultants, as well as the participation of the entire municipal electorate, so as to ensure the best utilization of the land resources for the benefit of all. Here I have in mind the future generations, as well.

As an inhabitant of Motovun, I would be happy to help with advice in this complex undertaking, which I would do without any compensation. I believe that I have the necessary credentials, too. Let me mention in this context that I am a bachelor of architecture (Belgrade, 1969), master of city and regional planning (Harvard, 1972), and doctor of urban studies and planning (MIT, 1975). In addition, I dealt with a wide range of real estate investment and management issues as a building economist. As a teacher and researcher in this field, I worked at several universities and institutes (Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia, 1975-79; MIT, 1979-80 and 1983-90; Northeastern, 1980-83; and Reading, 1990-2003). Finally, I



worked as a consultant for many large organizations (for example, IBM, 1983-85; State of Massachusetts, 1984-90; Shimizu, 1986-88; and Bovis, 1990-95). All these experiences may be of help in dealing with the complex issues now facing the municipality.

*Addendum I* (November 23, 2005)

Only today it came to me that I should have mentioned, at the very end of the long list of my qualifications, that I also paint. Shucks. An opportunity lost to draw attention to the parallel with Leonardo's letter of introduction addressed to the Duke of Milan, which ends thus, as well. Having started presenting himself as a military and civil engineer, builder and architect, he ends his letter with a few parenthetic words about his dabbling in art. Of course, Leonardo was not in position to renounce compensation, but the parallel is otherwise impeccable.

*Addendum II* (December 12, 2005)

I took the letter, written in Croatian, to the municipal office on November 22. The municipal secretary stamped it in my presence. The same day I sent it *via* electronic mail to the mayor and to a member of the municipal council who also serves as the secretary general of the leading regional and municipal party. The municipal council met on December 5, and a report of the council's deliberations appeared in the local newspapers on December 7. The newspaper did not mention my letter. So far, the council has not responded to it in any way. No-one who sits on it has mentioned it to me in person, either. Almost three weeks later, it is abundantly clear that there will be no response to my offer. To the best of my knowledge, the council will proceed with the disposition of land hitherto in state ownership without any professional guidance whatsoever. More important, it will proceed without any consultation of the municipal electorate. God bless Motovun.

*Addendum III* (December 31, 2006)

Before the year is out, it is time to round off this sorry story. After a turbulent spring, last summer the mayor of Motovun had an interview in *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)* in which he personally attacked all his enemies. There were three of us who acted, according to the mayor, out of personal interest. He did not have much to say about me, but he specifically mentioned this letter offering help to the municipal administration. In particular, he claimed that I became an outspoken enemy of golf and polo in Motovun ever since the municipal administration rejected my consulting offer. A few days later the same newspaper published my response. It was terse. First, I have never heard from the municipal office, one way or another. Second, I have never offered my advice for any sort of compensation, but free of charge. Third, I have never been against golf and polo as

such, but against covering the area around Motovun with houses hiding behind these vaunted sports. My response ended with an appeal to the mayor: it is time for him to apologize to me in the very same newspaper. He has never come up with anything of the kind, it goes without saying. Nonetheless, I have been waiting for it till the last day of this fateful year.

#### *Addendum IV (March 8, 2009)*

Sadly, this sorry story is far from finished so many years later. To begin with, the mayor of Motovun responded to my original letter, together with a dozen of other letters going all the way back to 2004, on April 18, 2007. All he had to say was that he was not interested in my consulting services, at least “for the time being.” All his responses to all my other letters were similarly perfunctory, only to satisfy the legal requirement concerning communications between citizens and municipal authorities. Most important, he responded in his own name rather than in the name of the municipal council, to which my letter of November 22, 2005, was actually addressed.

Now, less than a month ago *Glas Istre* published an interview with two municipal councilors from the only opposition party in Motovun in which one of them stated clearly that my offer of consulting services was never brought to the municipal council itself. In other words, the mayor kept my original letter to himself even though it was not addressed to him as the mayor of Motovun.

In retrospect, all I can conclude from the mayor’s handling of my offer is that he must have perceived it as a threat of some kind. Either he conceived of it as a threat to his own authority in the municipality, which I could bring into question on professional grounds, or he was concerned that I would eventually learn too much about everything that stood behind golf and polo in Motovun’s development. Here I have in mind the hidden private interests having little to do with the community as a whole. Whatever is the case, his attacks have only grown in ferocity ever since my open-minded offer of help. And now I am facing no less than two court cases, one from the mayor and another from the municipality that does exactly as the mayor pleases.

#### A MISPLACED BEAUTY (December 13, 2005)

This year I donated a Christmas tree to the children of Motovun. As I write, it is being put up on top of the well in the upper square. It was a nuisance in my garden, and so I had it cut. Three communal workers took care of it this morning. But I could not let it die for naught. Planted some thirty years ago by Jakub Samokovlić, remembered fondly by many people here as Kuba, it has grown into quite a beauty. A misplaced beauty, to be exact, for Christmas trees do not grow

naturally in these parts. Still, the children will surely enjoy it for a week or two. This much I owed to Kuba.

*Addendum* (March 4, 2008)

The long-departed beauty left a bulky stump. Now that gardening is no longer just a fancy idea any longer, it had to be removed. I started by digging around the stump and cutting the roots, which were rotten already. For about a fortnight, almost every day I would return to the garden with a hoe and an axe. Everything went well until I discovered a whole bunch of large stones, which must have fallen from the neighboring wall many years ago. Entangled in the roots, each stone had to be dug out and yanked away. There must have been at least a score of them. But once I got rid of the stones under the stump itself, it was easy to topple it over. Having broken the last roots, I dragged the stump out of the deep hole, rolled it to the edge of the garden wall, and pushed it over. It settled in the bushes down the hill, where it will rot away in peace. Misplaced or not, the old beauty is gone from my garden at last.

THE CULPRIT (December 16, 2005)

There can be no doubt any longer that Ivan Matejčić's office, from which he retired only a month ago, is bent on destroying the Istrian architectural heritage, which it is actually supposed to preserve. I just walked by the largest house currently refurbished in Motovun. It is close to the bottom of Rialto, looking south. From the outside, the house has just been completed. Even the shutters are already in place. But the façade is in rendered stone rather than covered with mortar and painted, like it used to be. I talked to the builder about it. The decision concerning the façade came directly from Matejčić's office. Houses in a Venetian town of old are being refurbished to look like stables in Croatian villages that surrounded it. Even in Croatian villages houses were covered with mortar and painted when there was enough money for it. By the way, mortar was expensive in this part of Istria because sand was scarce. It had to be made by grinding stone. However, protecting façades with mortar was essential for keeping water out of houses. Returning to the devastation of Venetian heritage in Istria, there can be no doubt about it any longer. Motovun is systematically stripped of its color. And Ivan Matejčić is the culprit.

FOLLOW THE WATER (December 17, 2005)

Jozo Brandić is a thoughtful man. When Motovun's crumbling walls come up, he has a simple advice: "Follow the water." When anything else having to do with the town's decrepit infrastructure comes up, he always offers the same advice. There is much to it, too. From the area enclosed by the town walls downward, the atmospheric water used to

be collected in cisterns. The surplus was channelled into the sewer, as was the water used up in the houses. The clean and dirty water used to be prudently kept apart. Although the entire water management system was built in stone, it was put together with stunning ingenuity. And it was maintained for centuries with meticulous care. When drinking water was brought to the town in pipes, the old cisterns were gradually abandoned. The sewer slowly fell into disrepair, and much of it got plugged up. Atmospheric water now rushes every which way, eroding old walls on its way. As of late, there appears to be much more of it, as well. Climate change bodes ill for our town. Not only houses are threatened, as well as so many walls supporting gardens and roads, but the town walls, too. Everywhere it goes, water is washing the mortar away. And much of it was not that far from mud, anyway. By and by, the whole town will crumble into a heap of smallish stones from which it was built centuries ago. Follow the water, indeed. Or else.

#### DRAINAGE (January 8, 2006)

Before stone walls collapse, they develop bellies. Close to their base, they bulge outwards. As the bulge grows, the top of the wall pushes out over its foundations. The break takes place just under the bulge, once the earth behind the wall swells beyond the point of repose. And the main reason for swelling is accumulated water that has no way to escape. There has been so much rain this fall and winter, that many walls in Motovun have developed worrisome bellies. Some have already burst, but many more are expected to come down if it keeps raining at the same rate as the last few months. By the way, a part of the Babacan parking lot is now closed because it has sunk in several places. The wall that holds it is close to collapse. Even more important, the tall wall along the ramp leading up to the parking lot has developed such a belly that it is only a question of time when it will fall down, trapping many parked cars for days or even weeks. Returning to the causes of all this, it is clear that better drainage is needed. This has been so for decades, of course. But it is also clear that there has been more rain than usual the last few seasons. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that this has to do with climate change, which makes the problem of drainage in town even more acute. Even if the annual amount of rain has not have changed much, it now comes down in shorter periods. The long-neglected drainage system cannot cope with all the water. An emergency plan is needed before it is too late. Is there any sign of it emerging, though? None whatsoever. And this is how it will be in the future, for the authorities, both local and regional, have better things to do than worry about trifles such as drainage. In the meanwhile, Motovun is in peril.

## CRAZY WISDOM (January 15, 2006)

How to be in harmony with the cosmos? It seems that certain preliminaries are indispensable: rid yourself of all beliefs; leave metaphysics to the sectarians of the absurd; understand that hope is fear gone bad; confront reality directly; stop upholding the romantic dream of realization; forget sentimental neurosis; play with your own limits; look at your confusion; confront life without the bric-a-brac of the religious and the spiritual—without, for all that, becoming a narrow-minded materialist who would make a new god out of rationalism; dare to be alone; do not oppose essence against reality; give yourself over to the pleasures of pure subjectivity; understand that everything is real; and finally, one day, know exhilarating silence. [...] In short, it takes crazy wisdom.

From Daniel Odier's Preface to his *Yoga Spandakarika: The Sacred Texts at the Origin of Tantra*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2005 (first published in 2004), pp. xv-xvi.

## FOR THE BIRDS (January 17, 2006)

When I talk to people around me about my heating-oil problems, they have no sympathy for me. Oil was perhaps the best choice when I was refurbishing my house, but I could have gone for wood or electricity if I wanted to avoid hassle in the future. Tough luck. Relying on a single supplier of oil with a cistern small enough to come down my narrow cobblestone street was kind of foolish, for it could not but break down sooner or later. Tough luck again. People I talk to have no sympathy for anyone else, for that matter. Whatever anyone's problems, their own decisions are undoubtedly close behind them. Tough luck again and again. People I talk to are always ready to be of assistance, though. All I need to do is to ask. If there is anything they can do to help me solve my problems, or at least alleviate them, they surely will. And this goes for anyone else, as well. But sympathy is for the birds. And this is how I am growing to appreciate it.

## GREAT GIFTS (January 19, 2006)

When we have a chance to become angry or afraid, we feel a gathering of energy followed by its dispersal. It is in this gathering that we can reach *spanda*, the secret tremor considered in this book. This requires great awareness, because the awareness of our state is generally delayed. Once the cataclysm occurs, the energy falls off again. And we say to ourselves: "I was angry!" It is only rarely that we achieve a clear awareness of our emotion in the present moment. If this were always the case, there would be no drive to action, no manifestation of the emotion outside ourselves. Anger, fear, hate, and jealousy are

great gifts. Finally we leave the spiritual mirage behind. We are no longer those sanitized beings smelling sweetly of lotus-flower perfume. We smell like hate. We stink of it. This is reality. This is unity, at last! Transforming hate into love and compassion is like putting saran wrap over a container of rotting food—it does not resolve anything. We must go to the raw and direct feeling. There is nothing to transform there. To transform is to lose the chance that we have been given to look at reality. The solution is in the problem and not in its negation. The problem itself is a marvellous gift.

From Daniel Odier's *Yoga Spandakarika: The Sacred Texts at the Origin of Tantra*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2005 (first published in 2004), p. 70.

HEAD OVER HEELS (January 20, 2006)

Whenever one talks with Mariano Maurović, the unofficial historian of Motovun, one ends up talking about Venice. Not Venice the tourist attraction, it goes without saying, but Venice the queen of the Mediterranean. And Venice the bridge between Europe and Asia, if not the entire world. After so many talks with Mariano, one realizes that he is in love with Venice. Passionately. Madly. Head over heels. If one shares this affliction with him, and I certainly do, then one is likely to experience something akin to envy of him, for Mariano's love of Venice burns brighter than one's own. In fact, it is the love of his life.

PERHAPS TOMORROW (January 25, 2006)

For most practical intents and purposes, I do not live in Croatia. True, I reside on Croatian soil, and I buy my staples here, but that is about all. I do not make my money here. I do not pay my taxes here. I do not even earn my pension here. With the exception of my house and sparse personal belongings, my assets are elsewhere, as well. So far, so good. But there is a hitch in this propitious arrangement: I buy my heating oil in Croatia. Worse, I cannot buy it anywhere else. That is the law. And buying oil is quite an art in this country, no matter how much money you have in your pocket. Although I started buying heating oil a week ago, I still do not have a single drop of it. Perhaps tomorrow, I was told a moment ago, having waited the entire day for oil delivery. It takes a fine blend of pleading, pestering, dissimulating, cajoling, and threatening to get the companies selling oil here to even consider delivering you some. And it takes an even finer blend of perseverance, smoothness, perfidiousness, coolness, and aggressiveness to make it through the ordeal. But it is all worth it in the end, I am sure. For it is character building.

*Addendum* (September 7, 2006)

So many months later, I am in the same situation. Perhaps tomorrow, the eternal tomorrow. But the whole thing is a bit more complex this time around. The fellow who used to take the heating oil from the foothills of Motovun to my house, which is not accessible by even the smallest cistern available in Istria, has had problems with his van. God knows when he will repair it, though. So, I had to find another fellow who could do this for me. He has a tractor and trailer. The trouble is that this fellow is not as accessible as the previous one. He has no mobile phone. Every time I talk to the fickle company that will eventually deliver the heating oil, I have to walk to the fellow's house down the hill and tell him the latest news. Perhaps tomorrow, I told him this morning. Or perhaps the day after tomorrow. He just shrugs his shoulders, and that is that. By now, my character is the size of a mountain.

HALF IN JEST (February 14, 2006)

I return home from Klaudio's and sit down at the dining table. The sharp light makes me squint. Not sure what to do before going to sleep, if anything, I flip through a couple of magazines strewn about the tabletop. But I do not feel like reading. It is quiet. A bit too quiet, too. It is time to hit the sack, but I am in no hurry. I do not want to get up too early, either. As often happens at night in the middle of winter, my mind wanders to bugs. I kind of miss them. But they will be back in numbers in a month or two. The house will be abuzz with them. Something stirs behind one of the magazines, and I get up to see what it is. Most likely a stinkbug, I make a guess. I look around for something to pick it up and throw it out of the house. It is a large fly, though. Lying on its back, it is spinning around. Curtains. I flick it on the floor with my index finger and step on it. But only gently. "Happy Valentine's," I whisper half in jest.

NEW TUSCANY (February 16, 2006)

Last night there was no electricity for a few hours. It was cut before midnight and it came back around two in the morning. Today it was cut again in the early afternoon. Each time this happens, the current fluctuates wildly. Each time the cut is intermittent. The lights blink like crazy. All kinds of household appliances stop and start a few times before they go mercifully quiet. Many of them conk out before their time because of the jitters. And the morons in high places like to boast on festive occasions that Istria is a New Tuscany!

#### ENOUGH FOR A THEORY OF SORTS (February 16, 2006)

I am searching for something on the computer in my study when something crawls up my right hand, which is resting on the mouse. My first impulse is to shake the pest loose, but then I give it a closer look. Luckily, for it is a smallish ladybug. Now I give it my full attention. I immediately notice that it is a bit smaller than the one that visited me a bit more than two weeks ago. It could not have shrunk in the meanwhile, so it must be a different one. My hand raised and my fingers spread open, so as not to accidentally hurt it, I watch its every move. The ladybug crawls over the back of my hand to the tip of my middle finger, turns around, pauses a few seconds, spreads its wings open, and flies off. It lands on the floor not far off. Now it is exploring the wooden boards with meticulous care. But what shall I do about it? It is raining outside, and it makes no sense helping it out of the house. Once again, I can only hope it can find some sustenance indoors. And then it crosses my mind that it could not be otherwise if so many ladybugs have been visiting me as of late. The way I am, two ladybugs are enough for a theory of sorts. Relieved, I return to my computer. This time with a vengeance, though.

#### A LADYBUG BREEDING GROUND (February 17, 2006)

Today I found an even smaller ladybug than the previous two. It was so small, the dots on its back were not yet clearly formed. In fact, it was so small it took me a while to recognize it as such. Most important, it was so small that it could not have come to my house from the outside. The weather has been too wet for that. It stopped raining only hours ago. Besides, all the windows and most of the shutters have been closed. In short, the ladybugs must be hatching in a nest in my very house, in which their mother had left her eggs at the end of last season. As soon as I realized this, my chest swelled with pride: a ladybug breeding ground under my own roof!

#### “DON’T GET ME WRONG” (February 21, 2006)

There are a few of us at a table at Klaudio’s when Dražen Nemet joins us and orders coffee. An outspoken young man, as well as a funny one, he entertains us from the word go. “By the way,” he turns to me at some point, “the color of your house is just awful!” He just drove to Motovun from Tar, where he now lives, and he was taken aback by what he saw from the road. “Don’t get me wrong,” he laughed affably, “the house itself is quite beautiful!” I keep quiet for a while, but then I suggest that the problem is not with the color of my house. “Rather,” I propose as mildly as I can, “the trouble is that most houses in town are now stripped of their original color.” My house would not stick out like it now does if everything were as it used to be. “You may be right,” Dražen concedes pensively, “you might be right.” And then he



brightens up: “How beautiful Motovun would be if all the houses were painted in vivid colors!”

#### *SAMADHI* (February 22, 2006)

I am reading about *samadhi*. The word appears over and over again. Page after page. The teasing descriptions of this vaunted state of mind come one after another. A very sweet state. A luminous stillness. A gentle explosion. A state of suspension outside of space and time. Clutching the book, I keep reading. And then my eyes lock onto the printed word in the middle of a page: *samadhi*. The word solidifies. It turns into black, typeset letters printed on white, grainy paper. I take a deep, involuntary breath. My eyes open wide. The rest of the page evaporates. The light intensifies. My body starts vibrating, as if I am experiencing a steady but gentle electric shock. The world stops. Trembling, I realize that I am experiencing something extraordinary. A taste of grace. A dip into eternity. A brush with infinity. The moment I am released, which comes less than a minute later, tears come pouring down. I shake my head in disbelief and put the book down. It takes me a while to calm down.

#### BEEPING (February 23, 2006)

I woke up to the beeping of the uninterruptible power supply system in my study. Another damned power cut. As it turned out, it was close to eight in the morning. I got up to close the study door, and thus make the beeping a bit less annoying, but I could not fall asleep again. The beeps were still there in the dark. And so I got up after a while, soon after the power returned and the beeping stopped. When I opened the bedroom shutters, I saw that it was a sunny day. The Mirna valley was covered with low clouds. A fair compensation for all the beeping, I guess.

#### THE HORN DAY (March 1, 2006)

In Motovun and Buzet, the horn is always played the day after the carnival. The day itself moves with the lunar calendar associated with Easter. It is rarely nice, though, for it usually falls in late February or early March. The horn day is usually on the cold side, like today. Sometimes it rains, too, but the rain is rarely strong enough to spoil the game, let alone interrupt it. As for the rules of the game in Motovun, for it is not exactly the same in Buzet, “The Horn” (February 25, 2004) is the best source. To the best of my knowledge, the rules have never been written down in full. They have never been connected to the weather, either. Rain or shine, the game goes on. It is time to stop writing, though. The game begins in fifteen minutes.

*Addendum* (March 2, 2006)

The horn was glorious, as ever. There were between thirty and forty players this time around, but a huge crowd followed us from the cemetery to the gas station on Kanal. Everyone was plastered by the time we sat down for dinner at Cotić's. Hoots of laughter followed us all the way down the hill. At some point a bunch of American tourists joined us for a few throws. They were not annoyed that their bus was stuck behind the crowd. Not at all. Rather, they joined us. They had a few swigs of the wine, as well. All in all, it was simply wonderful. I cannot imagine ever missing the horn in the years to come. The day after, I am already looking forward to it next year. By the way, I do not remember the weather at all. It was on the cold side, I think. As I already said, the weather does not enter into the game at all.

MEDDLING (March 2, 2006)

I keep telling myself that it is silly to meddle in local affairs, but I keep meddling still. A brief history of my last bit of meddling is quite instructive. About a week ago an announcement appeared on the municipal office's notice board in the town loggia inviting comments on the new statute of the municipality. To my surprise, comments could be submitted by electronic mail, too. I told myself that I should not bother reading the statute, but I went to the municipal office to get a copy the same day I saw the announcement. I told myself that I should not read the statute all that carefully, but I covered it with notes the very same day, as well. I told myself that I should not send any comments to the municipal office, but I did it by electronic mail two days ahead of the deadline. And I had not one but three such comments, all of which propose a greater degree of democratic participation in the work of the municipal office. But throughout this episode I kept telling myself that it was silly to meddle in local affairs. Some resolve.

*Addendum* (March 17, 2006)

While chatting yesterday evening with a member of the municipal council, I learned that all of my comments were rejected at their last meeting. As it turned out, all of them were contrary to the current law regulating local self-government in Croatia. However, this morning I read in the local newspapers that my third comment would soon be in accordance with the law. Actually, it would be the law. Namely, I proposed that the mayor be elected by direct vote of the citizens, rather than from within the municipal council after the elections. The new law is expected to pass through the Croatian parliament any day now. Good news, too. Slowly but surely, the law of the land is catching up with me.

### A GREAT MAGICIAN (March 8, 2006)

Two adepts, one of the Ch'an school and the other of a different school, meet at a river. The adept of the other school says that his master possesses extraordinary powers. Seated on one side of the river, he can draw in the air the marks drawn on a piece of paper one of his disciples is holding on the other side of the river. "And your master, of what marvels is he capable?" "My master is a great magician," answers the Ch'an adept. "When he is thirsty, he drinks; when he is hungry, he eats; when he is tired, he goes to bed."

From Daniel Odier's *Desire: The Tantric Path to Awakening*, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2001 (first published in 1999), pp. 74-75.

### THE OLDEST ONE IN TOWN (March 16, 2006)

The heating oil for my house is supposed to be delivered this afternoon, and so I go to the bank to get the money. My chore done, I am chatting with Dina Pilat behind the counter. I am ready to leave when Piero Tomaz walks in with his cane. "How are you doing?" I salute him effusively and grab him by the arm. "Ah," he lifts his cane demonstratively, "as you would expect from an old man!" "Come on," I protest, "what is this?" "Now I am the oldest one in town!" he shakes his head with a proud twinkle in his eye. "How old are you?" I venture. "Eighty-eight," he sighs and pulls himself up to his full height. "A long way to go still," I pat him on the back and reach for the door. Piero waves at me cheerfully, and so does Dina.

### AUTARKY (March 16, 2006)

The longer I live in Motovun, the stronger is my wish for self-sufficiency. Autonomy. Nay, outright autarky. By and by, the wish is growing into an unquenchable thirst. A burning desire. A mad daydream. Imagine living without electricity and running water. Without heating oil. Without the phone and the Internet. And without food supply. I could grow potatoes, cabbage, and beans in my garden. I could send letters and postcards by mail. I could make a cistern and collect rainwater. I could collect wood and cook in my fireplace. I could hum in the dark. All I would need to buy would be candles, matches, salt, olive oil, wine... That is about all, I think. But I would be free, free. And I would never bother about power cuts, cuts in water supply, dead phone lines, or store opening and closing hours. Most important at this very moment, I would never wonder whether and when the heating oil would finally be delivered. The bliss!

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

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

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

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

SPIDERS I DO NOT KILL (March 22, 2006)

The music stops. I get up to find another compact disk in the niche in the wall just above the player. Another Turkish disk, of course. When I find it and pull it out, something crawls out from among the disks, scurries to the edge of the niche, and jumps to the floor below. It attempts to hide among the wires, but I can still see it well enough. It is dark, but I can see it is either a spider or a scorpion. Spiders I do not kill. Scorpions I do, no matter how tiny. It moves toward the wall, where it could easily find a crevice in which to hide, and I squash it with my index finger. When I bring it to the light, it turns out to be a scorpion, its tail still wriggling. I nod and smile. As I said, spiders I do not kill.

THE JOY OF COLOR (March 25, 2006)

To my joy, people in Motovun are beginning to paint their façades in live colors. A short while ago, Davor Sviličić painted his house half way down Borgo in terracotta the shade of which is very similar to that of the hotel within the town walls. The back of his house, which is

painted the same color as the front, is quite visible from far away, as well. Today I watched Valter Benčić paint yellow the façade of his house on top of Gradiziol. The back of his house is leaning against the passage that connects the lower square and Barbacan. The shade of yellow he chose can be best described as ripe lemon. It is strong and vibrant. It completely changes the drab street around it. By now the painting job must be finished, and I must go and see the new façade. I just must. The joy of color is difficult to describe. Difficult to put into words. But I have been riding on it since the morning.

#### LIKE A MARTIAN (March 27, 2006)

After a brief pause, I continued meddling in the local political affairs. And in earnest this time around. First I spoke to a television crew from Zagreb about the democratic deficit in the municipality and the region. Then I wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper in support of an attack on the leading light of local politics, the regional governor. I went as far as to propose a green party for Istria as an antidote to the incompetent or corrupt parties of today, including the governor's own party. "Heck," I have been encouraging myself all day long, "I am unreachable, like an aristocrat of old." It took me a while to understand that I am even more unreachable than that. And by a wide margin. Besides my house, all my assets are abroad. All my sources of income are abroad, as well. As a matter of fact, I am rather like a Martian.

#### A GENTLE BOUNCER (March 28, 2006)

The weather is iffy, albeit appreciably warmer than a week ago. Sunless spring, so far. Although rain threatens at all times, we have been lucky the last few days. Not a drop. Judging by the behavior of stinkbugs, it might have rained, though. They are crawling into the house through every crevice they can find. And they are searching diligently enough. I found about a dozen of them huddled together between one of the shutters and the frame on which they are hung. The stinkbugs could not get all the way in, but they were at least safe from the threat of rain. Quite a number of them do find their way indoors, of course. Every now and then, I pick one of them up and throw it out again. By now I am an expert bouncer. Not a single stinkbug escapes my attention. At the same time, not a single one gets hurt in the process. I am a gentle bouncer, to coin a term.

#### THE FORUM OF GREEN ISTRIA (March 30, 2006)

Tired of widespread political manipulation, much of which focuses on real estate, a bunch of us from Motovun are thinking about an alternative. As another conventional political organization does not

strike us as an adequate response to what is already on offer, we are thinking about a green party as the ultimate objective. Before we get there, we are thinking about a green forum set up on the Internet. Its provisional name is the Forum of Green Istria. The website is already in development, its engine being a piece of software that can manage discussion. The name of the forum obviously appeals to the ecological issues underlying rapid economic development, much of which is unsustainable. An ecological orientation stands to reason in a region such as Istria, where tourism and agriculture are the two main prongs of economic development. In addition, the name has a special meaning in the region. Namely, tourist guides often distinguish Blue from Green Istria. The former is associated with the Adriatic coast, the latter with the interior of the peninsula. Given that much of Blue Istria has already been covered with concrete, often disastrously, Green Istria is next in line. And thus it begs for protection from overdevelopment. Once the website gets going, we will get a better feeling about the future of the forum's political program. With some luck, we may have a green party in time for the 2009 elections.

*Addendum* (April 9, 2006)

The Forum of Green Istria is now on the Internet ([www.forum-zelene-istre.org](http://www.forum-zelene-istre.org)). Browsers like Google are already informed about the new arrival, and it will take them a few days to include it in their search results. Unfortunately, the language of the website is Croatian only. Including foreign languages into its design would cost too much at this stage. However, English will become essential soon. There are many people in Istria who are not fluent enough in Croatian. Most of them are German, Dutch, and British. Their common language is often English. In a few short years, when Croatia joins the European Union, they will have some political rights in Istria, too. At any rate, the game is now on. Although our chances to influence the backward political scene in Istria and Croatia are low, they are far from zero. Keep your fingers crossed!

THE IMPROBABLE CARCASS (April 6, 2006)

Street cats are a marvel of adaptation, which is why there are so many of them in Motovun. They can survive almost anything, including the erratic traffic. Although a few do miss their tail, I do not know of a single cat that has ended up under the wheels of a scooter, motorcycle, car, truck, or tractor. But such an improbable thing did happen last night. God knows how, a cat got squashed by a car. Even more improbably, the mangled carcass got discovered by Istra Toner, a fervent lover of cats, who does not spend much of her time in Motovun. She was devastated, of course. Not wishing that anyone else should see such a horrible sight, she threw the poor thing over the wall on the lower square. When she came to Klaudio's about an hour before midnight, she was white in her face. She was shaking. She

could hardly speak. On our way home, I asked her exactly where she had found the cat. It was on cobblestones a few feet from the loggia. I asked her exactly where she threw the cat. It was over the wall a few feet from the loggia, once again. This morning I looked down to see which cat got killed. I could not see any sign of the cat, but I immediately realized it ended up in Milan Babić's storage under the wall. I am not sure what he keeps there, but it is covered with green tarpaulin. Anyhow, it took me quite a while to stop laughing. Sooner or later, Milan is bound to discover the improbable carcass.

*Addendum I (April 7, 2006)*

It was raining yesterday morning when I looked over the wall of the lower square, and so I could not lean over it. The wall is rather wide, as well. The weather is better this morning, though. And the carcass is there, all right. In fact, it is right in the middle of the green tarpaulin. To my surprise, it is not mangled all that badly. The body is far from squashed, as I imagined it from Istra's harrowing account. To my delight, I have never seen this particular beast. It definitely is not a street cat from this part of town. I know them all. Most likely it escaped from one of the nearby houses. This could have been its first time out and about. Unaccustomed to the street, it quickly met a sorry end. So, the mystery is solved once and for all. But I still cannot stop laughing whenever I think of Milan discovering that carcass on top of his storage. And smack in the middle of it, too. The mystery!

*Addendum II (April 8, 2006)*

Now I check the carcass twice or thrice a day. It is not an idle pursuit, either. The thing is moving. And often. Milan must have noticed it sometime yesterday morning and tossed it a few paces away from his storage. By this morning the carcass had moved a few more paces away. Now it is quite some distance from the precious storage. There is no association with it any longer. The trouble is that it will start stinking soon. Milan must be hoping that someone else will notice the carcass and call the authorities. It is getting warm, and the cat's belly is slowly swelling. Soon it will be the size of a largish ball, as it is exposed to the afternoon sun. And so the carcass may move yet again. Until the authorities take care of it once and for all. Or so Milan must be hoping.

*Addendum III (April 10, 2006)*

At long last, the carcass is gone. It was removed by the communal workers early this afternoon. Although I doubt that the cat has gotten a proper burial, it is out of the way. Or out of sight, to be a bit more precise. Most likely it is in some garbage container on top of Gradiziol, which is where it would have ended up the very next morning had it not been tossed over the wall. Out of sheer

compassion, too. By the way, garbage is removed twice a week in our little town.

#### SITE ADMINISTRATION (April 10, 2006)

The last few days I have been quite busy with my new website. The discussion forum is taking most of my time. In addition to posting a bunch of themes that are supposed to kick off the debate, I have been fooling around with site administration. Yes, I am the site administrator. The software is awkward, to say the least. It is far from intuitive for a non-geek like me. But there is another problem I am now facing. An entirely unexpected problem, too. I am struggling with Croatian. Although I have no trouble writing a simple letter in my mother tongue, I feel strange when writing anything even slightly more demanding. My Croatian quickly gets stiff, wooden. I stumble for words. I am unsure of my idiomatic expressions. And I am rather worried about occasional brushes with Serbian. After the recent war, Croatian and Serbian must be kept apart. As far apart as possible. Which is why many Croatians stutter in front of microphones and cameras. They can never be sure of their own Croatian. Although small slips are tolerated in day-to-day banter, they are frowned upon in writing. And especially political writing. In short, I am facing a tough challenge. Anyone out there dying to try his or her luck with site administration?

#### BECKETT TO THE RESCUE (April 12, 2006)

Right at the beginning of my political engagement in Motovun, I get *via* Amazon Samuel Beckett's penultimate prose work, *Worstward Ho*.<sup>[3]</sup> Smack in the middle of the excitement, I read the third paragraph:

All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed.  
No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.<sup>[4]</sup>

And I feel vindicated. Absolved. Right at the beginning of my political engagement in this godforsaken hill-town, I am set free. Smack in the middle of the excitement, I get my bearings. My coordinates. And the course I am yet to take. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

#### “DON'T GO THERE, BON” (April 12, 2006)

I have been urging friends from around the world to go to the Forum of Green Istria, register, read a bit, and respond to the several themes already on offer. As the language of the site is Croatian, I am focusing on friends who hail from Yugoslavia of old. One of these friends



checked the site and sent me a terse personal message: “I like it, Bon. They must be stopped.” When I urged her to go public, she turned a bit more prolific, as well as ominous:

Don’t go there, Bon. There’s little hope, as Croatians are very strange people (and I should know, being one of them). So, I will be looking on from afar as they fuck up that little bit of homeland they finally got back.

All this was in English, I must add. And in capitals, which I hesitantly removed, for they are a bit difficult to read. As well as in pink, of all colors. By the way, this friend of mine is originally from Istria. She lives in England since her youth, though. Although she occasionally hints that she might return to her old country when she retires, she does not seem all that eager to return to Croatia for good. Or to retire. Ever. It appears that too many years in England have spoiled her for good. Which is perhaps why she is so much fun whenever she comes over for a fleeting visit.

*Addendum I (October 5, 2017)*

The friend in question was Istra Toner’s younger sister. Istra was my next-door neighbor at the time, and her sister would come over from London every now and then, but only for a few days at a time. A jolly and frank woman, she was a pleasure to be around on her visits. We got to be good friends quite quickly, but we have not been in touch for about a decade already, which is why I cannot remember her name any longer. Alas! At any rate, her advice was right on the mark. Her first line, and the peppy title of this piece, crosses my mind often enough. In retrospect, I should have heeded her advice without much ado. So many years later, I am still amazed at my stupidity. And getting involved with the Motovun golf scam was sheer stupidity, indeed. Ever since, though, I make sure not to get involved in local politics. Croatians are very strange people, no doubt whatsoever. The strangest I have ever come across, as a matter of fact.

*Addendum II (December 18, 2017)*

Istra Toner’s sister came up in conversation with my beloved earlier today, and I mentioned that I could not remember her name. My beloved could not remember it at first, either, but then she exclaimed: “Branka!” Branka it was, too. And I thought of this piece at once. At long last, it is complete.

“DO YOU WISH TWO MORE MOTOVUNS?” (April 23, 2006)

Thus a small piece of ordinary writing paper I have been distributing to friends and acquaintances in town. I am referring to the two towns that lurk behind golf and polo grounds, of course. The World Wide Web

address of the Forum of Green Istria ([www.forum-zelene-istre.org](http://www.forum-zelene-istre.org)) is the only other thing printed on this plain piece of paper, which is about half the size of a standard business card. Sadly, my puny leaflet is in Croatian only. As is the website itself. Earlier today I have written to all the green organizations in Istria and Croatia whose links appear on the site and asked them to put on their sites the forum's link in turn. I also asked them to join the debate. And in earnest. As of late, there are more and more postings on the site, too. Early next month I will invite the newspapers to visit the forum, as well. So, everything is in motion now. If only the faint rumble of two more Motovuns would recede with my frantic activity. At least for a few weeks. Or maybe a few days only.

WHERE THE WEB IS THE THINNEST: A LETTER TO *THE ECONOMIST* (April 25, 2006)

Your survey of new media—that is, the World Wide Web and its many colourful offshoots—focuses almost entirely on the most developed world (“Among the Audience,” April 22, 2006). This is where the Web is the thickest. But the age of participation, as you call it, may have an even greater relative impact in places where the Web is the thinnest. China is perhaps the most important example. This is where the democratizing effect of new media is most feared by those in power. There are many other such spots around the world, where the newspapers, radio, and television are almost exclusive sources of information about the world out there. Those who have access to the Web can keep abreast of things quite effectively even in such places, though. And they can also organize themselves, thus threatening the monopoly of power of those on top. This is what your survey sadly misses.

*Addendum* (April 27, 2006)

I just found the response of Andreas Kluth, the author of the survey. He started by thanking me for my letter. “You are absolutely right,” he continued, “and I myself regretted having to omit the possible scenarios for poor countries.” He was limited to thirteen-thousand words, he explained. And he concluded by thanking me once again. “I am almost embarrassed by your praise,” I responded. But then I added that my letter was motivated by my own experience in the so-called Western Balkans. “A few weeks ago I initiated a political process by setting up an Internet forum,” I said. Although the results are far from spectacular, I mentioned, they are still above my expectations. “The Internet can do wonders in these backwaters,” I concluded. What a pleasure it is to correspond with bright and gracious people like Andreas Kluth.

### COMPLEMENTARY COLORS (April 26, 2006)

Just as is the case across much of Europe, there are quite a few survivors of 1968 in Croatian green organizations, as well. Some of them remember me from the good old days. This is hardly surprising, but it is still a special treat. After some forty years, we are on the barricades again. Back then they were red. Now they are green. Come to think of it, these are complementary colors. Combined, they produce white or gray.

### HOMAGE TO CERVANTES (May 10, 2006)

The Forum of Green Istria is exactly a month old today. Fourteen themes and sixty-three responses have been posted so far. The number of visits is surprisingly high for such a short period of time: seven of the themes have been visited more than a hundred times, while one of them has been visited more than three-hundred times. Genuine debate has opened up on several of the themes. Etc. All good news. They are far from good enough, though. The number of people debating is quite small. Most visitors are quite passive. The debate veers off and gets bogged down all too often. The core of people in Motovun is left out of the debate. Although the local newspapers have reported on our first steps, the people in power in the municipality are completely silent. Not a peep out of them so far. After two press conferences concerning the fight against golf and polo grounds in Motovun, one yesterday and one today, I am starting to feel ill at ease. The many windmills arrayed around me do not scare me a bit, but they do dishearten me still. It is as though I have been here already. God only knows how many times, too.

### NOT YET APPRECIATED (May 25, 2006)

Some friends told me that they had heard an interview with Korado Korlević on Radio Pula a short while ago. It was on May 16, to be exact. The educational director of a small observatory in Tinjan near Poreč, as well as a polymath, Korado is quite concerned with the environment. He is quite popular in Istria, too. As we had met a few months back, and corresponded *via* electronic mail ever since, he mentioned me when he spoke about the struggle against too many golf and polo grounds in Istria. Reportedly, he referred to me as a “weirdo, but in the best sense of the word, as someone who is not slave to conventions.” My friends wrote down the exact words. The word “eccentric” is not yet appreciated in Istria. Nor are eccentrics themselves, it would seem.

### SLAVIC STATES: A LETTER TO *THE ECONOMIST* (June 6, 2006)

A bit distracted, this afternoon I started reading your European Section without customary care. The first article was about some Slavic states. I kept skipping from paragraph to paragraph. Out of the blue, one sentence grabbed my attention: “Corrupt and incompetent officials, venal politicians, slow, expensive, and untrustworthy courts, silly rules, and a feeling of public powerlessness all combine to make voters feel fed up.” How very true of Croatia, I thought. Only then I checked the article’s title. As it turned out, it was about Slovakia and Serbia (“A Tale of Two Slavic States,” June 3, 2006). What a pity, I thought. For that felicitous sentence fits so well almost every Slavic state I happen know. Croatia included, of course.

### THE LARGEST ONE (June 17, 2006)

After a long day away from home, I discover a huge scorpion right in the middle of my entrance hall. It is the largest one I have ever seen. The scorpion scuttles toward the toilet, but I kick it out through the front door. It lands in the middle of the street and limps away between the cobblestones. The poor thing is quite defenceless against someone like me. Someone quite unimpressed, that is. At long last it dawns on me how scorpions make it in this world. They con their way through life by impressing innocent people.

### QUITE SMITTEN (June 19, 2006)

How much do I love Motovun? Several days ago I went to Rovinj with a few friends. Wherever we went, I found people from our small town. And I spotted them from afar, as well as far enough not to start waving at once. First I saw Denis Daugostin. Next I saw Leila Ivasic. And then I saw Edo Jerman. They appeared one after another. Everywhere I looked, Motovunians popped out from among the unfamiliar faces. Each and every time I was delighted to see them so far from home. I was ready to greet them with gusto, too. And a bit crestfallen when they came a bit closer, when it turned out that they did not look the least bit like Denis, Leila, or Edo. That is how much I love Motovun. In fact, I am quite smitten by it.

### I LOVE MOTOVUN (June 21, 2006)

Thus the name of a new website aiming to shield Motovun from pernicious development, which is available both in Croatian and English ([www.volim-motovun.org](http://www.volim-motovun.org)). *Volim Motovun* is its Croatian name. It is being launched around noon today. An auspicious time and date, to be sure. The site is a vehicle for a petition addressed to the president of Croatia, Stjepan Mesić, prime minister Ivo Sanader,

Istrian governor Ivan Jakovčić, and the mayor of Motovun, Slobodan Vugrinec. They are beseeched to do everything in their power to ensure that the historic town is repaired and regularly maintained, as well as that its surroundings remain covered by vineyards, olive groves, and groves of fruit trees. The historic landscape needs to be preserved, as well. The last page of the site lists the names of all those who have signed the petition, together with the place and country where they are from. Simple. No fuss. With some luck, effective, too. But now I must write to all and sundry and make sure that the site gets a decent kick off. God bless the Internet, once again.

*Addendum I (June 23, 2006)*

Close to a hundred people signed the petition the first day. Most of them were from Croatia, but many other countries were represented, as well: Slovenia, United Kingdom, Germany, United States... More than a hundred signed the petition the second day. By about ten o'clock this morning, there were more than three hundred signatories. Many other countries came up: Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, Serbia... Wow! But then something happened. The website collapsed. It is not available any longer. One theory is that one of the four offices blocked the messages as spam, and then the messages ricocheted back to the server from which they were sent. No-one was tending the server, and the website collapsed under the unexpected load. Whatever the technical reason, the snowball effect is gone by now. Few people are silly enough to keep returning to a dead site for long. A few tries, and that is that. The Internet is a godsend, but it is pretty ruthless when it comes to blunders of this ilk. Anyhow, I love Motovun still.

*Addendum II (June 26, 2006)*

At the moment, the count is above eight-hundred. The way things are going, there are likely to be more than one-thousand petitioners by the end of the day. In short, the website is back in order. Very much so, as well. According to Siniša Pintar, who designed the site, one of the four offices receiving the petition must have filed a complaint with Abuse, an Internet service that protects its customers against spam of all kinds. To wit, the petition was deemed to be spam by the president Mesić, prime minister Sanader, governor Jakovčić, or mayor Vugrinec. Take your pick, but I would place my bet with the lesser fish. Thus, the site was summarily closed. Sinisa had to promise not to send petitions one by one, as they arrive to the site, but to group them and send them every once in a while. But not too often, either. This is a prime indicator of the level of development of democracy in Istria and Croatia as a whole. But things will change, as the swelling number of petitioners suggests. No, guarantees.

*Addendum III (June 30, 2006)*

By now there are more than five-thousand signatories from forty-odd countries. Most of them are from Croatia, though. If the petition keeps swelling at this tempo, we will have ten-thousand signatories within less than a week. And so I decided to send a few words to president Mesić and prime minister Sanader. I simply wanted to alert them about the stunning numbers. Governor Jakovčić and mayor Vugrinec are already aware of the numbers, I am more than sure, and thus I decided not to write to them on this occasion. Alerted by the media, an ever-larger number of people in Istria and Croatia are becoming aware of the petition, too. As it turns out, everyone loves Motovun. I kind of suspected it, for our little town is quite wonderful, but I never even imagined the petition's staggering success.

*Addendum IV (February 7, 2007)*

By mid-October, when I killed both of my incendiary websites for good, there were more than sixteen-thousand signatories from sixty-two countries and all the continents except Antarctica. In fact, there were more countries represented than there were signatories from Motovun itself, and by a respectable margin. For the record, there were only forty-eight of them. The petition's resounding success notwithstanding, it was not taken all that seriously by the politicians to whom it was respectfully addressed. As our mayor pointed out in the local newspapers, which reported the stunning results of the petition on several occasions, it had no legal basis. Indeed, it was entirely informal. But it is amazing how seriously the word of law is taken in this town, region, and country when the voice of the people is concerned. Otherwise, it is bent as best fits our politicians' fancy. Democracy, what democracy?

*OUR OWN HISTORIAN (June 25, 2006)*

Brain tumor. It was discovered less than a month ago, but it grew quickly. And it was surprisingly large when it was discovered. As it turned out, it was malignant, as well. We all knew it was a matter of weeks, but the news hit us hard nonetheless. He died half an hour ago. In some hospital in Pula. Mercifully, too. But it took me quite some strength to reach home before I started sobbing. Mariano Maurović. A strange guy, perhaps even a weirdo, but a hallmark of Motovun still. Our own historian. Our own recollection. And our own minder. Gone. It is Sunday, and so the funeral is expected on Tuesday.

FIVE DAYS OF DEATH (July 10, 2006)

Five days of silence. Five days of dimness. Five days of stillness. Five days of irrelevance. Five days of emptiness. Five days of darkness. Five days of death.

*Addendum I* (February 3, 2008)

Five days wasted on irrelevant quibbles with a few friends and spiteful subterfuge by many enemies. Five days squandered on unearthing layer upon layer of slavery embedded in people's minds. Five days snuffed out in a hopeless attempt to bring everything to light. Five days mangled by tilting at windmills without respite. Five days of political engagement in Istria, that is.

*Addendum II* (September 28, 2016)

Five days? Make it five years instead. If not even ten or maybe more. For political engagement in Istria is hardly a joke. And especially if one happens to come head to head with the leading political party on the peninsula, the Istrian Democratic Assembly. For my sins, I am still struggling to this day. My struggle against the corrupt Istrian courts has taken me all the way to Strasbourg. This time around, I am taking Croatia to court, but it all started with the courts in Pazin and Pula, where the Istrian Democratic Assembly rules the roost. And how. Returning to the original haiku, it never ceases to amaze me how optimistic I tend to be in all my dealings with my fellow humans. Five days of death, my ass.

MY VERY LAST STAND (July 10, 2006)

I have always been a foreigner. Always from elsewhere. Now I am among the Bons and Flegos, but I have just been told I am a foreigner still. My very last stand.

*Addendum I* (July 11, 2006)

I sent this piece to friends around the world as an electronic postcard. "All of us modernists are aliens, strangers in a strange land—wayfarers, if you will," wrote back Bob Collén *via* electronic mail. "Even when we think we belong, there is daily confirmation that we don't." And then he went for the clincher: "What you add to the condition are the actual passports." "Well put, Bob," I responded at once. "It is plain silly to wish to belong to this place or that." And then I went for my own clincher, if the term still pertains: "I have been chastized."

*Addendum II* (July 27, 2008)

Entitled “*Da altrove*” (“From Elsewhere”). fourteen of my pieces written between 1981 and 2006 just appeared in Italian translation in a collection of more than fifty contributions by various authors edited by Melita Richter Malabotta and entitled *Migrazioni e paesaggi urbani*.<sup>[14]</sup> The title of my contribution comes from this piece of poetry in prose, of course. After more than two years, this particular title still gives me an almost visceral pleasure. Indeed, Motovun is my very last stand. Against what? Against humans, it goes without saying.

*Addendum III* (November 3, 2015)

Soon after I started my fight against crooked golf in Motovun, my local enemies figured out that the best way to hurt me was to call me a foreigner. Or *furešt* in the Venetian dialect spoken in Istria. As witnessed by the previous haiku of the same date, the hurt must have been excruciating (“Five Days of Death,” July 10, 2006). Which is why it is still with me so many years hence, albeit in traces only. My enemies have taught me a useful lesson, though. My search for home was misguided from the very start, and I had better learn it as fast as possible. Forever a foreigner, I finally accepted my fate, whence my very last stand. But the hurt will never go away...

THE OTHER GUIDE: AN IDEA FOR AN ART PROJECT (July 14, 2006)

When I open a tourist guide of Istria, I often wonder about what I find there. The skill required to take so many photographs of notable places around the peninsula is often considerable. Not rarely they are surrounded by hideous apartment blocks, factories, power-stations, or highways. Earlier today, as I was talking about this at a small gathering of artists in Oprtalj, just across the Mirna from Motovun, an idea for an art project came to me in a flash: start from the images that can be found in any old tourist guide, and then embellish them with images of what actually surrounds the skilfully framed views. The other guide would soon emerge, but it would require quite some courage to produce and disseminate to tourists.

FIGHTING AS SUCH (July 19, 2006)

People love telling me that no fighting, no matter how just, is really worth one’s peace of mind. But I love telling them there is much joy in fighting as such.



### SKIPPING MERRILY (July 19, 2006)

“How can he be right about anything,” a peasant would argue among his sneering mates, “when his neighbour is fucking his wife?” For a peasant, that is a sufficient argument on anything in particular, be it the best time to start the harvest, or the best place to dig a well. As well as the best way to travel to Mars, for that matter. And how can one argue with a peasant? After all, he has been around for some ten-thousand years, thinking and acting precisely this way, skipping merrily from one bold *non sequitur* to another. There must be some method to his folly, after all. Whence the answer to this conundrum, I dare suggest. The best thing one can do when arguing with a peasant is to figure out who else is fucking his wife. Doing it yourself is too much to ask for, it goes without saying.

### A FEW POLITE WORDS (August 8, 2006)

Feeling trapped, an enormous fly is buzzing nervously around the kitchen. I ignore it for a while, but it keeps buzzing and buzzing. When I realize the fly is too stupid to find the door to the livingroom, whence it would have to find one of the two doors leading to the great outdoors, I walk into the kitchen, pick up the kitchen towel, aim carefully, and get the fly down with a single flip. I pick it up from the floor by a broken wing, check that it is dead, and take it to the edge of the terrace. When I release it to the lush foliage below, I surprise myself with a few polite words uttered aloud: “Thank you for your entertainment.”

### MY PHONE BILL (August 11, 2006)

My telephone bill is almost entirely for the connection to the Internet. At most, there are two or three *bona fide* telephone calls per month. Some months there are none. My standard bill is about twenty-five pounds sterling per month. The pound is my guide in all matters financial because most of my money comes in that currency. Anyhow, my phone bill suddenly jumped to thirty-four pounds in April. In May it was forty-four pounds. That is when it peaked, too, for the bill came down to forty-two pounds in June and thirty-nine pounds in July. Reckoning from this trend, the bill will return to normal in two or three months. From then on, it will be about twenty-five pounds a month once again. Why am I going on and on about something as silly as my phone bill? Because it is an excellent proxy for my political activity, which is conducted almost entirely *via* the Internet. The expected return of the phone bill to normal thus makes me twice happy.

*Addendum I* (September 13, 2006)

I was pleasantly surprised by the phone bill for August, which I received in this morning's post. By the way, last month I had not a single call. Rather, the entire bill is for the dial-up Internet service. Well, it is twenty-six pounds only. Almost normal, that is. And I thought it would take me several months to achieve this objective. All I need to do now is to hold the phone bill steady, and everything will be just fine. Absolutely fine.

*Addendum II* (October 15, 2006)

The September phone bill is yet to arrive, which will most likely happen tomorrow morning, but I know already what it will be for October and the months beyond. Yesterday I decided to kill my two websites concerned with Motovun's future. Wasting no time, I informed the designer of the sites about my decision. If everything goes according to plan, both will disappear from the World Wide Web before noon tomorrow. No trace of them will remain, either. For the experiment in local democracy is now over. Over for good, too. No more checking, reading, answering. No more fussing about the reactions of friends and foes alike. And the old proxy of my political activity will give me an enormous pleasure as soon as it settles down in a few short weeks. Twenty-five pounds a month, period.

*ODERINT DUM METUANT* (August 19, 2006)

The first and only time I put down this Latin expression was almost thirty years ago ("Communism as a Residuum," October 22, 1979), when there was still fire in my breath, but it has stayed with me to this day. "Let them hate, so long as they fear," as it is most often translated into English. According to Wikipedia, the expression is attributed to Lucius Accius, a Roman tragic poet who lived some two centuries before our era. As of late, it is coming to me ever more often. It is beginning to haunt me. As a matter of fact, it is fast becoming my silent motto. I have even mentioned it to a few people closest to me, albeit under my breath. But I went a step further today, and searched for the expression on the World Wide Web. This is how I found it in my *Residua*, as well. But I was quite struck when I discovered that this was a favorite saying of Caligula. Wikipedia concurs on this account, I must add. I froze upon this discovery, of course. I am willing to go quite far in my, well, politics, but old Caligula is a step too far even for someone as callous as me.

*EXCLUSIVE TOURISM* (August 26, 2006)

There is much talk of exclusive tourism in Motovun today. Well, there is much talk of exclusive tourism in Istria and Croatia, too. Exclusive

is the word. The war cry, as a matter of fact. Everyone wants it. Everyone dreams about it. The more exclusive, the better. This is how golf and polo, purportedly the most exclusive of sports, have become so popular with those in power. But the word “exclusive” has escaped attention of those who are not in power. The first to be excluded from tourism of the new kind, no matter how fanciful at present, will be precisely the hoi polloi. They will remain on the other side of the fence. On the other side of the road. And on the other side of the power divide. For the time being, though, they are clamouring for exclusive tourism the most loudly. And the most fervently. For, guided by those in power, the hoi polloi can already smell the money that is not yet minted. The money they will be able to smell from afar only. The money from the enjoyment of which they will be forever excluded.

#### SURFEIT OF NASTINESS (August 30, 2006)

People in Motovun often complain that others in town are nastier than they would expect from a town its size. It is always the others, of course. Having no experience with communities this small, I rarely comment such complaints. After three full years in residence, however, I have a hypothesis regarding the surfeit of nastiness in Motovun, assuming it really exists. The town is in decline once again. Ever since the wholesale expulsion of Italians in the late Forties and early Fifties, it has experienced several periods of palpable decline, but this one may be terminal. The old are dying, the young are leaving, there are few births, and houses are being sold to newcomers—mainly foreigners. In fact, the economic incentive to leave the town is very strong as of late, as the sale of a small house on top of the hill can generate enough money to build a big house someplace in the foothills, as well as to save some of it for a reasonable car. The people can sense that the community is dying. Also, they know that all the key institutions—such as the school, the bank, the health centre, and the post office—are under increasing threat of closure as the population declines. All trusted rules of communal decorum are suspended when the community itself is in question. Why bother, when there is no-one to return the favor? Thus the perceived surfeit of nastiness. Anyhow, the hypothesis strikes me as pretty sensible. And there is a good way to test it over the next five to ten years. If it is correct, nastiness will only grow until the newcomers establish a community of their own.

#### ANOTHER INCENTIVE (August 31, 2006)

How long will it take for Motovun to become a coastal town? When the sea rises by a meter or two, the Mirna valley will turn to a vast marsh once again. Given present trends in climate change, this may take about ten years. When the sea rises by another two or three meters, the valley will turn into a handsome fjord. This may take

another ten years, give or take a few. And I will be enjoying the shimmering sea from my very terrace! Right in front of my burning eyes! Another incentive to reach the ripe age of eighty. As if incentives of this ilk are in short supply.

*Addendum* (January 25, 2007)

According to the best scientific evidence I could find, the highest level of the sea that has been reached in the last half-a-million years is about twelve meters above the present sea level. A good part of that increase is due to the expansion of the oceans because of the temperature rise, and another part is due to the melting of polar ice. Quite by chance, the Mirna at Motovun is about twelve meters above the sea level. So, the notion of Motovun as a coastal town is not entirely fanciful. However, the rise of twelve meters is likely to take more than twenty years. Another incentive to shoot for the glorious age of ninety. What the heck, both of my parents got there in spite of two world wars.

LOOKING WEST (August 31, 2006)

The *bora* has cleaned the air, and the sky is completely clear. Looking west, there is no cloud in sight. This evening the sun set at the northern corner of the stretch of the Mediterranean visible from Motovun. Although the flat layer of air pollution above northern Italy was thick enough to make the sundown bright red, one could still glean through it the murky silhouette of the Alps west of Milano. About a hundred kilometers away, straddling the blue sea, a most imposing sight. The *bora* at its finest.

*Addendum* (September 1, 2006)

The weather is almost the same as yesterday evening, but it is a bit warmer, and there is a bit more vapor in the air. There are a few clouds here and there, as well. Most important, the flat layer of pollution above northern Italy is a bit higher and denser. In fact, there are two layers, making the sunset first bright orange, and then red. But I could still see the Alps carved sharply against the setting sun. This evening I knew what I was looking for, though. From now on, I will never forget it, either.

FROM THE TOP OF ISTRIA (September 2, 2006)

Today I climbed Učka for the first time. At one-thousand and four-hundred meters, it is not much by any serious mountain-climbing standards, but it is still the tallest mountain in Istria. The truth be told, it is Istria's only mountain, too. Together with a few friends, I walked for about an hour from the place where we left the car. The climb was not hard, but my friends were less than half my age. They raced to the

top, and I breathlessly followed them without a word. But Učka was worth the sweat. And how. The day was delightful, and the view from the top was spectacular, even three days after the last bout of *bora* that always clears the air. One thing made my day, though. It was the air pollution coming from northern Italy. It was abundantly obvious from the top of Istria. The flat layer was reddish in color and almost black on top. It straddled the peninsula from the west. Its front reached half way across the green world below our feet. And I photographed it all, as though such evidence of the horror would make any difference at all. But now I know when I wish to return to this amazing observation spot. It would be wonderful to be on top of Učka when *bora* begins to blow and watch the pollution recede across the Adriatic toward Veneto and Lombardy.

*Addendum* (October 2, 2006)

At a party in Zrenj, which is not far from Motovun, this weekend I met a professor of geology from Zagreb who told me the name of the pollutant that comes to Istria from Italy: nitrogen dioxide. He also mentioned that the European Space Agency had recently produced a global air-pollution map showing the distribution of this pollutant. One zone of high concentration in Europe is along the River Po in Northern Italy. The map shows that nitrogen dioxide is spreading over the Istrian peninsula, as well. Having learned all this, I searched the World Wide Web and found the map, which was produced in 2004 on the basis of many months of satellite observation. I also learned that nitrogen dioxide is indeed reddish-brown in color; that it is generated by vehicles, waste disposal systems, and power plants (of which there are many along the Po); and that it causes serious respiratory problems, especially for people with asthma. The only mystery about this pollutant is that no-one in Istria seems to know about it. Which explains why everyone I talk to is quite indifferent when I insist that something should be done about air pollution coming from Italy. Unimpressed, they pucker their lips and shrug their shoulders.

THE EYELESS MOTH (September 4, 2006)

The moth I found on my terrace this morning was perhaps the largest one I have ever seen. It was nearly as thick as my small finger, and almost as long. Its drooping wings were impressive, too, as was its long, curved snout. It was dead, though. But the thing that struck me as peculiar as soon as I picked it up for closer inspection was that it had no eyes. It is entirely possible it never had any eyes, but it is a bit more probable that they were removed from their furry sockets. The ants, I would suspect. Although there was no sign of the industrious scavengers on the terrace floor, one of their busy highways runs close to the spot where the dead moth was lying. The eyes would be the most succulent bits for the ants to collect, I suppose. One way or

another, the eyeless moth will stay with me for quite a while. Now I have to find another one, and check whether it has any eyes.

#### WITH A LITTLE BIT OF SAVVY (September 8, 2006)

When I feel the moment is right, I mention to people in Motovun that we are lucky to live in a town with medieval walls that are still in good shape. As well as a few gates that can easily be put right. More often than not, the context for such daring pronouncements is discussion of either the growing energy crisis or rapid climate change. Sooner or later, there will be people on the move, I would venture. There will be desperate throngs in search of warmth or high grounds. And marauders of every description, as well. With a little bit of savvy, we will be able to protect ourselves from the worst to come. For the bad guys will not be armed with anything the walls cannot put up with. Outlandish, no doubt. And maybe even foolish, I do admit. To my surprise, such ravings are usually accepted rather calmly. To be sure, the subject is never rejected out of hand. People in Motovun must be watching a great deal of television.

#### THE OLD JACKHAMMER (September 10, 2006)

Depending on the wind, the machinegun staccato waxes and wanes from under the nearby Bataji since March or April last year, but the end of the construction job is not yet in sight. Of the four villas that now spoil the view of Brkač hill, one still remains only half-finished. The other three are nearing completion, but much of the interior work is not yet done. Landscaping is only a distant prospect. So, it will take a year or more for the development to be completed and mercifully sold. And that is only the four villas! Many, many more will be spoiling the view from Motovun in the years to come. In due time, the Brkač hill will be crawling with them. That is, the old jackhammer will stay with us for a long, long time. Perhaps it is time to get used to it. Or even start enjoying it.

#### THE HUGGER (September 21, 2006)

All kinds of spiders find my house just to their taste. Literally so, too, as my house is a haven for all kinds of insects. Some spiders are large, some small. Some have long legs and short trunks, some exactly the opposite. The variety is simply stunning. Among all these wonders, there is a tiny spider with long front legs, which are always spread wide open in wait for even tinier prey. Huggers, or so I call them in my innocence. The front legs look a bit like scorpion claws at first sight, and I sometimes mistake huggers for tiny scorpions, which I never spare. When you offer them a finger, scorpions of all sizes try to grab it, but huggers do not. Heaven forbid. I just offered my index

finger to a hugger, but it immediately shrunk into a ball and dropped down a thread it made on the spot. I smiled, but the hugger did not wait for further proof of my good will. True to its species, it hid into the first crevice it could find.

#### MY GENEROSITY (September 27, 2006)

Sometimes I get miffed with spiders. “Come on,” I yell at them in their dark corners, “don’t you find me generous enough?” And then I set about their bloody business. I hunt down yet another buzzing nuisance, squash it, and toss it out the window. “There,” I yell again for all of them to hear. But the spiders just squint at me, as though their dark corners are their birthright. As though my generosity knows no bounds.

#### TWO PRAYING MANTISES (October 2, 2006)

I have long wondered what would happen if two praying mantises were brought together. And today I found two of them on two sides of my terrace. They were so far apart, they could not see each other, either. Using chopsticks, I brought them together at last. Both bright green, they were of the same size, too. Which was about the length of my little finger. They behaved in exactly the same way toward me, raising their forelegs and spreading their wings in vain defence. But they turned out to be completely indifferent toward each other. Without even a glance at their spitting image, they wobbled apart. Thrice. And so I gave up, hoping for a more enlightening outcome the next time I find two praying mantises at the same time.

#### MY EMERGING RESOLVE (October 17, 2006)

Tired of growing difficulties with the delivery of heating oil in Motovun, I set the thermostat at seventeen degrees Celsius. At the moment, the temperature in the house hovers half a notch above this arbitrary figure. To be sure, the heating system will kick in soon enough. It is getting colder every day, and I may have another day or two to enjoy without any heating at all. So far, so good, though. A few more warm garments in the morning and evening, and everything is perfectly fine. And there are garments galore. In the dead of winter, I may need warm socks and a hat, as well. But I am willing to set the thermostat at an even lower temperature—say, fifteen degrees. What the hell. Screw heating oil, anyway. My forebears would have been happy with much less, of course. All they had was an open hearth, which went cold overnight. One way or another, I will fight the tenderfoot in me. To the bitter end. Old Nietzsche would have been proud of my emerging resolve.

*Addendum* (November 14, 2006)

Looking back, much of October was balmy. There were times when the weather was rather heady, too. November is not yet bitter, but it is far from balmy. And so I jacked up the temperature in my house to eighteen degrees. Two days into the new regime, going back to seventeen degrees strikes me as quite unappealing, if not even repulsive. Going down to fifteen degrees is out of the question. More, it is inconceivable now. Looking back once again, the old tenderfoot in me will have to be fought by other means. *Pace* Nietzsche.

THE ULTIMATE REBELLION (October 21, 2006)

In the last section of *The Meme Machine*,<sup>[5]</sup> entitled invitingly “The Ultimate Rebellion,” Susan Blackmore challenges Richard Dawkins’ call to arms in the last sentence of *The Selfish Gene*: “We, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.”<sup>[6]</sup> That is, genes and memes, biological and cultural replicators that evolve through Darwinian selection without much concern for us as their carriers. But that is a copout, she says. The self is a complex of memes, or “selfplex,” anyway. “If we take memetics seriously, then the ‘me’ (...) is itself a memetic construct.”<sup>[7]</sup> Memes can compete with other memes, and this they do quite fiercely, but they cannot intervene in the evolutionary process from the outside. What are we to do, though? Blackmore surprises with her heartfelt solution to the riddle. “One trick is to concentrate on the present moment—all the time—letting go of any thoughts that come up.”<sup>[8]</sup> In other words, do not let any meme stick. “Another trick is to pay attention to everything equally.”<sup>[9]</sup> That is, let memes fight it out among themselves. “Then we are no longer victims of the selfish selfplex. In this sense we can be truly free—not because we can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators, but because we know that there is no-one to rebel.”<sup>[10]</sup> The ultimate rebellion is the letting go of all rebellion, Blackmore proposes in her last sentence. Zen Buddhism in a nutshell.

*Addendum I* (November 7, 2006)

I searched for Susan Blackmore on the World Wide Web even before I finished her book. It did not take me long to find her electronic-mail address at the University of the West of England in Bristol. First I sent her “Yet Another Meme” (October 18, 2006), and then this piece. Today I got her reply. “Sorry for the long delay,” she started. All kinds of things prevented her from even looking into her mailbox, let alone responding to her mail. “Great!” she wrote regarding this piece. “Obviously one reader who gets it completely!” She ended her message with a question: “What do you do with your electronic postcards?” I responded by letting her know about my *Residua*, a vast collection of sundry writings started decades ago, as well as about my habit of sending my pieces to friends either as electronic-mail or snail-



mail postcards. With a little bit of her help, which would be most welcome, all manner of memes will be spreading around the globe like wildfire!

*Addendum II* (November 21, 2006)

After a bit more than five years, I am rereading Daniel Dennett's *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life*.<sup>[11]</sup> Chapter Twelve, "The Cranes of Culture," is dedicated to memes. Dennett, like Blackmore, challenges Dawkins' call to arms: "If it is true that human minds are themselves to a very great degree the creations of memes, then (...) it cannot be 'memes *versus* us,' because earlier infestations of memes have already played a major rôle in determining who or what we are. The 'independent' mind struggling to protect itself from alien and dangerous memes is a myth."<sup>[12]</sup> Strangely, I did not pay much attention to this passage on my first reading. All readings are selective, after all. The argument struck me as momentous only in Blackmore's rendering, which trails Dennett's by three years in publication terms. Of course, she has taken a few steps further, considering what we are to do given our predicament. She has spelled it out for us. Letting go of all rebellion is ultimately the only thing we can do, thus letting memes use us as their hapless playgrounds.

THE LADYBUG MYSTERY (October 28, 2006)

This year, the first ladybug invasion of my house started in early February. The second started two weeks ago. Once again, they are crawling all over the place. If February was too early for them to hatch, what can we say about October? It is easiest to chalk it up to climate change, for it is the warmest October on record in these parts, but it is also possible that something else is going on. After all, my house has a microclimate all its own. Perhaps the ladybugs are tricked into coming out of their eggs by something very local. Although I have not noticed anything like this in the last few years, that is still a possibility. I must talk to my neighbors about ladybugs before I push my conclusions too far. For the time being, I must admit that the ladybug mystery is a great deal of fun.

*Addendum* (October 31, 2006)

The last few days I have talked about ladybugs with many of my neighbors. Up and down Borgo, they all say that the insects are back in numbers. To my surprise, my neighbors are not surprised. Not in the least. Climate change is in the air, and they all attribute the invasion to the weird weather. And it is weird, indeed. All records are being broken fast. Several of my neighbors also report other oddities in their gardens or fields. Some plants are blossoming again, and many insects are still around to pollinate them. There will be carnage

when the temperature eventually drops. Assuming it will drop, of course. My neighbors are quite aware that such assumptions are not to be trusted any longer. “We’ll see sooner or later,” they all say rather calmly.

#### STAGGERING! (November 2, 2006)

I do not remember ever seeing the Alps as clearly as this evening. And for such a long time, too. As I write, about half an hour past the sunset, the mountain peaks are still there, etched against the reddish murk of pollution. This time around, the *bora* cleared the air so thoroughly that the visibility increased by leaps and bounds—perhaps even five-fold. If my guess is correct, the eye can travel for at least a hundred kilometers west. Staggering! Once again, I feel indebted to this miraculous wind. More, I feel enthralled by it. Ah, the *bora* is my kind of wind. The wind of my heart and soul, which always long for beyond.

#### PERFECT SUBJECTS (November 8, 2006)

What happens to a people subjected by many other peoples over a few millennia? Adaptation by minute adaptation, in due course they evolve into perfect subjects.

#### THE TILT (November 16, 2006)

Stinkbugs are funny creatures. More often than not, they do not pay you any attention as they crawl along at a leisurely pace. Protected by that little trick of theirs, they feel safe enough to brush you off without even looking. On such occasions, you have all the time to look for a sheet of paper, scoop the insect up, open a window or door, and toss it out of the house. Sometimes they do notice you, though. If you tower above a stinkbug, it occasionally tilts to one side to see you better from the floor. Having assessed the danger, it either scurries into the closest crevice, or it takes to wing. The tilt usually presages evasive action of one kind or another. This is thus the moment when you must decide quickly enough whether to just smile benevolently, or to step on the little nuisance in spite of the stench that will soon waft to your nose.

#### A DARWINIAN BOOK (November 19, 2006)

As I am nearing the end of Terrence Deacon’s fascinating book, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Human Brain*,<sup>[13]</sup> I am becoming increasingly aware of the link between the logic of Darwinian evolution—overproduction, variation, competition, and selection—and the logic of development of my *Residua*. Instead

of following any particular purpose or plan, my ideas evolve as I go along. I write down almost anything that crosses my mind, but I return by means of *addenda* only to those pieces of writing that are selected by further writing, sometimes separated by many years or even decades. If this has been going on largely by chance until this point, from now on the evolution of my ideas will be streamlined on purpose so as to boost the underlying evolutionary process. From now on, mine will be a Darwinian book *par excellence*. Whether or not I will ever return to this idea remains to be seen, though.

#### THE COLOR OF MEAT (November 21, 2006)

I was curious to see the color Damir Karakaš had selected for his house across the street from mine. “The color of meat,” he told me about a month ago on one of his visits from Osijek, where he lives with his family. He saw it on a house in Poreč or Umag last summer, and he fell in love with it immediately. “There is a little bit of purple in it, too,” he added. Fortunately, they had the very same color in one of the paint stores he had found. “You’ll see,” Damir assured me, “it will fit into our street perfectly!” A few days ago he brought to Motovun a house-painter from Osijek, and the fellow spent all day yesterday priming the façade. The painting was scheduled for today. When I woke up this morning, I thought of the color at once. I was eager to see it as soon as possible. When I opened the front door, I was in for a big surprise. The color of Damir’s house is exactly the same as that of my own, but a few shades darker.

#### OPACITY INTERNATIONAL: A LETTER TO TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL (November 21, 2006)

I am writing to you from Motovun, the most picturesque and best-preserved medieval hill-town in central Istria. Not only is the town worth seeing, but its environs are also a joy to witness. Covered with vineyards and olive groves, it is breathtaking. In 2004 the town got one star in the first edition of Michelin’s guide to Croatia. In Istria, it is on a par with Opatija, for example. By comparison with Michelin’s guide of Italy published in 1989, it is on a par with Padua, Udine, and Trieste, among others. By the way, one star means “interesting”, two means “worth a detour,” and three means “worth a journey.” And that is all the stars a place can get by Michelin’s tough standards.

Motovun is under threat, though. Golf and polo will soon be sanctioned by the physical or spatial plan of the municipality, which numbers less than one-thousand inhabitants. The trouble is that these elite “sports” are merely a screen for a relentless building boom that now threatens most of Croatian coast, including both Istria and Dalmatia. Everywhere one looks one sees the local building lobby working closely with international investors and developers looking

for a quick buck. If present trends continue, and there is nothing and no-one to check them, much of the coast will be devastated in a decade or at most two. Motovun itself will get more new houses than it now has. Double the number, to be a bit more exact.

Most of Motovun's few inhabitants are poorly educated farmers. They have no experience in democracy or rational administration whatsoever. If they care about the development of the town and its environs, this is only in terms of their petty interests. From the vantage point of builders, investors, and developers, they are ideal political subjects. Only a few of us, mostly newcomers to this "paradise," are fighting for the transparency of the political, administrative, and planning process in the municipality. Judging from what is happening around us, we are failing, though. Which is why I have turned to Transparency International Croatia, hoping for help from, as it were, outside the municipality, the region, and the state.

But I have been sorely disappointed by your organization's help. To begin with, it is almost impossible to get in touch with anyone willing and able to act in the Croatian office. My "official" complaint against the municipal administration, which refuses to respond to any of my letters concerning the planning process, is left unanswered by your office in Zagreb, too. My repeated calls for help are falling on deaf ears. Most surprising, no-one seems to understand what it is that I want from them. Not only do they fail to see any link between the opacity of the political, administrative, and planning process in Motovun itself and pernicious development, but they also fail to comprehend the need for transparency in the activities of Transparency International in Croatia.

Thus, Opacity International strikes me as a much better name for your organization than the one you currently hold with pride. At least in Transparency International Croatia, I should add, there is no transparency to speak of. And your own opacity matches perfectly the opacity in everything citizens of Croatia now face. All we can see ahead of us is rampant capitalism that goes hand-in-hand with Croatian opaque democracy, if democracy it indeed is. If you do not do something soon about your office in Zagreb, this bitter perception of mine will surely spread. And your very name will become the brunt of jokes of all kinds.

*Addendum* (November 23, 2006)

My letter went *via* electronic mail to the head office in Germany, and a copy went to the Croatian office in Zagreb. No response from Germany yet, but the Zagreb office reacted surprisingly quickly. A certain Marta Kljaić, with whom I have been corresponding thus far, put everything into a single sentence: "On account of your unprecedented brazenness, which demonstrates nothing but the surfeit

of time on your hands, I am informing you that we are hereby dropping your case.” Amen.

The bit about all that time on my hands suggests that they must have contacted the municipal administration in Motovun. How else would they have guessed something like this? For this is the favorite argument of the municipal office about my many complaints. I understand that the ruse works with the local farmers, who do not know any better, but I am quite surprised that it also works with Transparency International. Apparently, Motovun is not under threat. Everything is hunky-dory. It is all a figment of my idle imagination. The case dismissed.

Come to think of it, this way of lopsided reasoning might go well even in Germany, as well. There, too, the likes of me must be a real nuisance for the organization, and especially if they got the 1968 virus, like me. Just imagine millions of Baby Boom troublemakers with plenty of time on their hands! And their numbers swelling from year to year for an entire decade. Many of them quite literate, too. Poor Transparency International’s staff around the world! My heart goes to them.

#### *MOTOVUN POSTCARDS* (November 22, 2006)

A new book is shaping in my mind: *Motovun Postcards*. A most predictable title, no doubt. It will pick up where *Istrian Postcards* has left off. Perhaps the first piece in the new selection of writings from my *Residua* will be “The Three Phases” (December 16, 2002), in which Renata and Ivo Vrtarić are bemused by my love affair with Motovun, which reminds them so much of their own so many years earlier. The book will chart all the phases of my experience with the town. And the third phase is nigh, which is perhaps why the idea of a new book is upon me already. Partly for this reason, but largely because of my insistence on the English language, no Croatian publisher will touch *Motovun Postcards* even with a barge poll. That is clear enough. The publisher of choice may be waiting for me in Belgrade once again. Or maybe in Trieste, the capital of nowhere. The capital of exile, to be more precise. And just the right place for a book about Motovun.

#### *Addendum I* (December 10, 2006)

Having returned home from a longish trip a few days ago, I am still battling with my electronic mail. I found hundreds of messages in my mailbox, many of them of some weight. I am responding to them rather haphazardly whenever I find a little time. And so I just discovered Will Hughes response to my ruminations about a new book: “Excellent. After this you could have postcards from Borgo, then from No. 18, then from the terrace, then from the bedroom, then

from the deathbed, and then, with some clever planning, from the grave..." I replied at once that I quite liked the suggested steps in my publication plan. The last step is the trickiest, of course, but also the most challenging. *Grave Postcards* is such a wonderful title, too.

*Addendum II* (February 8, 2007)

Now that my new book's completion is within sight, I feel that the effort has been well worth the while. The process of selection itself has been elating. This applies both to inclusions and exclusions, perhaps in equal measure. Indeed, Renata and Ivo Vrtaric's wise remark more than four years ago is close to the beginning of *Motovun Postcards*. Only one piece of writings precedes it. But the most important thing at this moment is the sweet taste of the third phase of my love affair with this little town smack in the center of Istria. Now my love burns so much brighter, so much purer, than at the innocent beginning. I am bathing in love for Motovun, as a matter of fact. And that is how it should be, it goes without saying. Although the second phase was a bit of a bitch, as hinted by my friends, much has been gained in the meanwhile. The people who inhabit this magical hill are so much closer, so much dearer. I know them so much better. I can only hope that there is no such thing as the fourth phase.

*Addendum III* (November 2, 2007)

Today is Friday. Last weekend I sent yet another message to my Italian publisher, telling him that I was afraid our project was dead. My book was first supposed to come out in Italian during the summer, but then he put it off till the fall. By and by, he has turned silent. All my recent messages have remained unanswered. And so I decided to get in touch with Miša Jovanović, who published in English my *Belgrade Postcards* (2002) and *Istrian Postcards* (2003). I explained that I could not find a publisher either in Croatia, where a publisher friend told me a few months ago that my book would not have a chance without a Croatian translation, or in Italy, where I did find a publisher, but not a reliable one.

I sent Miša a mobile-phone text-message on Tuesday. All I wanted to know was whether he was interested. As he did not reply, which struck me as a bit odd, an hour later I sent the same message to his wife, Nena. She did not reply either, and so I sent them later in the day an electronic-mail message together with a copy of my book. There was no reply on Wednesday, either. I was quite surprised, but I did not think about it much, for I was quite busy the last few days. By Thursday I got a bit concerned, but I still let things be. Miša and/or Nena will come back to me when they find a moment. This is how it has always been. At long last, yesterday evening I got a message from Nena: Miša died on Monday.

Ever since, I cannot shake off the awful news. “Miša is dead,” it flashes through my mind every few minutes. I simply cannot believe it. More, I cannot accept it. In fact, I feel like making a fuss about it, but I do not know how. Or with whom. To put it simply, I am confused. “Miša is dead,” it flashes through my mind so often that the confusion is only getting worse. But another thought flashed through my mind just now: “*Motovun Postcards* is dead, too.” Not even in Belgrade can I hope to find another publisher as crazy about Istria as Miša Jovanović used to be. His love of the peninsula is surely hard to match anywhere around the world.

#### TRUFFLES AND ACID RAIN (November 22, 2006)

As of late, truffle hunters around Motovun have been complaining that it is ever more difficult to find the pricey fungus. All kinds of reasons are offered for the change in their fortunes. One reason is the new course for the Mirna, which does not go through the Motovun forest any longer. Another is disregard for truffles by those who manage the forest, and who focus on the wood, instead. Most truffle hunters would also admit that there are too many of them nowadays, thus slicing each other’s share in the quarry. But today I thought of another possible reason for the downward trend in the amount of truffles found: acid rain. And acid rain comes along with nitrogen-dioxide pollution that is brought to Istria by wind from northern Italy. I just searched the World Wide Web, and there it was. Bingo! The connection is spelled out by many websites. Among the most important reasons for the loss of truffles in France and Italy is acid rain itself. This offers one more piece of circumstantial evidence that nitrogen dioxide is indeed polluting Istrian air. Respiratory diseases, such as asthma, brought by this pollutant are of no-one’s serious concern in Motovun, but the ebbing of truffles undoubtedly is. Many people here depend on it, too. Perhaps this bit of evidence will finally change their hearts.

#### GRATIS (November 23, 2006)

Sitting in my livingroom, I am puffing at a fat cigar, sipping wine, and listening to the uninterruptible power supply system that protects the computer in my study: beep, beep, beep... The entertainment comes gratis from the electrical company. The juice was cut exactly at noon. It will be restored in a couple of hours, or so I hope. As an added bonus, all the other sounds of the house, such as those of the icebox and the heating system, are now off. The beeps coming from upstairs are thus pure. They punctuate the silence rather perfectly.

### THE THIEVES AND THE WHORES (December 7, 2006)

It took me ten days in the capital to fully understand how the whole country works, including the most remote of its provinces. Indeed, the capital reveals it all. It is a peculiar arrangement between the thieves and the whores. All the others are pawns in their game. The thieves are known as the sponsors. The whores are known as the sponsored ones. Or the sponsorees, to coin a less awkward term. Sponsors often change sponsorees, and *vice versa*, depending on shifts in each other's fortunes and looks. Occasionally they marry, but marriage is rarely for long. Or in earnest. The whores are the most visible part of the system. Gucci. Armani. Versace. The thieves are more subtle, albeit not by much. The whores are always around them, and thus the thieves cannot be missed. Prada. Fendi. Escada. In its splendor, the capital brings everything to blinding light. There are so many places where the thieves and the whores meet and make their arrangements in plain view of the pawns. The sponsorship system is understood by them all. Thieftom and whoredom are intertwined from top to bottom. The best of thieves and the most attractive of whores splurge the most. Easier come, easier go. They have the best villas, the best cars, and the best yachts. Through the media, and especially through television, they also provide the best of entertainments for the pawns, including wannabe thieves and whores. Greased by envy at all levels, the arrangement works smoothly. Occasional mishaps do occur, only to make the arrangement so much smoother than before. And so much more revealing.

### SILLY OLD ME (December 10, 2006)

As soon as I manage to sink my teeth into John Julius Norwich's latest book, *The Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean*,<sup>[15]</sup> I look for the Index. Not surprisingly, Venice is there. And it spreads reassuringly over two pages. Page by page, many illustrious Venetian families are also there: Dandolo, Contarini, Grimani, Loredan, Morosini, Venier... The Bon family is missing, but I feel relieved nonetheless. This will be a splendid read for the coming winter. But then I look without blinking for Motovun or Montona. What the heck, I may be in for a pleasant shock. Not surprisingly once again, there is no trace of it in the Index, either. Oh, well, I manage a wry smile. I close the book and push it aside as my smile stretches into a mocking grin. Silly old me.

### THE *TRICOLORE* (December 13, 2006)

Trees are being felled left and right in Motovun. First many old acacias went. Then quite a few old chestnuts. The last week or two many old chestnuts and poplars went, too. Judging by the stumps that now line many a road and lane, these trees were a bit less than a



hundred years old. Few people had much to say about the acacias, which are thought of as weeds in these parts, but it is different with chestnuts and poplars. People want to know who is behind the felling. And why. There are no answers, though. Having learned my political lessons in Motovun, I am not asking any questions, either. Perhaps the felling makes sense. Perhaps it does not. I will never be told, in any case, no matter whom I ask. But I do feel kind of sad about one particular tree that was chopped down while I was in Zagreb a couple of weeks ago. It was an old chestnut. It stood next to the little church half way down Borgo, where it provided shade for many surrounding houses. Planted some eighty years ago, it celebrated the *tricolore*—the three-colored Italian flag. The tree itself had white flowers, but one of the major branches had red ones. That branch must have been grafted in the Twenties, soon after Italy got Istria following World War I. The leaves provided the third color. Regardless of the symbolism, the tree was beautiful. And it was in great shape, as witnessed by the remaining stump. Even the symbolism was of some historical interest, of course. Come to think of it, though, was that the reason why this particular tree was felled? I doubt it, but it might have contributed a little to its demise.

*Addendum I* (December 15, 2006)

“How sad, indeed!” wrote Bob Collén in response. “The loss of a tree, even a necessary loss, is the loss of a friend.” But then he turned to his town—Orange, Massachusetts. “We elect a Tree Warden, pay him a pittance, but he is answerable to the annual town meeting and the public at any time. The bureaucrats and the progressives think the position should be appointed and report to the Board of Selectmen, but the voters, so far, have been reluctant to surrender elected positions.” I wrote back asking about the Tree Warden: “What are his duties? What does he report to the Board?” And then I put in a few words of explanation for my interest: “Just a few words would be enough to make people in Motovun envious of democracy as it might be.” Of course, the annual town meeting itself should be enough to make people here green with envy. Bob responded at once:

The Tree Warden is elected by secret ballot by the voters of the town. The term is for three years. In 2004, he was paid \$100.00 a year and \$8.61 per hour for all time expended on “actual labor connected with his department.” He is responsible for all trees on public (town) property and for hazardous trees that abut town land.

Typically a public hearing is held for the removal of any trees on town property or abutting land. Sometimes, the Tree Warden does the work or puts it out for bid. Like other officers elected by the voters, he

reports to the annual town meeting (not the Board of Selectmen).

It is important to note that a board of three selectmen governs the Town of Orange, each elected for a three-year term. The form of government is “open town meeting,” probably as close as one can get to “pure” democracy. Like the Tree Warden, Cemetery Commissioners, Water Commissions, and Library Trustees are also elected by the voters and therefore report to the annual town meeting, not the Board of Selectmen.

The Tree Warden’s annual report for 2004 included the number and location of hazardous trees removed (there were four); the number and location of stumps removed (two); the number of inquiries and complaints regarding hazardous trees on properties abutting public land (thirteen); the number of public meetings regarding trees to be removed (two); and the total expenditure for the year (\$4,400.00).

Wow! The balance between things done directly by the electorate *via* town meetings and those done by their elected representatives, the Board of Selectmen, is of greatest importance here. As one would expect, each side tugs its own way. Each side is jealous of the other. The fact that the Tree Warden reports directly to the electorate, and not to its representatives, is of special interest in this context. It shows that the electorate deems the job of caring for trees too important to be entrusted to the “bureaucrats.” At any rate, Bob’s response makes it clear that my wish to make people in Motovun envious of Orange, Massachusetts, is rather misguided. Or perhaps even outright ridiculous. It would take me a couple of years to explain all of the above to both the electorate and the elected in my poor town. And that would entail only the Tree Warden!

#### *Addendum II* (December 30, 2006)

The story of the *tricolore*’s demise is still ricocheting around town. As of late, it is getting an unexpected twist, too. And a personal one, which makes it travel like lightning. The man behind the felling, the No. 2 man in the municipal council and the mayor to be in the next elections, which seem to be all but won a couple of years in advance, confessed a few days ago that he had made up his mind when a chestnut fell on his little daughter’s head a week or two ago. The little one is not even two. And the chestnut was pretty big. Dangerously big, as a matter of fact. “Then and there,” he beamed at his gaping audience, “the tree’s fate was sealed!” The politician and his family live all the way down Borgo, in the poor tree’s way. Coincidence, damned coincidence!

*Addendum III* (January 13, 2011)

And who was this mighty politician behind the carnage of trees in and around Motovun? As everyone in town knows perfectly well, this was Emil Soldatić. Long one of the closest associates of the governor of Istria, he is not new to power. In fact, power is in his blood. His father used to be one of Motovun's movers and shakers. And his daughter may well inherit his might one day. I remember one day years ago when Emil held up his daughter, still a toddler, and pointed at the Mirna valley with his free arm from the lower terrace. "One day," he chuckled for the benefit of all of us assembled at Klaudio's, "all this will be yours!" I can well imagine his father used to do the same while Emil was still a toddler, too. So, what is an old chestnut tree to such a man? Only an object for the exercise of his power. Period.

SANTA LUCIA, AGAIN (December 13, 2006)

Many people in Motovun will tell you that this is the shortest day of the year. It is Santa Lucia's, and they can recite some proverb or another to this effect. When you correct them, they shrug their shoulders innocently: "So people say!" Most of them farmers, they can see for themselves that the sun keeps edging southward for more than a week after this holy day. Such is the power of the church, which does nothing to dispel widespread ignorance of this ilk. And the church has had a couple of centuries at least to learn its elementary astronomy. And much more besides. It is easy to imagine how much more difficult it is to dispel less obvious muddles of the populace. The shortest day of the year is thus here to stay. Perhaps indefinitely.

*FROTTOLE* (December 14, 2006)

As of late, I am listening to little else than the *Frottole* by Andrea Antico da Montona (1470/80-1540?) performed by the Solisti Istriani in the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč. A month or so ago I got the compact disk from Enrico Pissach, president of the Italian Association of Motovun, together with a handsome book dedicated to the Renaissance composer of some renown born in our town (B. Jurevini, G. Radole, and S. Puppis, eds., *Le Frottole di Andrea Antico da Montona*, Trieste: Università Popolare di Trieste, Istituto Regionale per la Cultura Istriana, Comunità Italiana di Montona, Comunità Italiana di Fiume, and Famiglia Montonese di Trieste, 1996). The disk was sponsored by an even larger number of organizations than there are publishers of the book, but there is no information anywhere on it about its own publisher. There is no place or date on it, either. According to Enrico, it came out a year or so ahead of the book. Both the disk and the book would have been impossible without Mariano Maurović, who died this year. According to Enrico once again, Mariano did everything in his power to bring Andrea Antico to light.

It is clear from what remains of that effort that he had to scrounge from a myriad of diverse sources. Now, the title of the work I am listening to is most interesting in itself. In Italian, *frottola* is a tale or story, but also a canard or trumped-up story, as well as nonsense in general and a popular nonsense song. In music, the term appears in the Twelfth Century, and it stands for a lyrical genre with irregular metrics and without pre-established structure. Splendid! My kind of music. And my kind of composer. As I was consulting several dictionaries about this term, for a brief while I felt something very like envy. Such a wonderful title! It would serve more than well as an alternative title for my *Residua*, too.

#### FREE TO ROAM (December 15, 2006)

Nero, Emil and Hana Soldatić's shaggy black dog, is free to roam around Motovun. Many people are unhappy about it, but Emil and Hana believe that dogs should be free to roam. Period. Emil is even proud of his dog's many amorous adventures around town, which he also helps advertise. About a dozen puppies to his credit, Nero is no slouch, either. But quite a number of people in Motovun are about truffles, and they do not like their precious dogs messed about. And especially not in the middle of the white-truffle season, when a good hunting dog is worth a mint. Literally, too. It has long been predicted that things will not end well with Nero. Shooting and poisoning came up quite often in conversation. Indeed, he almost had it a few days ago. A few nights ago, to be more precise. Someone shot him in the right front leg with a rifle of small caliber. Luckily for the dog, the bullet went through the muscle, and he managed to drag himself home. Nero will be back in shape within a few weeks. No-one knows who shot him, though. Or who may try his luck again. But Emil and Hana still insist that Nero should be free to roam. To improve his chances, they are considering a compromise of sorts. They are thinking about neutering him.

#### THE WITHERED REMAINS (December 20, 2006)

I find dead insects everywhere around the floor of my house. As the winter approaches, their numbers are growing apace. They are mostly stinkbugs, but there are some wasps and flies among them, too. Whenever I spot them, I kick them into a corner until the dreadful sight becomes oppressive. Then I scoop them up and toss them out the nearest window on the theory that the withered remains may still be of some use to someone or something. If not right now, then this coming spring. Slowly but surely, dead insects are accumulating under my windows, as I have noticed today. Walking around the house, I had to pick my way quite carefully so as to avert the crunch. If the wind does not scatter them soon, I will have to scoop them up once again and toss them into the garden. They otherwise threaten to pile up. And the pile

threatens to grow. Slowly but surely, it will reach the windowsills. If I am not careful, the rustling pile will eventually cover the windows, as well, and bar my superb view.

#### FACING THE SUN (December 22, 2006)

Brilliant sunshine. Sparkling sky. Spicy air. My eyes closed, my legs and arms wide apart, my knees and elbows slightly bent, I am standing naked on my terrace and facing the sun. A luminous sphere swells in my head. Yellow, orange, red. It grows big, ever bigger. Warm, ever warmer. And it reaches ever deeper. But the only thought that manages to shape in my mind does not want to go away. It keeps pestering me ever more insistently. It is time to stop. It is time to leave the terrace. It is time to return indoors. It is time to slip back into warm clothing. Until the spell is broken at last, and I open my eyes. It is freezing, too.

#### TOURRRRRISM (December 24, 2006)

It has never crossed my mind that tourism might have a characteristic sound. A definite sound by which it could be unambiguously identified. Today I have been enlightened, though. There are so many cross-country motorcycles in the hills around Motovun that the sound of tourism is readily recognizable: “tourrrrrism.” Or maybe even better: “tour-tour-tourrrrrism.” Indeed, there is no sound like it.

#### THE REAL WINTER (January 3, 2007)

In a few days the real winter will come to Motovun. No watering hole will remain open after the coming weekend. There will be nowhere to go for the morning coffee or the evening glass of wine. Until about Easter, when the dead season commonly ends, only the grocery store and the post office will remain open. And people are sure to linger there a bit longer than usual, on the odd chance that someone else will come along for a quick chat. Or just a moan. Only the weather does not conform to this bleak prospect, though. It is not only sunny, but it is also quite warm. Unseasonably so, as the old expression goes. A few more winters like this and the tourist season might shift. For better or worse, the real winter could be in some danger. The danger of temporary extinction.

#### BORGO (January 3, 2007)

Thinking about a short piece describing my street house by house, today I went down Borgo and made a list of all the houses and its inhabitants. It stretches from the loggia on the lower square, just under

the town walls, to the so-called Gothic gate on the bottom. Looking from the square, there are fifty-two houses on the right side of the street, and fifty-three on the left. Well, this is not exactly true. Two of them to the left across the street from the loggia are only sheds. They used to be shops. Also, there is one empty lot on the right side of the street, as well as four on the left. The five missing houses are completely gone by now. All told, there are ninety-eight houses in Borgo. Only eighteen of them are permanently occupied. Of all the others, five are empty, three are being refurbished, and all the others are used only from time to time, usually during the summer months. I counted thirty people who visit regularly, but there might be a few more. Now, of those living permanently in my street, there are exactly sixty adults and sixteen children. Of the adults, fourteen are elderly. And Borgo is the second most important street in the historic core of Motovun! Before Gradiziol, it used to be the main access to the town gate. At some point the area around Borgo got its own wall, as well. One day soon I should make such a list for Gradiziol, as well. The picture will not be much prettier, I bet.

*Addendum I (January 5, 2007)*

Few people in Motovun are surprised by my findings. Although the precision of my count does have its effect, seventy-six people strikes everyone as about the right number. However, many of the people I have talked to think that Gradiziol is in an even worse shape than I think. A proper count is thus warranted. But the main issue everyone takes up is how many people used to live in the hundred-odd houses on Borgo—say, a hundred years ago. The lowest estimate so far is four people per house on the average. The highest is seven. That is, the estimates range between roughly six and ten times the present number. Wow! That is much worse than the plague ever got.

*Addendum II (January 26, 2007)*

Having put together a spreadsheet with all the inhabitants of the old town, today I printed it out and brought it to Klaudio's around noon. Several people helped me with the count, but Sandra Caligari was the most helpful among them. As a teacher of many years, she knows Motovun well. Although the final count of all the permanent residents will need to be checked with Dragan Vivoda, who has been working for the municipal office for several decades, I have a feeling it will not change by much. To begin with, there are eighty-nine adults and twelve children in Gradiziol, or one-hundred and four people all together. And there are two-hundred and sixty-one adults and forty-five children in the old town. All told, that is three-hundred and six people, almost fifty people less than the usual guess. Now, the story goes that Motovun used to have two-thousand and five-hundred inhabitants in its heyday. That is more than eight times the present population. Eat your heart out, plague!

*Addendum III* (January 29, 2007)

I just spent a bit less than an hour in Dragan Vivoda's office. He was most helpful. As I expected, the final count differs little from the previous one. Now there are three adults and one child more in my spreadsheet than before the meeting. And that is that. So, there are three-hundred and ten people who permanently live in the old town. But there is one piece of good news that everyone mentions the last few days: there will be one more child among us in a few months. One recently married woman is pregnant. The happy couple lives on Borgo, too. Soon we will beat Gradiziol by as many as five children. Hooray!

NOTHING FINISHES (January 4, 2007)

For hundreds of years, people have been talking about an experience called nirvana, *moksha*, emancipation, self-realization, salvation, or liberation, without understanding it properly. Yogis call this experience *samadhi*. Although many people think that in *samadhi* or nirvana everything is completely finished, it is definitely not a process of quitting the world. Nothing finishes, only one level of experience ends, but then another begins.

From Swami Satyananda Saraswati's *Kundalini Tantra*,  
Munger, Bihar, India: Yoga Publications Trust, 2000  
(first published in 1984), p. 3.

BY WAY OF EXPLANATION (January 4, 2007)

After this weekend, Benjamin's will be closed through Easter. This afternoon I went to the restaurant to make sure it would be opened this evening. Benjamin and Milica Pahović assured me it would be. By way of explanation of my anxiety, I told them a story my mother had told me many years ago. In a village close to Pazin, where she was born and raised, there was a feeble-minded man everyone knew and liked. If my memory is not playing tricks on me, his name was Kito. He roamed through the countryside unmolested. After the grapes were picked one year, he was spotted picking the remains in someone's vineyard. There was plenty to pick still. "Eat, Kito, eat," he was heard urging himself as he chewed and chewed, "you won't have it for long." Benjamin and Milica laughed. No prize for guessing where I will be eating through the end of this weekend.

*Addendum* (January 9, 2007)

Benjamin and Milica were quite revolted when they learned through the grapevine that not a single café would be open in Motovun for a good part of January. "If we got together," Milica kept repeating, "we

would have come up with a schedule such that at least one place remained open at any one time.” Indeed. But this is not how things are done in our town. Getting people together is not only difficult, it is also almost impossible. And so Benjamin and Milica decided to take things into their own hands. They turned the bar of their restaurant into a café and hired one of their temporary waiters to tend it for the few critical weeks. On their instructions, he also gets the fireplace going every single morning. “We will not make any money,” Milica kept repeating, “but we will not lose any, either.” Bless them both, not least for that fireplace.

#### PERISHING (January 6, 2007)

Almost every day I find a few dead ladybugs around the house. Most often they can be found on windowsills. I assume that they have hatched inside the house, but cannot find their way out. Even though it gets cold at night, during the day it is warm enough. Perhaps there is something for them to eat out there, too. But I just found a dead ladybug in the tight space between the wing of a window and the frame. This time I am sure it came from outside the house. It must have been looking for a warm spot. One way or another, ladybugs seem to be perishing in large numbers. There is little doubt that the weather has tricked them into hatching at the wrong time. Curiously, I have not noticed any other insects crawling around out of season. Since a month or so ago, the house has been dead quiet. Of so many insects that thrive in these parts, only the ladybugs are afflicted, and they are the most endearing of them all. Shucks.

#### MOTOVUN’S WALLS (January 6, 2007)

Together with the tools and methods of siege warfare, fortifications changed fast throughout the world. And ever faster, too. Built in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, Motovun’s walls changed little since the Fifteenth or Sixteenth Century, though. Why? Because Motovun was sidelined as a fortified outpost soon after they were built. The walls would have been an easy prey for a well-equipped and determined adversary in the subsequent centuries, but such an adversary was not interested in them any longer. But why were the walls nonetheless maintained in their original form? Because they offered sufficient protection to a small garrison stationed within. The garrison itself was all that was needed to keep in check the unfriendly but unarmed countryside. Besides, the walls served well as a symbol of power, distant as it was from Motovun, as well as Istria as a whole. After the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, when little was left to covet in plundered Istria, the symbolic rôle was ever more important. Twice a relic, Motovun’s walls now impress only the tourists, many of them from the erstwhile powers that first put them up and then kept them standing mostly for show.



#### AN EMOTIONAL FAREWELL (January 8, 2007)

As I am reading about the scandalous love affair in Naples and Palermo two centuries ago between Horatio Nelson, the great British admiral, and Emma Hamilton, the wife of the British envoy to the King of Naples, I am mindful of a ladybug that keeps crawling all over my book and my fingers, occasionally taking short flights around the lamp above me, only to return a moment later. As I write, it is on my notebook. Well, it just crawled up the thumb on my left hand. All the while I am thinking of the ways to feed it, water it, and make it otherwise happy in my home. But there are three whole months till spring! No matter what I do, my little companion is surely doomed. Perhaps this is but an emotional farewell? Oh, the poor thing almost got under my pen...

#### THE JOKE (January 9, 2007)

A tourist couple asked me where they could eat in town. "Nowhere," I puffed my chest up in mock pride, "this is Motovun!" Being from Croatia, they got the joke.

#### STRUGGLING (January 11, 2007)

John Julius Norwich's book about the Mediterranean goes to a bit more than six-hundred pages of sheer text, not counting bibliographic references, family trees, maps, and the index, but I am struggling some hundred pages before the end. And I have been struggling for some eighty pages already. On page four-hundred and twenty-one, to be exact, the Venetian Republic was snuffed out by Napoleon. On Friday, May 12, 1797, the Great Council of Venice abortively met in the Ducal Palace for the very last time. And it fell apart like some harmless mirage. Alarmed by shots fired outside their windows, the councillors slipped out of the palace in haste, leaving their all-too-distinctive robes of office strewn behind them. After more than a thousand years, the Serenissima expired preposterously. Disgracefully. Dishonourably. The Mediterranean I still love, but what is it without Venice? What is it without its indefatigable if fussy mistress? Which is why I am struggling with Norwich's last book past page four-hundred and twenty-one.

#### MY INNOCENT VICTIMS (January 17, 2007)

When a ladybug lands on me right in the middle of winter, I move about with great care for fear of crushing it. But my cumbersome clothing is always in the way. God knows how many of them I have unwittingly crushed between so many layers, so many folds. Climate change is surely on my side, though. As well as that of the ladybugs,

my innocent victims. Year by year, I will be shedding my clothing. Layer by layer, fold by fold. By and by, I will be almost naked all year round, and no ladybug will suffer from my clumsy twists and turns any longer. Besides, I will become less and less awkward as years go by. Or so I promise. For fear of crushing a ladybug out of season, I will tread much more gracefully, as well. Barefoot, I will tiptoe. All in all, climate change is surely on our side. And especially that of the ladybugs.

#### PURE WORK (January 18, 2007)

Whenever I find myself surrounded by television cameras, microphones with so many baffling acronyms, and journalists brandishing pens and notepads, like at a press conference yesterday in Bataji, a hamlet I can plainly see from my house, I find refuge in *The Bhagavad Gita*. That is, in Krishna's calming words to Arjuna just ahead of the fateful battle. As I talk about the perils of golf and polo in Motovun, about the travesty of land machinations hiding behind these posh sports, and about the pitched battles for sustainable development still ahead, I can hear the loving whisper in my mind's ear: "When work is done as sacred work, unselfishly, with a peaceful mind, without lust or hate, with no desire for reward, then the work is pure" (18:23). And I can feel the Love God's warm breath on my cheek. Nonetheless, today I went for my copy of this marvellous book and searched for all the passages about pure work, like the one above. They were all heavily marked after innumerable readings.

#### ONLY BALKANS (January 19, 2007)

Another victorious day in my life! I just got another ton of heating oil, which will last me through the end of the winter. It is in my tank, and my hands are already clean. Hooray! It was a bit easier than the last time, but it was still horrendous. The cistern was two hours late. When it came to the cemetery parking lot, the oil first went into a large plastic container mounted on a trailer of a tractor. With the cistern's powerful pump, that took only ten minutes. The tractor ride up Gradiziol and down Borgo took another ten to fifteen minutes. And then the container had to be drained into my tank *via* a long and thin plastic tube, which took a bit less than an hour. I was waiting at the cemetery from before eleven, the agreed delivery time, and it is almost three o'clock already. But it was a joy telling everyone involved in this cumbersome operation how I used to get heating oil in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Having decided on a supplier, all I had to do was pay by check occasional bills attached to my door. The supplier kept track of how much oil was in the tank. When it got cold, a cistern would come around a bit more often than usual. And that was all. About thirty years ago. "Ah," everyone laughs off my impassioned story, "this is only Balkans!"

*Addendum* (January 21, 2007)

In response to this piece, sent around as an electronic postcard to friends far and wide, Will Hughes came up with a single question: “How will they ever get close?” “Frankly,” I surprised myself with my gut reaction, “I hope they never will!” And then I stuck in a conclusion reeking with demented pride: “Which is perhaps the main charm of this region!” Two sentences only, but ones that would not surprise me from almost anyone among my neighbors in Motovun and beyond. Only Balkans, but proud Balkans! Otherwise, I would still be living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I guess.

THE SPECK (January 22, 2007)

I am smoking a cigar, sipping wine, and listening to music. When I notice a speck of ash close to the ashtray, I try to pick it up with the tip of my index finger. It moves away. Not paying attention to what I am doing, I try again. The speck moves away one more time, and then it takes off. Only then I register that it is a tiny fly, which proceeds to circle under the lamp lighting the dining room table, and my mouth stretches into an appreciative smile. It is so tiny, I cannot but rejoice in its prowess. A while later I notice that it is back by the ashtray. The speck appears it appreciates my company, too.

SO VERY SOOTHING (January 23, 2007)

As I write into my notebook by candlelight, a freak storm is battering Motovun. Judging by the occasional beeps of the system protecting my computer from power surges, the electricity is going off every now and then. Which is why I have lit the candle in the first place. This is quite unusual in the middle of winter, but then it has long been unusually warm, as well. Climate change, beyond any doubt. Freak storms are here to stay as reminders that something is amiss. Badly amiss, too. The reminders are liable to become ever more insistent. And maybe even unforgettable. All this said, the candlelight is so very soothing, though.

FROM EAR TO EAR (January 25, 2007)

I was sitting at Klaudio’s with a few regular customers last night when a bunch of people from the church choir burst into the café. They meet several evenings a week for rehearsals. There must have been at least a dozen of them. Most of them were women, but there were two or three men among them, too. Huddling around a few tables in the back, they quickly changed the atmosphere of the place. After a drink or two, they were laughing. I think it was Benjamin Pahović who started it all, but the laughter spread like wildfire. And it got louder and

louder. Although I could not hear them clearly enough from where I was sitting, I could not suppress a smile. It would not go away, either. “God bless the church choir,” I ventured at last, and everyone around the table nodded with a smile. “It’s such a joy to hear them laugh,” I added for some reason, and everyone nodded again. We were all grinning from ear to ear, like a bunch of happy drunks.

*IN SICH GEHEN* (January 30, 2007)

Thus a German expression for something that can be roughly translated as “going into oneself.” As soon as I learnt it today, I felt elated. I was surprised at first, but then it dawned on me that it captures something of the Motovun winter. The time to go into oneself. To dive within. To rejoice in one’s own company. Although most people in these parts perceive the winter as something rather negative, or even terrifying, it is actually a wonderful time. A time of reunion with oneself. And rejoicing in one’s inner self. For some reason, the German expression captures the sentiment so much better than any English expression I have learnt so far. Which only goes to show that my lessons with Paul Müller are starting to pay off. To bear fruit. As would surely be the case with lessons in any other language, for there are fruits of so many different tastes, but the joy is nonetheless so palpable that it cannot go unmentioned. German be praised.

*IF I WISH TO BE HEARD* (January 31, 2007)

Franco Juri and his crew from an Italian television channel in Koper or Capodistria in Slovenia came to see me today. We talked about many things, including the environmental perils of golf and polo, which still threaten Motovun in spite of many warnings by the greens. We also talked about smog in Istria, a subject no journalist or television crew would touch in Croatia. Perhaps it impinges on tourism in Istria a bit too directly? At any rate, the whole thing went well. With a little bit of local Teran, it was fun, too. When we were finished, Franco started telling me when our talk would be aired, so I could watch it. I interrupted him at once by saying that I do not have a television set. In fact, the main reason for agreeing on our talk was somewhat practical: given that an ever-smaller number of people here and elsewhere read newspapers, or anything else, for that matter, I know that I must master television cameras if I wish to be heard on green issues of all kinds. Put simply, I am in training of sorts, and every opportunity to hone my skills is very much welcome. Franco took it with a big smile.

#### JUST ANOTHER GOD (February 4, 2007)

In tiny Motovun, an Olympus in its own right, I am just another guy. In my deluded mind, I am nothing if not a god. Worst comes to worst, I am just another god.

#### AT YOUR DOORSTEP (February 5, 2007)

Whenever you open your front door on a freezing winter night, street cats gather in a jiffy. You see their shadows darting your way from all the way up and down the street. Food? Drink? Warmth? Anything would do. They are desperate. As they array themselves in the light of the open door, you can see their pecking order at once. The dominant male is crouching farthest away, still barely visible. The females and adolescent males are at a safe distance, but in plain view. And the only kitten still kicking in spite of the cold is already at your doorstep, mewling miserably. The most innocent and inept among them is the most potent, too. As you slowly push your door closed, having offered nothing at all to the assembled cats, you feel most guilty about the littlest one. The best you can come up with is that you would only prolong its agony. In any case, chances are it would get not a morsel of whatever you would throw its way.

#### *Addendum* (February 13, 2007)

As you feared, the kitten did not make it through the cold spell. When you found it lying on its side, its legs stretched out improbably, it was already crawling with flies. It could not have been older than three months, which means that it was conceived way out of season, when the town was still crowded with temporary residents, and there was food aplenty. Although the nagging guilt will not leave you easily, you cannot but feel some anger, as well. And it is pointed at the temporary residents, who confuse the street cats with their extraordinary kindness. They never stay long enough to see the consequences of their good deeds.

#### BOOKS, PAINTINGS, AND WINES (February 6, 2007)

Antonio Schiavulli came to see me today. He lives in Trieste, but his publishing house is in Monza near Milano. Melita Richter, an old friend from Zagreb, who now lives in Trieste, too, brought him to my place. He is interested in publishing an Italian translation of my *Motovun Postcards*, which I will finish in a few weeks. He is also interested in translations of my previous two books, *Belgrade Postcards* (2002) and *Istrian Postcards* (2003), both of which originally came out in English. I have already put him in touch with Misa Jovanovic, my publisher from Belgrade, whose permission would be needed before the entire series could be published. If everything

goes well, my three books will be in print by this summer. In short, the meeting went splendidly. To my surprise, Antonio would also wish to sell my paintings *via* the online gallery attached to his publishing house. He was quite taken by what he saw in my own gallery. The only thing I could not offer him on the spot was the local Teran from my cellar, in which he delighted. Books, paintings, and wines are Antonio's great loves. Alas, I am not into wines! Not yet.

*Addendum I* (January 2, 2008)

Well, things change. Although I did finish my last book exactly as planned, everything else went awry. To begin with, Antonio changed his plans before the summer. For some reason, the book was shifted to autumn, as were the previous two. By the time leaves turned red, he stopped responding to my missives, though. I have not heard from him for months now. And then Misa died. Out of the blue. He was my last hope, as I wrote to him in my last missive, which he received a day too late, as it were. Chances are my last book will never appear in print. Perhaps my luck will be rather different with wines. As it turns out, one can never tell about such things.

*Addendum II* (June 6, 2008)

Every now and then, I remember Antonio Schiavulli, the publisher who disappeared from my life as miraculously as he appeared in it. On such occasions, I am rather sure that the deepest circles of hell are reserved for publishers who desert their hopeful authors without a word of explanation. Just like that. Out of the blue. As though hell does not exist at all, let alone its deepest and most perilous circles.

HER ABSOLUTION (February 7, 2007)

As soon I bought my house from Ljiljana Samokovlić and her daughter, Maja, I invited them to visit me in Motovun. Over the years, I invited them over and over again, but both of them felt it would be too hard on them. Their husband and father, Jakub or Kuba, put so much of himself into the house that it would be best never to see it again. Or so they kept repeating. But Maja came to see me last summer. Ljiljana came today. "It is easier for me that everything looks so different," she said as soon as she crossed the threshold. I showed her the whole house. Although it does look quite different now, I did my best not to touch anything Kuba had built. "You know," she said as she was leaving, "I like what you have done with the house." A lady of the old school in her mid-seventies, she knew I needed her absolution, as witnessed by my many invitations.

#### FIDDLING (February 8, 2007)

In the current issue of *The Economist* there is a breathtaking picture of the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The picture was taken from the nearby mountains, so that the top of the hill on which the palace perches is roughly at the same height as the camera. The palace is seen not from the front, as is usually the case, but from a small angle to the left, thus dramatizing the dazzling architectural display facing the valley below. Low sunlight comes from the right, and the left flank of the handsome hill is thus in deep shadow, which makes it look only steeper and higher. The picture is so wonderful that I cut it out and pasted it on the inside cover of my notebook—rather a special place in my own mind. As I was fiddling with the scissors and the glue, I had to admit to myself that Lhasa is even more stunning than Motovun. I am fully aware that most people would take this as quite obvious, and my admission kind of ridiculous, but I am so much in love with my own Lhasa that this admission does not come easily to me. In fact, it took me a few days to pin it down. In the meanwhile, I even thought of skipping it altogether.

#### CUTENESS ITSELF (February 8, 2007)

When a ladybug feels threatened, it behaves very like a turtle. It tucks its legs under its shiny red carapace and lowers it to the surface. No gap is left when it clamps itself down. Its grip becomes so strong that it is not easy to budge it even from a smooth surface. At the same time, it tucks its head in, together with its feelers, so that the carapace becomes impenetrable from all sides. In the safety of cover, it waits for the danger to pass. In the meanwhile, the two black spots, one on each half of the carapace that protects the wings, become very like a pair of eyes. If you imagine yourself quite a bit smaller, perhaps only a bit bigger than the ladybug you are so carefully observing, those eyes fix you with a frightening stare. And you always thought that those dots were nothing if not cuteness itself.

#### ON EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT (February 9, 2007)

Mehmedalija Šljivić, known to most as Meho, spends a good part of his time on the street. During the tourist season, he sells lavender oil and woollen socks out of a plastic bag, but he still walks up and down Gradiziol even out of season. Habit, I guess. As soon as he spots you, he approaches you with wisecracks of all kinds. Today he surprised me, though. “You think you have an emotional attachment to this place,” he started out of the blue. “Only consider my own attachment,” he continued, looking almost hurt on account of my heartlessness, “and you will see that I am much more attached to Motovun than you will ever be!” On my way to the store, I stopped to hear what he had to say. “Look,” he said and pointed at many houses

around us on top of Gradiziol, “there is hardly any house around here where I did not make love to a woman!” And then he started listing all of his amorous conquests, pointing now at one house, now at another. More, he pointed at specific windows, too. He used to be quite a guy in his youth, I reckon. “That’s emotional attachment for you,” he laughed and lifted his grizzled chin high. I kept nodding in agreement all the way. “Meho,” I waved him goodbye at last, “there is no doubt any longer—your emotional attachment to this place is way ahead of mine!”

#### SAINT VALENTINE’S FOR TRUE (February 14, 2007)

Sunbathing naked on Saint Valentine’s cannot but push you toward the realization that the whole world is your beloved. The sun, the wind, the buzz of intrepid insects... The idiotic holiday notwithstanding, the general mood is conducive to discoveries of this ilk. This accomplished, it is not difficult to make the next leap: your beloved is the world. A blessed incarnation of everything there is. The final leap is now staring in your face: your beloved and the world are one and the same. Saint Valentine’s for true.

#### THE NEW HOLE IN THE WALL (February 15, 2007)

It was raining heavily a couple of nights ago, and I had a feeling one wall or another in Motovun would collapse because of the deluge. As soon as I learned this morning that a bit of the town walls had fallen off yesterday, I rushed to see the damage. A big hole is now gaping on the section of the wall facing southeast. It is about two thirds of the way up from the parking lot on Barbacan. As it is partly covered by ivy, which is largely responsible for the collapse, it is hard to tell how big the hole actually is, but it is clear that it will get ever larger if it is not fixed soon. A whole section of the wall may eventually collapse, as well. But no-one I talked to about the latest development was interested. “If only it all came down!” shrugged his shoulders one of them. “To hell with the wall!” another waved his arm dismissively. The new hole in the wall is the least of our problems.

#### MY FRONT TEETH (February 21, 2007)

Eni Nurkollari is by my side. His hand is under my arm. We are walking uphill, toward my house. It is dark, but I can see well enough. I know my way by heart, anyhow. My front teeth are in my pocket. I can feel them whenever I wish to reach for them. To check. To reassure myself in my stupor. Eni is consoling me, but it is like a dream. Somehow, I felt as I played the horn, the greatest game of them all. At least in Motovun, the center of the world. I am walking up the steep hill. Eni is by my side, talking. Consoling me. The dream feels a bit too real to be true. Indeed, I can feel my teeth in my



pocket. They are solid. Real. As real as teeth can ever get. The dream is fading as I am walking. And as Eni keeps talking. Consoling me to the best of his ability. Telling me that all will be well. I am at the front door of my house at last, and Eni is telling me to call him if I need any help. The teeth in my pocket tell me he is for real, too. The horn. Motovun. This evening. Somehow I fell. Some silly hole in the road tripped me. The darkness. As I was playing, I just stumbled. Tumbled headlong. Found myself prostrate. And remained lying on the road. Unconscious for a short while. But all is well now. The dream is real, as real as dreams can ever get. My front teeth are still in my pocket. All is well. The teeth are still in one piece. Safe and sound. And Eni is waving goodbye. I promise to call if I need anything at all. All is well, indeed.

*POSTSCRIPTUM XI* (February 22, 2007)

Finishing a book is a bit like dying, as many must have quipped already. Book by book, one gets worried a little, for one never knows how such mysterious things add up. Or for how long. Bit by bit, the droll quip becomes ominous, if not outright scary, as well. Not because of dying, one feels like boasting, but because starting a book is so much more awesome than finishing it. So much more dazzling. It is a bit like being born again. As books add up, it is like bringing oneself to life ever anew. Miraculously. And ever more miraculously. So, will there be another one? And what will it be about? Not about Motovun, for crying out loud! Not again!

## Sundry Afterthoughts

### THE IDIOCY OF VILLAGE LIFE (April 20, 2007)

To begin with, I am not complaining. I am only writing about my continuing heating-oil problems in Motovun. Ever since the only cistern in the whole of Istria that was small enough to wind its way down my medieval street went out of commission, which was less than two years ago, I am forced to fill my tank with the help of intrepid local people. A larger cistern comes to the cemetery parking lot, and then the oil is decanted into a plastic container. At first, it reached my house in a van; now it reaches it on a trailer pulled by a small tractor because the van, too, went out of commission. Once the tractor pulls up to my house, the oil is decanted by means of a long hose into my own tank, which holds two tons of oil. But the largest container I could find for the transfer of oil holds one ton. So, when the gauge on my tank tells me that it is half empty, I order another ton of oil. I must do it before the tourist season, though, because the parking lot in front of the cemetery gets crammed with busses during the summer months. Anyhow, a few days ago I ordered a new delivery, and it came today. This took many a phone call, but everything went smoothly until the very last step. As it turned out, the plastic hose has developed a few crinkles that slow down the decanting. The hose has become brittle after many uses, and it is thus impossible to straighten it again. I could not find a new hose in the local store, either. What used to take about half an hour, takes more than two hours now. However, the gauge on my tank is not to be trusted, and the last bit of oil spilled on the floor of my cellar. The oil was everywhere. It took me an hour or so to collect it into a bucket with a sponge and toss it into the garden. The whole house now stinks of oil. And so does the garden. But, as I said, I am not complaining. I am only writing about the idiocy of village life. And Motovun has definitely become a village.

### WORLD HERITAGE (May 21, 2007)

The Croatian Ministry of Culture has recently put Motovun on the waiting list for UNESCO's World Heritage Sites. Without any doubt,

this is the status it deserves. As far as I can gather, the administrative procedure may take a couple of years, but this is great news already. I have contacted the ministry, and it seems the application has nothing to do with the municipal or regional authorities. It comes directly from Zagreb. It will take me a while to figure out what is going on, but it is likely that the local authorities are not very happy with these developments, for they cannot but interfere with their attempts to sell Motovun off to their own advantage. One way or another, the fate of our town is shifting. If it gets UNESCO's protection, the game will change for the better. Much better, too. It is a bit early to rejoice, but rejoice I nonetheless must.

#### THE TOWN CRITIC (June 29, 2007)

I am finishing my beer at Klaudio's. It is past midnight. Quite by chance, everyone else assembled around the bar counter is from the film crew that has worked in town for the last two days. There are six or seven of them. Their job finished, they are in a jolly mood, too. As I am leafing through the local newspapers, I hear that Leila Ivašić, Klaudio's wife, is talking about Mariano Maurović. I look up. "He was the town critic," she says. "Whenever he got annoyed by anything," she laughs, "he would put it into newspapers." He died last year, though. "Brain tumor," she explains. "But now we have Ranko Bon," she points at me with a little bow, and I dutifully grin at everyone. Although I am not sure I really wish to be the town critic, I feel quite honoured by the connection with Mariano. "Good night, folks," I exclaim, put my empty bottle at the counter, and head for the café door.

#### THE IRON LAW (July 11, 2007)

The iron law of tourism in Motovun is exceedingly simple: the worse the weather, the greater the number of tourists in town. Which is to say, tourists come to Istria first and foremost because of the sea, and they venture inland almost exclusively when they are prevented from going to the beach. This has been the case for as long as anyone in town can remember. Of course, everything depends on the weather early in the day. If it is nice in the morning but lousy later on, the jump in the number of tourists will be slight. Given that an increasing number of them comes to the peninsula by car, the early morning weather is ever more important. As of late, but for related reasons, there is another variation to the iron law worth noticing in this connection: if the weather is lousy for three or four days in a row, the number of tourists plummets like a stone. Again, they are much more mobile now than they were a few decades ago. If the weather is lousy for too long, the tourists go elsewhere in search of sunnier beaches. Although the iron law has thus softened a bit, it seems to be here to stay. The weather is all in Motovun.

### THE TOURIST SEASON (August 24, 2007)

When you playfully ask restaurant and shop owners in and around Motovun about their fortunes, most of them come up with the same gloomy answer: “The season’s over!” Indeed, the number of tourists traipsing around Istria has already come down significantly. It will surely plummet by the end of the month, which has been rather wet so far. And for the third year in a row. But these are the people who are still far from appreciating the scale of climate change. The clever tourist is likely to look for new weather patterns, which have little, if anything, do with the old ones. June, July, and August will eventually become ever less important in their minds. March, April, and May, as well as September, October, and November, will slowly come to the fore. The tourist season will stretch by leaps and bounds. By and by, restaurant and shop owners will figure out how to milk the intrepid tourists much of the year. In a few short years they will beam at your innocent question: “Never better, buddy!” Until they learn about climate change a bit more closely.

### THIS DYING TOWN (November 6, 2007)

The tourist season is now over. The fair-weather residents are long gone, as well. Although there may be several busloads of visitors on the next few weekends, there is hardly anyone in Motovun during the week. Most of the shops are already closed. The last weekend was unusually busy, mainly due to a religious holiday, thus only adding to the present gloom. Streets and squares ring empty under the leaden sky. A trickle of smoke from an occasional chimney is the remaining sign of life. And this is how things will be for some five months until Easter. Christmas and New Year’s will bring small crowds, but only for a week or so. It is thus time to get used once again to this dying town. It is the switch from the tourist season to reality that is most difficult to bear, but it can be mastered in time, especially when one accepts the fact that the switch will get worse from year to year. For even a dying town eventually dies. For good.

### THE ZERO CATEGORY (December 21, 2007)

Another wonderful day. And so I decided to go around town and take pictures of all the monstrosities built to date. That is, all the signs that the historical preservation of Motovun is failing, and badly, in spite of the Croatian law that considers it inviolable. As a matter of fact, the town is on the list of localities known as “the zero category” in legal jargon. Which is to say that no intervention into the historical heritage is allowed. None whatsoever. The zero category, my ass. My pictures are sufficient proof of the devastation allowed, if not actually encouraged. Spanning buildings completed within thirty to forty years, but mostly in the last ten to twenty years, they show that Motovun is at

the mercy of an incompetent administration from top to bottom. Sadly, the only thing I can do is take damned pictures. All else is out of my reach. Within a few years, it will be out of everyone's reach, as well.

*Addendum* (December 22, 2007)

In addition to my many dear friends around the world, who regularly get my writings as electronic postcards, guess who else will get my snail-mail postcard with this piece pasted on it? The one and only Ivan Jakovčić, the governor of Istria, of course! I simply had to send it to him, as a Christmas present of sorts. If I could only see him stumbling upon my misguided missive in his voluminous mail on Monday, Christmas Eve... Alas, I can imagine his reaction well enough: "Fucking asshole!" And I can imagine the postcard's hurried flight in the general direction of the dustbin. But he will miss it, I am more than sure. He will be way too angry for his customary precision. Swearing all the while, he will have to get up from his cushy armchair, pick the postcard up from the floor, crumple it with both hands, and jam it into the old dustbin. The zero category, as the law providentially stipulates.

THE HEATING-OIL STORY (January 4, 2008)

This winter is considerably colder than last, and my heating-oil tank is getting empty at a clip. I have been watching the indicator on top of the tank ever more carefully for about a month now. As the end-of-the-year holidays are not the best period to get oil, a few weeks ago I decided to order another ton of the stuff early in the new year. I cannot get more than that at any one time because the trailer of Gianni Benčić's tractor can accommodate a plastic container of exactly one ton. Actually, it could carry two such containers, but the risk of something going wrong would be so much higher. According to Gianni, the risk is high enough already.

This time around I also needed a new plastic hose. The old one became so stiff and kinky that it had to be tossed away. In search of the hose, I went to a hardware shop in the foothills of Motovun last week, but I could not find Edo, Gianni's brother, who is most experienced there. I needed him to make sure that I bought the right kind of hose. The first time I went to the shop, Edo was at a funeral. The second time I did find him, and he promised to cut a small piece of the most promising hose size, which had to be checked against the spout on Gianni's container. The third time I found him again, but he told me that he had forgotten about this chore. The holidays, he explained. I went again to the shop this morning, but I was told that Edo was home on sick leave. A short while later I indeed found him at home. Gianni was with him, too. Edo told me that the hose was just right, and Gianni offered to take me back to the shop in his car. A quarter of an hour later, this part of the job was finally accomplished.

When I asked Gianni when he could help me with the oil delivery, he said that next week would be quite bad. He could not be sure about it, for he had not heard anything definite yet, but he expected to be very busy with a building project in the hotel. They are building a swimming pool there, and there will be quite a bit of stuff to cart both up and down the hill. He would be at it all day long for at least a couple of weeks, he told me. The best time for him would be tomorrow, the first day of the weekend.

As soon as I returned home, I called the gas station close to Novigrad from which I have been buying heating oil the last few years. Their truck comes to the parking lot in front of the cemetery, where Gianni waits with his tractor and trailer. Tomorrow around noon was fine with them, but I should still call in the morning to make sure. One never knows about such things, I was told. If a bigger delivery would suddenly pop up somewhere else, they would have to attend to it first. One ton of oil is too little to commit to it outright. At any rate, I called Gianni to tell him about the good news. He was not at home, though, and I was told to call him later. A while later I called again, but got Edo on the phone, instead. He promised to pass everything to Gianni when he returns home. By the way, Gianni does not have a mobile phone, and it is always a bit of a trouble to find him.

All this accomplished, I went to the only automatic teller machine in town. It is on the lower square, so that both locals and tourists can use it. The machine was out of order, however. I called the toll-free number pasted on the machine, and I was promised that it would be fixed very soon, maybe even right away. To my great surprise, it was indeed fixed within no longer than an hour, and I managed to get the money for heating oil tomorrow. Feeling almost jubilant, I told everyone I met how lucky I just got. The machine has been quirky as of late, and everyone I talked with shared my enthusiasm. A pretty good portent for tomorrow, too.

Boring? Of course all this is boring. It is the most boring story I have ever heard, as a matter of fact. Only imagine going through all this two or three times a year. Every year. Year after year. And this is only the heating-oil story. There are many others. Hundreds of them. And all are equally boring. In fact, Motovun is the very capital of boring stories of every imaginable kind. But keep your fingers crossed around noon tomorrow, for this story could easily get even more boring by then.

TWO (January 8, 2008)

“Hello, kids!” I yell as the children from the daycare center down Borgo file past my house. They are all eyes. “What do you say?” intones one of their two teachers. “Hello!” yell the kids in one voice

and start giggling. “How many do you have now?” I ask the teacher as she walks past my doorway. “Eighteen,” she says, “but some of them are still on winter vacations.” “And how many of them are from Motovun?” “Two,” she whispers almost apologetically and points at Josip Handjal and Aleks Basaneze. “Two?” I gasp. Looking down, she nods and waves me goodbye.

#### LIVING IN MOTOVUN (January 15, 2008)

The construction site right across the street from my house went dead some weeks back. Much of the rough work is already finished, but the house still needs a roof. The construction crew vanished just before Christmas, though. As far as I could gather, they had no construction permit. Judging from the house itself, they had no plans, either. Anyhow, the foreman returned a few days ago. He is tidying up the site and closing it off. “What’s up?” I asked him this morning. He was banging together some planks for a makeshift front door. “We have another job in Buzet,” he began nonchalantly. It took a while for us to come to the missing construction permit. Then we shifted to building anyplace in this town. Before long we started talking about living in Motovun. “Who’d ever come to live in a place like this?” he raised his shoulders at some point. After a pause, he answered his question himself: “Poets, loners, weirdoes...” When he noticed that I had turned quiet, he did his best to change the subject.

#### REAL MOTOVUNERS (January 21, 2008)

There are no more than a handful of people in Motovun who can truthfully say that they hail from Motovun, too. Most of the town’s population either fled or was driven out during or after World War II. A few people hail from one of the neighboring villages, some of which are within sight, but most of them came from other parts of Croatia and beyond. It is therefore ever-so-slightly suspicious whenever someone starts claiming that he or she is a “real” Motovuner. Some gripe is usually lurking behind such a preposterous claim, and it is often petty. In any case, I have heard through the grapevine that a bunch of young men in their late teens or early twenties, all of whom have been born here, has taken to billing themselves as real Motovuners. As such, they engage in the same few pastimes and frequent the same few places. The only gripe I can imagine in this case is that the whole world is passing them by.

#### AN INVESTOR ON A WHITE HORSE (March 19, 2008)

Tomorrow is another red-letter day in Motovun’s history. A commission set up by a couple of ministries will vet the environmental impact assessment of yet another golf development project. In

November 2005, the same commission shot down the environmental impact assessment of the previous project by a different investor. The main reason for this decision was that the investor wanted too many apartments, houses, and villas in view of the hilltown. And so the investor sold its properties and some property rights to a new one. To the best of my understanding, history may repeat itself tomorrow. Although the new investor has reduced the number of apartments, houses, and villas by about a quarter, they still loom too large in the context of golf development as such. If this comes to pass, it is not very likely that the investor will comply with the commission's demand to slash the number of buildings. In the event, the properties and property rights would most likely be sold anew. And this will go on until either an investor on a white horse is found, or the ministries involved in Motovun's future form a more malleable commission. If you believe in investors on white horses, take your pick.

*Addendum I (March 20, 2008)*

As I expected, the commission has slashed the number of proposed apartments, houses, and villas. In particular, the number of beds has been cut in half. If the investor does not accept this condition within fifteen days, the project will be scrapped outright. This is today's verdict. Although the investor may comply with the commission's decision, this is not very likely. It is hard to imagine that the economic viability of the venture will survive such a drastic cut. Anyway, where is that investor on a white horse? Motovun is waiting!

*Addendum II (June 20, 2008)*

As I write, another red-letter day in Motovun's history is unfolding. The commission is meeting again, this time in Zagreb, which is why I am not attending it. After many new deadlines agreed with the obliging commission, the investor has returned with a new proposal. The number of beds is still the same, though. If the commission sticks to its decision of March 20, the proposal should be rejected outright. Period. But this is not likely to happen, for the investor is now in cahoots with the ministers that set up the commission in the first place. Much of the intervening period was used to negotiate the new proposal behind closed doors. This is Croatia, after all. A kleptocracy from head to toe. The investor has had much experience with such shady deals around the world, and this one is thus likely to go smoothly, as well. For those who are still unsure about such things, investors on white horses do not exist. And they never will.

*HEATING OIL, AGAIN (March 28, 2008)*

The winter was not harsh, but it was long. Very long, indeed. The tank in my cellar was almost full in early January, but it is almost empty now, and so I decided to bite the bullet this morning. I started



by calling a dealer in Medulin at the southern tip of Istria. A month ago he told me to call again around this time because he might get a smaller cistern, which could possibly squeeze its way down my street. No luck, though. As far as I can gather, the new cistern is still but a pipe dream. Thus I called Gianni Benčić, who takes the oil on the trailer of his tractor from the parking lot by the cemetery to my house. I had tomorrow in mind, but he was not sure about that. He was free this afternoon, however. Then I called a dealer in Novigrad on the western coast of Istria, and he also told me that today would be much better than tomorrow. Gianni was happy about the arrangement, but my next problem was getting the money. One ton of heating oil costs a bit more than six-hundred pounds sterling, but the largest amount I can take from the automatic teller machine on the lower square is somewhat less than four-hundred pounds per day. The rest I had to borrow from two friends, one of whom would need the money by tomorrow. Ever since the only bank left Motovun a couple of years ago, this problem appears whenever I do not have sufficient time to take out the requisite amount. After many a phone call to the dealer in Novigrad and Gianni, the oil was finally delivered. As always, it took us almost an hour to decant the stuff from a plastic container perched on the trailer into the tank in my cellar. To add insult to injury, I got splattered with oil when we were finished. Most of the pungent liquid that remained in the hose ended up on my fleece and pants. I had to put everything I was wearing into the washing machine, but I doubt that the smell of oil will vanish in one washing. What is worse, after all this misery I have only a bit more than half a tank of oil. The same ordeal awaits me in September. I cringe at the thought already. The fucking heating oil, over and over again.

#### REAL ESTATE (April 12, 2008)

It is barely warm enough to sit on the terrace at Klaudio's, but quite a few of the tables are still occupied by tourists. As I am sipping my wine, a couple appears. In their late fifties or early sixties, they are walking around in short sleeves. English. He looks hard-boiled. Real estate, I can tell at once. When they sit down two tables away from me, I can hear without listening some of what they are saying. "It is essential for some people to live up here so that the town looks alive," she says. "The trouble is that there is nothing to do up here," he says. Real estate, of course. Chances are they are involved with golf development in Motovun, as well. But my thoughts shift to his words. "Wait a minute," I can almost hear myself arguing with him, "nothing to do is still something to do, and it surely beats everything else, too!" I keep my mouth shut, though. If they are indeed involved with golf development anywhere in Istria, there will be plenty of opportunities for an argument, I am sure.

## EARTH DAY (April 21, 2008)

Tomorrow is the Earth Day, which was first celebrated in 1970, and one of the leading Croatian newspapers, *Večernji list* (*The Evening News*), will dedicate the whole issue to the international holiday. Green will be its dominant color, and it will be printed on recycled paper. This is why I am in Zagreb this time around. This morning I sat at the editorial meeting of the newspaper as a part of a small group of guest editors brought together by Vjeran Piršić, one of the leading environmental or ecological activists in the country. Although my domain is spatial or physical planning in general, the focus of the two articles I wrote is on Motovun. That is, golf and polo courses as threadbare screens for building a myriad apartments, houses, and villas in the historic landscape of this medieval jewel of a hilltown. In my mind, Motovun equals the earth entire, too. If only everyone would fight for his or her corner of this beleaguered planet! What else could we possibly fight for, anyhow? Everything else is way too abstract for our puny brains.

## *Addendum* (April 22, 2008)

The newspaper is out. It is much less impressive than I expected, although I did not expect much. Most important, my main article is entirely missing. It is missing from the online edition of the paper, as well. Here I delve into the connection between spatial or physical planning and the second Croatian privatization, which involves land in state ownership. I explain how politicians, investors, real estate dealers, and builders collude to turn large tracts of land into private profit. Even though I do not go in great detail, I show how all this works in Motovun. I emphasize the crookedness of the whole thing, which remains safely in the hands of municipal officials bent on extracting as much money out of the deal as possible. Judging from the decision of the editor of the newspaper, I am too radical by half. At any rate, it is good that the subsidiary article is out, albeit considerably shrunk. It states clearly enough that the town is in peril right now, as deals are made behind closed doors on how many apartments, houses, and villas can be built in view of the medieval town. Even that was worth the effort. My corner of the world is in the focus, no matter how briefly.

## MOTOVUN IS DOUBTLESS SPECIAL (May 14, 2008)

I was awoken by the plaintive calls of the uninterruptible power supply system: “No juice, no juice...” The surprising bit was that I could also hear the cement mixer next to my house. Zdravko Košutić’s house across the street is in the early stages of refurbishment. It did not take me long to realize what was going on. Željko Vukadinović’s house, also across the street and recently refurbished, was being connected to the electrical network. Every new house on Borgo means an hour or

so without juice. As well as no shower, no shaving, and so on. I have no idea how such things are done elsewhere, but Motovun is doubtless special. And especially nowadays, when refurbishing is going on everywhere around town. At any rate, the insistent calls of the UPS system are with me for ever.

LHASA, ISTRIA (May 28, 2008)

Going east from Buje to Buzet down the Mirna valley and looking up the steep Motovun hill, the Communal Palace looks a tad like the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet. Were one to hang long orange banners or streamers from several pairs of top windows on the largest communal building in Istria, the likeness would become much stronger. And perhaps even compelling. But the top windows on the left side of the Communal Palace are in the hands of the Italian Union, whereas those on the right side are in the hands of the Motovun Municipal office. This is the first impediment to this art project. The second is that Lhasa is the seat of Tibetan Buddhism, whereas Motovun is Catholic to boot. Of course, the third impediment is that China is at loggerheads with Tibet, and fooling around with China is hardly in Istria's best interest. The public art project that just popped up in my mind will thus never see the light of day. It will forever remain ensconced in the dark recesses of my wayward mind.

*Addendum* (May 29, 2008)

Unable to wait until my friends discover this piece on the World Wide Web, I sent it to many of them. Some got it as an electronic postcard, and some will get it in a while pasted on postcards of flesh and bone. I sent around six of the former and four of the latter. And I just got Bob Collén's forthright response: "Not as long as you are able to write like this. Imagination is the key to the prison." How right he is, too. True friends are ever a blessing.

PARALLEL UNIVERSES (June 17, 2008)

I am talking with Milica and Benjamin Pahović about their youth within sight of Motovun. She was born in San Bartolo to the east, and he in Rakotole to the south. I am fascinated with their stories about village life. Soon enough we focus on cattle, the greatest mobile wealth of a peasant family. The daily needs of cows, oxen, and bulls were entrusted to the youngest children. At some point Benjamin starts waxing poetic about oxen that pulled ploughs and carts. Much of village life would have been impossible without them. Benjamin gets up, climbs on a table in his restaurant, and takes down a model cart that perches on a stone ledge above the main entrance. He explains what every part of the cart was for, and what it was called, but he always returns to the oxen. One went to the right, the other to the left,

and this is how they were called. The right ox was always the bigger and the cleverer one. “One day both of our oxen got killed by thunder,” he remembers with a quick frown. “It was right under the Motovun hill, on Kanal, where there was a monthly cattle fair.” His father was lucky not to be right next to them when the storm suddenly started. “He was paying for something in a nearby building, and someone ran up to him to tell him about the calamity.” “When was that?” I jump in. “That was about this time of year in 1968,” Benjamin answers without a moment’s hesitation. “Gosh,” I exclaim, “that was only forty years ago!” Benjamin nods, laughs, and slams his thighs with both hands. “Back then,” I shake my head, “we lived in parallel universes.” And we still do, it goes without saying.

#### MY POLITICAL LIFE (June 18, 2008)

Whenever I spend much of my day in “political” activities, which in my case consist almost entirely of writing letters to politicians big and small, I feel that I have wasted my precious time, as though “politics” is not life. Not “real” life, in any case. On occasion I get quite annoyed with myself, as well. Why do I keep wasting my time in such a horrible way?! But this is a wrong way of looking at my letter-writing, if for no other reason, than because it actually takes a big chunk of my time. Besides, life cannot but include politics, too. Like so many “biological” needs, I suppose. One way or another, I must learn not to abhor my political life. True, it brings me nothing I value dearly, but it is a part of my daily toil nonetheless. I should respect it as such at the very least. For crying out loud, I even shit with all the reverence shitting deserves!

#### THE CARNAGE (September 5, 2008)

The fate of the seven chestnut trees on the hotel terrace seems to have been sealed. A few days ago I talked to Emil Soldatić, who seems to be the designated tree man in the municipal office, and today I talked to Igor Legović, the hotel director. Both of them have been advised by forestry people that the chestnuts have grown way too tall, which means that most of their branches will have to go. Just like the chestnuts along Barbacan last year, they will be reduced to trunks with several branch stumps. Neither Emil nor Igor can tell me when this is likely to happen, but my guess is that the carnage is nigh—say, this year or maybe the next. Although I would like to consult an independent forester, if such a one existed here, the municipality will have the last say since the chestnuts are on public land. It is thus high time to adjust to the inevitable. As I sit on the hotel terrace, I do my best to imagine these marvelous trees as they will soon become. Like gnarled hands with fingers chopped off. If everything goes well, they will again be in fine shape in about a decade. Or maybe two. Fingers crossed.

*Addendum* (September 25, 2016)

Luckily, the carnage never took place. For some reason, the chestnut trees on the hotel terrace were spared the fate of those on Barbacan. And it is amazing to compare the two. Several trees treated by forestry people under the Motovun walls are gone by now. They let out the ghost after most of their branches were summarily removed. A few years later, their trunks were also removed, and only stumps remained in their place. And all the remaining trees are a sorry sight to this day. Thin branches have grown out of the awkward stumps, but they are simply ridiculous by comparison with those that have been removed. Eight years later, the trees are no less than pitiful to see. It is enough to compare the chestnut trees on the hotel terrace and those on Barbacan to see how incompetent the forestry people actually are. And it is nothing but luck that has saved the trees on the hotel terrace from their incompetence. Alleluia!

*MANUS MANUM LAVAT* (November 20, 2008)

Thus the favorite expression of Istrian politicians. Whenever they want to make sure that someone understands their intentions perfectly well, they quote Seneca the Younger. You help us, and we will help you. Understand? Which is a definite proof, if such a proof is needed, that Istria used to be a Roman province. As well as that it has remained as politically backwards as it was once upon a time.

*Addendum I* (January 3, 2011)

Am I inventing things? Not at all. This story I heard from a close friend from Motovun who had heard it himself. In fact, the Roman expression was directed at him personally by one of the leading Istrian politicians, Emil Soldatić. Until a couple of years ago, he was the secretary general of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the leading party on the peninsula since independence. One of the closest associates of Ivan Jakovčić, the party chief for most of the period, Soldatic is now on Motovun's municipal council, where he has been playing a leading role since municipal elections two years ago. His father used to be the director of the hotel under the Yugoslav regime, too. Although Soldatic's family has been in Istria for a few centuries only, he has grasped the old expression perfectly. And he has been applying it with aplomb.

*Addendum II* (September 13, 2012)

And who was the close friend from Motovun who told me about Emil Soldatić's Roman proclivities? It was Ivo Vrtarić. *Requiescat in pace*. Having felt the hilltown politics on my own skin, I was reluctant of mentioning his name while he was alive. He had already suffered the

ire of municipal potentates himself, and he did not need any more of their attentions. Anyhow, the story has been rounded off at last.

#### MY MOTOVUN LOVE AFFAIR (December 1, 2010)

Yesterday morning I bumped into Filip Vrtarić in the center of Zagreb. Now he studies in Ljubljana but lives in the Croatian capital with his grandparents. He chuckled when he saw the green Motovun badge on one of the straps of my knapsack (“The Badge,” March 18, 2009). He was pleased to see this little reminder of the town in which he was raised, but I immediately made a mental note that the badge’s time was up. I remembered my decision only this morning, and I removed it from the knapsack, where it was pinned a short while before the municipal elections nearly two years ago. At first I thought of tossing it into the garbage, but then I decided to keep it as a memento of my Motovun love affair. What the heck, it was splendid while it lasted.

#### *Addendum I* (December 2, 2010)

The current issue of *The Economist* carries no less than three articles about Croatia (“Cordon Sanader,” “Coming Together,” and “That Was Then,” November 27, 2010). This is quite out of the ordinary, which possibly means that the country is not very far from the full membership in the European Union. Be that as it may, the first article is about politics, the second about business, and the third about culture. The last article is about a recent addition to the permanent program at the Klović Dvori Gallery in the old town perched above the modern city. Three years after they broke up in 2003, Olinka Vištica and Dražen Grubišić founded the Museum of Broken Relationships. It has been on show in many places around the world ever since. Starting with their own wind-up, hopping bunny, it includes all sorts of little treasures that mean something only to those who are no longer together. The accompanying stories are the key to the museum’s growing appeal. Knowing Olinka quite well since my early days in Motovun, when she was director of the Motovun Film Festival for a couple of years, this morning I pinned the discarded badge onto a postcard of mine, which shows me in army uniform in 1970, and asked her on the back to check this piece of writing on the *Residua* website. Of course, the badge is meant for the museum’s collection. When it comes to broken relationships, those between people and medieval hilltowns must be kind of rare.

#### *Addendum II* (January 18, 2011)

Having heard not a word from Olinka, a few weeks ago I sent her another postcard with my army picture with another passionate entreaty scribbled on the back. To no avail, though. This morning I went to visit the new museum in the old town. After a quick tour of the place, which harbors no trace of my own love affair, I returned to

the front desk. "Please give Olinka my regards," I said nonchalantly to the woman on duty. For good measure, I produced my business card. "I sure will," beamed the woman at me happily. And this is perhaps the end of yet another broken relationship.

*Addendum III* (June 4, 2013)

Today I met Olinka in the center of Zagreb. We hugged, as ever. After a few friendly words, I mentioned my contribution to her museum. "But I have never heard from you," I complained with a mock frown. "What?" she pinched her lips. "Haven't I responded to your electronic mail?" At any rate, my contribution is not likely to be displayed any time soon, if ever. I can imagine that the museum is bursting at the seams with all sorts of contributions by her friends, as well as many others. And love affairs with picturesque hilltowns are farthest from her mind. Be that as it may, the only important thing at present is that we are still friends, as it were.

*CIMITERO DI MONTONA* (January 29, 2011)

I do not bump into too many people I know in the streets of Zagreb, but most of those I do bump into know me from Motovun. "It's a graveyard in the winter," I explain my presence in the Croatian capital. "A few old ladies, and as many hungry street cats." Most of them just grin at everything I have to say. "Only the post office and a grocery store are opened this time of year," I continue with their silent encouragement. "*Cimitero di Montona*," I conclude with a flourish if and when appropriate. For those even mildly familiar with Italian, these words sum it up pretty well. But bumping into people I know always leaves a sour taste in my mouth. And many unhappy memories rush to my mind as soon as we part our ways. An exile already, I remember so many people I befriended in Motovun upon my arrival. Most of them are gone by now, as well. They could not stand it any longer, either. Just like me, they must be weary of bumping into people they know from Motovun in the streets of their new abodes.

*CROATIAN GRAY FOREVER!* (May 6, 2011)

Ernest Benčić, known to all as Braco, owns a small shop on top of Borgo. It was in horrible shape for years, but now he is restoring it and plans to lease it out to the highest bidder. It used to be a butcher's shop as witnessed by the old-fashioned lettering painted by hand above the door that spelled the name of the business in Italian and Croatian: "*Macelleria – Mesnica*." Judging by the lettering, the sign was put up well before World War II. Someplace between terracotta and pink, the color of the shop was enchanting, too. In fact, it was quite close to the color of my own house. I just asked Braco which color would it be after restoration. "Gray," he said point blank. "I offered to paint it in

the original color, but the folks responsible for the preservation of cultural heritage in Istria told me that it must be gray.” As though any additional proof is needed that it is precisely those who are responsible for the cultural heritage that are systematically destroying it. To wit, they are removing color from the Venetian town. Croatian gray forever!

*Addendum I (May 7, 2011)*

Soon after I wrote this piece and posted it on the World Wide Web, I remembered Francesco Bandarin. Of Venetian origin, he is the director of UNESCO’s World Heritage Center. We used to be in touch in 2008 and 2009, when I still thought that something could be done about Motovun. My hope has evaporated, but I still forwarded this piece to him. Dealing with Croatian authorities is utterly hopeless, but I still have a little hope for UNESCO. Since early 2007, the hilltown is on the tentative list of World Heritage sites. One way or another, Bandarin’s origin is my greatest hope, though.

*Addendum II (November 24, 2015)*

In spite of my great hopes, Francesco Bandarin has not shown any interest in Motovun. My anxious pleas with him made no difference whatsoever. A bit surprised by his silence, I just searched the World Wide Web to see what I could learn about him. As it turned out, he served as the director of the UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre from 2000 to 2011, the year the original piece and the first *addendum* were written. He also served as UNESCO’s assistant director-general for culture from 2010 to 2014. Now he serves as a special advisor to the UNESCO director-general, as well as a professor of urban planning at the University of Venice. In other words, Bandarin is out of the game by now. And Motovun is on its way to be covered with Croatian gray from top to bottom. Alas, the tentative list of World Heritage sites remains as tentative as ever!

*TOO MUCH ART (July 16, 2011)*

About a month ago there was a big gathering at Hotel Kaštel in Motovun concerning something like the connection between art and nature. As far as I could understand the whole thing from the hotel crew, it had to do with making nature closer through art. At the time, I also learned that the hotel would take part in this breathtaking venture. Today the artists have descended, though. I recognized a few of them at once, but I behaved as though I had forgotten their faces. I am old enough to afford such excuses. There are seven of them, to be exact, as many as chestnut trees on the hotel terrace. As I write, each one of them is daubing one of the hapless trees. But I could not stand the excitement. I ran away from the terrace as fast as I could. Too much nature for me, I guess. Or is it too much art, perhaps?



## THE LOWER SQUARE (December 23, 2011)

Motovun has not changed much in the last two months, but several changes are visible as soon as one reaches the lower square. The first is that Miroslav Milosavljević's pizzeria is closed while Klaudio Ivasic's is still open. Of course, this was only a question of time, as the lower square cannot support two competing pizzerias ("What Goes Next?" December 16, 2004). According to the grapevine, Marko Fakin from Bataji is taking over the shop from Ernest Benčić, the landlord. He will offer much more than pizzas, and so he might be able to survive next door to the victorious pizzeria, which suddenly appeared only this year. The second thing that is visible on the lower square is that Ernest Benčić's other property, the old butcher's shop, is painted red rather than Croatian gray, as required by the appropriate authorities ("Croatian Gray Forever!" May 6, 2011). Originally, the shop was terracotta in color. I look forward to learning more about the choice of color on the landlord's part, but I assume it is defiance pure and simple. The red is a bit too garish for my taste, but it will be fine as the color fades over a few years. The third visible change is a whole bunch of parked cars. During the tourist season, parking was banned from the lower square, which was taken over by tables and chairs. They are gone now. The cars are back, and in earnest. They show beyond any reasonable doubt that the hilltown is alive and well. Thriving, as it were. Anyway, who says nothing ever happens in Motovun? The lower square is changing fast!

## MY FLEETING RETURN TO MOTOVUN (May 2, 2012)

Motovun is ricocheting around my mind once again. The weather has been so wonderful for so long that it is getting hard to forget my sunlit house, the birds darting around the terrace, and the amazing weeds growing helter-skelter in my garden. The only trouble is the memory of the faces of so many nasty characters that spoil the hilltown for me. Although there are no more than a handful of them, they hold many strings in their nimble hands. Thus I am doing my utmost to push them out of my mind. Forever. They are best forgotten once and for all, I keep reminding myself over and over again. But the trick is still beyond my power, I must admit. I cannot but wonder whether I will ever master it, either. Which is why I keep dreading my fleeting return to Motovun in spite of the glorious weather. The nasty characters will make sure to drive me back to Zagreb as soon as possible, I am quite sure.

## *Addendum* (November 30, 2016)

By and by, Motovun is getting ever closer to my heart one more time. The nasty characters in the hilltown are of little or no concern to me any longer. Although it is not exactly pleasant to see their faces, now I walk past them without much trouble. There are only a handful of

them, anyway. Ever since my liberation earlier this year, I even feel sorry for them all on occasion. I can imagine how hard it is for them to see me in their midst ever more often. Indeed, I spend relatively little time in Zagreb as of late. My trips there are kind of fleeting nowadays. Which is why the nasty characters must be desperate by now. For all their hopes that I will disappear never to return, I am not only around more and more often, but I can also be regularly spotted in the most public of places around Motovun. One way or another, though, they will have to get used to their fair lot. And I do not plan to kick the bucket any time soon, either.

#### TOO MUCH ART, AGAIN (July 16, 2012)

Exactly a year ago on this day, the trunks of seven chestnut trees on the hotel terrace were daubed by seven artists from Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia (“Too Much Art,” July 16, 2011). This was a part of an Istrian program whose objective was to make nature closer to people through art. Denis Visintin from the Pazin Municipal Museum brought the artists to Motovun. The Motovun Municipality, which rents out the terrace to the hotel, was wholeheartedly behind it. I was horrified by what I saw back then. But I hoped the paints the artists had used would wash away after at most a year. I was wrong, of course. They used the best paints on offer. That is, the most lasting ones. It is thus time to put down their names, exactly as they are signed on the trees. By the way, each name comes together with the name of the country. In alphabetical order, from Croatia we have M. Petrović and Adrijana Šuran; from Italy we have Alan and Sofia; and from Slovenia we have Lara Kobal, Renata Tegelj, and T. Tegelj. It is they who have made nature closer to people in a lasting way. Let their names be known to all.

#### ONLY ISTRIA (October 27, 2012)

It has been raining since yesterday afternoon, but now we are visited by a real storm. The rain is coming down in buckets. Borgo has turned into a gurgling river. It is thundering all around Motovun, as well. Thus it feels like summer rather than autumn. But there is one familiar thing that comes along with every storm worthy of the name: there is no electricity. This time it is serious, too. It conked out twice, but only briefly, and then it went out for good. That was half an hour ago, which is why I am surrounded by candles as I write. How long will it take for the electricity to come back, though? That is anyone’s guess, of course. After all, this is only Istria.

#### *Addendum* (October 28, 2012)

Yesterday’s blackout lasted about two hours. Well, the electricity conked out briefly once again another hour later, but that was just a

minor glitch. Returning to the blackout, I got really worried after a while, for life without electricity has become rather thorny. And it is only a century since it came to these parts. No matter how often I tell myself that I ought to live without it, I cannot even imagine how would it feel. Not even my parents could remember how it felt when the electricity came to Krk and Pazin in their early youth. Anyhow, the dream of freeing myself from this cornerstone of our civilization is just that, a silly dream. Life without my many computers and the World Wide Web is actually beyond my comprehension. And this is perhaps why I keep dreaming of another and less encumbered world.

#### DEATHS, BIRTHS (February 15, 2013)

Ljubica Handjal called me from Motovun this morning. “Milan Babić is dead,” she told me. I was stunned, for he was in perfect shape when I last saw him. “Actually,” she continued, “he fell down the stairs at home and died on the spot.” That explained it, but I was still stunned. In my mind, Milan goes with the hilltown, as does his wife, Stanka. In his early eighties, he could often be seen close to his house on top of Borgo, which abuts the loggia on the lower square. “Please hug Stanka for me,” I told Ljubica. “How’s Motovun?” I asked. “Well,” she mumbled after a pause, “it’s dead!” In her mid-eighties, she knows the hilltown well. “This place is as good as dead,” she repeated in a low voice. I wished her all the best and told her that I would be back by the end of March. I will miss Milan, though. Motovun I know is dying. And it is dying faster and faster. Each and every time I go away for a while, I learn about another death. And births are so few and far between that I rarely hear about them.

#### NOT ABOUT GOLF (March 27, 2013)

I went to my barber’s this morning. We gabbed about all sorts of things as he went about cropping my hair. “May I ask you something?” he said out of the blue. “Go ahead,” I said. “I remember watching you on television,” he cracked an embarrassed smile, “but I do not remember what it was about.” “Oh,” I grinned in turn, “it was about golf in Motovun!” “Exactly,” he nodded, “exactly!” “Actually,” I continued, “it was not about golf, but about crooked real estate deals that would enrich only a few.” My barber kept nodding, but it was clear that he had no recollection of anything I had talked about on television several years ago. It did not matter, either. The only important thing was that my face had popped up on the vaunted screen and stayed there for a while. And so I dropped the subject without much ado. We gabbed about all sorts of things until he was finished with his job.

## THOSE TWO FAMILIES (March 29, 2013)

On our way to the store on Gradiziol and back home on Borgo, my beloved and I met between a fifth and a quarter of permanent residents of Motovun proper. The old town, that is. We talked with them all. Well, one of them would not even exchange greetings with us, as she belongs to one of the two families that would rather see me never again. But it was a joy for me to catch up with so many people I have not seen for three whole months. My beloved kept pulling at my sleeve all the while. She kept making sour faces, as well. But I was unstoppable. I kept asking about everyone's family and friends. And in much detail. As my beloved told me when we finally made it home, I was unusually loud, as well. In short, there is definitely a soft spot for Motovun in my heart. A pity for those two families, though.

### *Addendum I* (April 10, 2013)

Not to beat around the bush, these are families Vugrinec and Ivašić. That is, the families of the mayor and the former president of the leading Istrian party in the Municipality of Motovun. The same party has hogged much of the peninsula ever since independence. I was quite friendly with both families before I started fighting against crooked golf and polo close to the hilltown some six years ago. The rift took its present shape four years ago, just before the last municipal elections. No prize for guessing which side of the fight they were on, as well as their party. One way or another, most members of those two families will not greet me in the street ever again. As I already said, a pity for them, too.

### *Addendum II* (November 27, 2015)

Pray, who was that woman who would not exchange greetings with my beloved and me a bit more than a couple of years ago? It was Tatjana Sutera, Klaudio Ivašić's sister and Djurdja Ivašić's daughter. For the record, none of them would greet me in the street any longer, but Djurdja is on most friendly terms with my beloved. She appears quite happy whenever they happen to meet. That is one of the little mysteries of the hilltown. We cannot figure it out no matter how hard we try, for neither Leila Ivašić, Klaudio's wife, nor Giacomo Sutera, Tatjana's husband, would greet either of us any longer. Djurdja's attitude to my beloved is thus rather special. At any rate, we can only hope that this mystery will persist forever.

## HISTORY IS HISTORY (April 9, 2013)

I had a nice talk at Benjamin's with Rudi Handjal, who knows a great deal about Motovun. Born in 1953, he came to the hilltown with his parents in 1967. Back then, it still had a soul, as he likes to put it. To begin with, there were many more people living here. In addition,

there was much more camaraderie and good cheer. Although many a protagonist of his stories I have never met in person, I know their children and grandchildren pretty well. “It would be good to record your stories,” I told Rudi as I was about to leave. “Of course,” he grinned. But I changed my mind even before I reached my house. For better or worse, I do not care that much about Motovun any longer. As far as I am concerned, its history is history, too. And so is history in general, I am afraid.

#### A REVOLUTION IN MOTOVUN (May 19, 2013)

There is a revolution in Motovun. Today’s municipal elections will change things for many years to come. To begin with, Tomislav Pahović known to all as Tomica is the new mayor. A medical doctor in his thirties, he promises to make everyone heard. In addition, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, the dominant party on the peninsula since independence, has ended up in the opposition in the municipal council for the second time in a row. They got five posts, the same number as the Independents, the new mayor’s party, who will form a coalition with the Social Democrats with only one post. A similar coalition was formed after the previous elections, but the departing mayor, Slobodan Vugrinec, had managed to steer it pretty close to the desires of his own party, the Istrian Democratic Assembly. The new mayor will push them into opposition proper for the very first time. In short, petty politics is history in the hilltown. A political scientist in his fifties, the old mayor will return to an administrative post in Vrsar, a municipality on the Istrian coast, where he actually lives with his family. Good riddance, Slobodan! And the warmest of welcomes, Tomica!

#### *Addendum* (May 21, 2013)

Now that the dust has settled, it is time for a few more words. First, I did not take part in the municipal elections. As I explained to all those who were surprised by my behavior, I could not break my solemn promise to the president of Croatia (“My Best Wishes: A Letter to Croatian President Ivo Josipovic,” April 15, 2011). No matter what, I will vote never again in this godforsaken country. Second, I was pretty sure that Tomica Pahović could not win the elections for mayor. However, he and the Independents, who went from door to door in the municipality, managed to persuade many people who had given up hope to vote one more time. It was these people who made the difference I was not counting with. Anyhow, I was wrong in my assessment, for Tomica won by a wide margin rather than a couple of votes. In fact, he trounced Slobodan Vugrinec. Turning to the future, I cannot but have high hopes for Tomica and the Independents in coalition with the Social Democrats. If they have won the municipal elections so splendidly, they can also make a difference in Motovun’s future. My best wishes, once again.

## THE TWO FESTIVALS (June 13, 2013)

I hear from friends in Motovun that there will be a town meeting early next week, the first meeting of this kind in a very long time. The former mayor was not about such public extravagances, to be sure, but the new mayor appears to be doing his best to listen to what people have to say about municipal affairs. The topic of discussion will be the film festival, which will take place some six weeks after the meeting. I am glad to hear about all this, but I wonder how many people will have the guts to say that the film festival itself is quite welcome, but that the beer and kebab festival that comes with it is definitely not. The former attracts about a thousand film enthusiasts, but the latter draws ten times as many people who could not care less about film. The trouble is that a good number of people in Motovun stand to gain from the latter rather than the former festival. They offer nothing but beer and kebab, but they are perfectly happy to do so under the guise of a cultural activity, which is heavily subsidized in Istria. Anyhow, I am annoyed with myself for wondering about all this. Why should I care? I am only a foreigner in Motovun, anyhow. Let the locals figure it out, if they can. And the two festivals are squarely of their own making.

## *Addendum* (June 19, 2013)

I hear from friends in Motovun that there were some eighty people at the town meeting. Today *Glas Istre (The Voice of Istria)* dedicated a whole page to an article about the event. “We are not against the festival,” runs the title, “but there should be some order to it.” And that is the message loud and clear. Some of those present were for it and some against it, but everyone agreed that the festival should be run as a proper festival rather than be abandoned to the festive mob that could not care less about movies. There is one thing missing in the article, though. This was the first town meeting organized by the mayor of the hilltown in at least eleven years. And that is squarely to Tomica Pahović’s credit. The former mayor had one town meeting, but he was invited to it by a Croatian organization promoting municipal democracy. Slobodan Vugrinec, who attended the meeting dedicated to the film festival, would never even dream of listening to what people had to say about any subject whatsoever. At any rate, the festival crew learned a few things from the concerned citizens. Now let us see what will be done about it in a bit more than a month.

## THE THIRD PHASE (July 14, 2013)

Irina Kosanović and Damir Gregorović moved into a neighboring house on Borgo in 2007. Over coffee, I talked with Irina this morning about her experience so far. Just like me, she now thinks that coming to Motovun was a big mistake. But she is of two minds when it comes to the future. On the one hand, she would like to sell the house and leave for good; on the other, she would like to stay if she could accept

the hilltown with all its warts. Hearing this, which mirrors my own feelings once again, I told her about the three phases I learned about from Renata and Ivo Vrtarić soon after I bought my house (“The Three Phases,” December 16, 2002). “It is the second phase that is the clincher,” I concluded my story. Irina chuckled knowingly. “But when will the third phase start?” I sighed imploringly. At any rate, our morning coffee ended up with laughter. Is this an early sign of the third phase, though?

#### MOTOVUN POLITICS IN A NUTSHELL (July 21, 2013)

Years ago, I built a planter of sorts by the front door of my house. Made of several large stones and a couple of plastic pots, it was meant to beautify Borgo a tiny bit. It was also meant to stop neighbors from parking in front of my house. The planter was demolished by the film festival crowds a couple of years ago, but I rebuilt it once again. Diminished, it still beautifies Borgo. As of late, though, a dog is shitting on it every so often. I must remove dog turds from it again and again. But today I learned from a stealthy neighbor about the dog in question, as well as its owner. It was Nero, who was led by Hana Posavec, Emil Soldatić’s wife. They live some way down Borgo. For many a year, Emil was the secretary general of the Istrian Democratic Assembly, which ruled supreme in Motovun for a couple of decades. Until the last elections, that is. He retired from the post several years ago, but he is still involved with the party. And how. Very much on his side, at least politically, his wife lets their dog shit on my planter whenever an opportunity arises. Over and over again. And this is Motovun politics in a nutshell. Although I am not involved in it any longer, I am a foe to remember. And punish with the help of an obliging dog.

#### THE SO-CALLED MOTOVUN FILM FESTIVAL (August 9, 2013)

The film festival tradition in Motovun goes back to 1999. Many of the people who have taken part in the first two festivals report much satisfaction with it. The films were worth watching and the atmosphere was informal to boot. Things started changing with the third festival in 2001. By the time my beloved and I came to the hilltown a year later, though, things were already getting out of hand. We took part in seven festivals from 2002 to 2008, but I reported to the festival organizers the very first year that they actually had two festivals, which should be separated as soon as possible. The film festival as such was fine, but the beer and kebab festival that went with it was definitely not. The latter overpowered the former to the point of making it questionable.

Tired of the drunken crowds at the tenth festival, my beloved and I decided to eschew the so-called cultural event for a while. And so we

missed four festivals in a row. From 2009 and 2012 we ran away well in advance. However, last year we heard from many people in Motovun that things were getting appreciably better. Apparently, the main reason for this was that there were many more rowdy parties around Istria in recent years than ever before. By and by, they started shadowing the film festival. After some deliberation, we decided to stay in the hilltown for this year's festival. Indeed, things were appreciably better this time around. The movies were not exactly to my taste, but the crowds were at least manageable.

The main reason for the improvement was the new mayor. Although he came to power late in the game, which means that most contracts were already signed by the old mayor and the festival organizers, he had one of the access roads to the hilltown closed to everyone except the inhabitants and their guests. As it happened, it was Borgo rather than Gradiziol that was closed during the event. For the first time in so many years, my house was not surrounded by drunken crowds all night long. Loud music on the top of the Motovun hill went on until dawn, but my beloved and I managed it well enough. The beer and kebab festival appeared to be under control for the first time since 2002.

But how will things shape next year? The organizers of the festival seem to be intent on keeping the film festival and the beer and kebab festival tied closely together. This is where they have unabashed support of all those from Motovun who gain from the latter without caring a single bit for the former. The festival organizers also threaten to go elsewhere if they are not allowed to run the so-called film festival as they see fit. The new mayor will thus have to find a clear path through the conundrum. But is there such a path? Luckily, I think there is. Those from Motovun who gain from the beer and kebab festival will ultimately agree to any constraining rules from the new mayor that will keep the festival in the hilltown. Although they will have to accept some inevitable loses, they will surely not wish to lose the game altogether. And the festival organizers will stick to the game they know well, for going elsewhere would entail many an unknown risk. In short, chances are that my beloved and I will take part in the next festival. To show some goodwill well in advance, let us call it a film festival.

*Addendum* (December 22, 2015)

So, how have things shaped up over the last couple of years? I am happy to report that the festival is ever closer to a *bona fide* film festival. The kebab and beer part of it is shrinking into insignificance, too. Interestingly, the organizers of the festival also appear to be happy about the change. This year, the number of tickets sold has broken all records. For all these reasons, my beloved and I have decided to remain in Motovun during the festival days ever since 2013. That is, ever since the hilltown got a new mayor. And all this is beyond any doubt three whole years after the last municipal elections. The



intervening three festivals have been completely different than all the previous ones we have witnessed. Who says that one man cannot change things in a small town? True, his closest associates in the municipal council are with him when it comes to the festival, but he is still their leader. Congratulations to him and his council members!

#### THE MOTOVUN COCKROACH (August 25, 2013)

Stanka Babić was doing something in the Motovun loggia next to her house when I passed by a few minutes ago. As soon as she spotted me, she called me by stealthy signs. When I approached her with a smile, she put the index finger of her right hand over her lips. A secret of sorts was obviously involved. “Now I will show you what we call ‘cockroach’ in this little town of ours,” she said in a loud whisper and looked around conspiratorially. Then she motioned me to the front door of her house around the corner. Between two stones in the archway above the door there lied a scarab beetle. Dead already, it shone metallic green and blue. “No, no,” I protested at once, “this is definitely not a cockroach!” “But,” she protested in turn, “this is what we call it here!” I just shook my head in disbelief: “That’s a holy beetle of Egypt, for crying out loud!” And then I waved her goodbye without any further ado. When it comes to cockroaches, these people are pretty hopeless. Not so long ago, the Motovun cockroach was no less than sacred in one of the cradles of our civilization.

#### THE MOTOVUN GOLF SCAM, AGAIN (November 7, 2013)

As I do every now and then, I just spent some time browsing through my *magnum opus* on the World Wide Web. For some reason, I spent most of my time on my writings from 2005. And I was horrified by much of what I read. This was the time when I was still friendly with everyone in Motovun, as my struggle with the golf scam started only close to the end of the year. It turned really nasty a year or two later, too. Many of my pieces thus describe the bliss in several watering holes that existed in the hilltown back then, but the names of people I come across now strike me as improbable, if not also impossible. They are names of my enemies. I would not even talk with them, let alone sit at the same table. Besides, many of the names I come across are those of people already dead. Horrified, I finally stopped reading and counted the years. Only eight years have passed since 2005, but Motovun has become such a different place in the meanwhile. And the only reason for the change is again the golf scam, which petered into insignificance with the global financial crisis in 2008. That was five years ago, but the lines drawn until then cannot be erased ever again. The golf scam is forever, as it were.

#### A BIT LIKE A DESERTER (January 1, 2014)

Saying goodbye to the whole Pahović family yesterday afternoon was far from easy. Rudi Handjal was there, as well. Our hugs were longer and more fervent than usual, for we all knew that it would be months before we hugged each other again. And I spilled it out then and there. “I feel funny leaving you all,” I raised my eyebrows. “A bit like a deserter,” Benjamin chuckled. “Exactly,” I nodded with feeling, “exactly!” His son, Tomica, is bringing new hope to the hilltown and the surrounding villages. The new mayor just smiled at my confession, though. He knows that I will jump into the fray whenever needed. But I still felt funny about leaving Motovun earlier today. As luck would have it, my beloved and I bumped into Benjamin on our way to the car. We hugged again, but it did not help much. And I still feel a bit like a deserter hours after reaching Zagreb. If everything goes according to plan, I will be back in Motovun sometime in late March.

#### *Addendum* (January 5, 2014)

Pero Učkar called this afternoon. “One day to go,” he sighed. Tomorrow is the last day Benjamin’s will be open, that is. The same holds for the hotel, as well. Motovun will close for the winter. The new tourist season will start in late March at the earliest, but everyone will be waiting for Easter, which falls very late this year. “I hope there will be a few survivors by the time you return in early spring,” Pero chuckled. At these words, I saw the streets and squares of the hilltown strewn with bodies. “Fingers crossed,” I chuckled in turn. But the gloomy vision is still with me long after our telephone conversation. Sprawling bodies everywhere. Which makes me feel a bit like a deserter one more time.

#### THE FIVE *BIFORE* (March 22, 2014)

The façade of the communal palace giving onto the lower square in Motovun is under refurbishment. The five mullioned windows with two lights on the second floor are being opened after a century or so. In Italian, they are known as *bifore*. Built in the Thirteenth Century at the latest, they were visible only in traces. A single mullion has been preserved entire, as well as a couple of stone arches supported by the thin columns. Although the scaffolds are still up, the windows are wonderful to behold from the square. The last one was put in place only yesterday. I am not a great fan of the people in Istria who deal with preservation of its historical heritage, but the refurbishment of the façade is very to my liking. What remains to be seen is how it will be plastered and painted after many decades of utter neglect. The last color of the façade was a warm shade of yellow, which can still be seen under the eaves, but it most likely hails from the Austro-Hungarian period. Before that, it could have been a shade of terracotta. The new components of the five *bifore* will also need

careful finishing so as not to stand out from the façade the oldest parts of which may well go the Seventh or Eight Century. Anyhow, my congratulations to the experts behind the refurbishment! Even they can get it right every now and then.

*Addendum I* (April 17, 2014)

As soon as my beloved and I returned to Motovun, I wanted to go to the lower square and see the façade of the communal palace. I was dying to see its new color. It was a huge disappointment, though. The new color is as close to white as yellow can be. “It’s the same as the stone of the *bifore*,” my beloved commented at once. Indeed, the five *bifore* are now entirely lost on the palace wall. A warm shade of yellow or a shade of terracotta would make a huge difference. Plenty of examples of such colors can be found in Venice, which held Motovun for more than five centuries. The people dealing with preservation of historical heritage in Istria have a long way to go. A long, long way. The destruction of Venetian historical heritage is what they are actually about. And I was dying to see the new color on the façade of the communal palace in Motovun.

*Addendum II* (January 30, 2015)

It is good to spell out the name of the person responsible for the botched-up color of the communal palace in Motovun. It is no-one else but Ivan Matejčić, who has screwed up much of the historical heritage in the hilltown. Purportedly the greatest “expert” in Istria, he has screwed up much else across the peninsula, it goes without saying. But the abominable color of the façade is part and parcel of Matejčić’s systematic effort to erase every trace of Venice from every town within his remit. Wherever he has a chance, he goes for the Croatian gray, his “color” of choice. I was so happy at the news of his retirement ten years ago, but my joy was entirely misplaced (“Good Riddance, Ivan Matejčić!” November 18, 2005). Alas, he is still around!

*Addendum III* (May 5, 2015)

The plot thickens, though. Two more sections of the communal palace’s façade have just been covered with plaster and painted. In fact, the scaffolds have been removed only today. These sections rise above the ramp that leads to the archway connecting the lower and upper squares. One section was painted the same off-white as before, but the other is pale ochre now. The section above the gate of the archway is plastered in a special way, so that some stones still show through it. This is something entirely new to Motovun. Even though I prefer the pale ochre to off-white, the partially exposed stone I find no less than despicable. I have never seen anything like it in Venice. How in the world has Matejčić come up with this last trick of his? By and by, he is turning into an author rather than an art historian. And the medieval hilltown is his canvass to play with as he sees fit.

#### THOSE TWO FAMILIES, AGAIN (March 28, 2014)

Just like last year, as well as several years before last, I relish my return to Motovun. I talk to everyone I meet on Gradiziol and Borgo except those two families that would rather see me never again (“Those Two Families,” March 29, 2013). But there is one small difference this year among years: more and more people in the hilltown tell me point blank that the same two families cannot stand them, either. People like to say that there is something wrong with Motovun, which is forever pulled apart by all sorts of rivalries, but it seems that everything boils down to those two families and their closest friends. In the last analysis, it is only a handful of people who are driving the whole community apart. But when will everyone figure it out at last? The way things are shaping, I reckon it is a matter of months at most.

#### PURE REAL ESTATE (May 2, 2014)

The only grocery store in the historic part of Motovun has changed operators. The transition has gone very smoothly. It took place on May Day, which is a public holiday in Croatia. The store has not changed much, either. All the elderly people from the hilltown who do not drive, like myself, will be happy with the smoothness of the transition. But the change is of some interest in its own right. The old operator was from Pazin, and the new one is from Buzet. And this is what can be expected of all the stores, cafés, restaurants, apartments or houses for rent, and hotels in Motovun. Having become a tourist attraction to be reckoned with, it has become attractive to both owners and operators living some way away. Only the properties will stay where they are. In the case of the grocery store, the owner of the property lives in Motovun, and in the same building, but an increasing number of other businesses have both the owner and the operator living elsewhere in Istria, Croatia, or even abroad. And this is the hilltown’s imminent future, for it is quite deserted out of the tourist season. There are fewer and fewer families with children in Motovun. The elderly are dying one by one and leaving their houses empty. In a few short years, it will be a ghost town during the winter months. In business terms, it will become pure real estate.

#### THOSE TWO FAMILIES, AGAIN AND AGAIN (June 11, 2014)

Having witnessed one assault too many from a member of one of those two families that seem to be behind most of the strife in Motovun, I cannot but wonder about mental illness as the underlying cause. What else could explain so much misery in the hilltown? In the case of one of the families, the connection is unmistakable, which started me thinking in the first place. The medical diagnosis of an important member of this family is beyond me, but paranoid schizophrenia

strikes me as the right verdict. The Istrian peninsula is rife with it, too. I do not know the other family well enough, but the same diagnosis seems plausible at first glance. To learn a bit more about this condition, I just checked it on the World Wide Web. Losing touch with reality is mentioned over and over again. This is accompanied by delusions and hallucinations having to do with a belief that everyone is out to cause you harm. Among the symptoms are disorganized speech and behavior, as well as inappropriate affect. All this is quite plausible in the case of those two families. But what can be done about the underlying mental illness? This is where I am baffled in spite of my considerable effort. As far as I can tell, the first step forward is the recognition of the problem. But who in the world could even suggest such a thing to those two families?

*Addendum* (February 17, 2017)

Now that the winter seems to be ebbing, I am starting to think about my return to Motovun once again. Quite a few friends pop up in my mind, and I am happy that I will be with them early this spring. Against my will, I cannot but think of those two families, as well (“Those Two Families,” March 29, 2013; and “Those Two Families, Again,” March 28, 2014). These are families Vugrinec and Ivašić, it goes without saying. And I must admit that I am far from happy to see some of them ever again. Alas, Motovun is so medieval that I cannot but see a few of them every single day! In my predicament, I find myself searching the World Wide Web for paranoid schizophrenia one more time. Although the mental illness seems to be quite widespread in Istria, I cannot find much more about it. How to diagnose it? More important, how to deal with it? To my chagrin, it appears that psychiatrists are not doing their job in these parts. What are we to do with families such as these two? Are we to suffer from their shenanigans for ever and ever?

RENT-A-TOWN (August 2, 2014)

I often argue that Motovun has become a stage set of sorts (“A Stage Set,” July 15, 2013). Old people die and young people leave. A growing number of owners of buildings, shops, or restaurants come from elsewhere, and the same holds for those who rent out these facilities so as to provide all kinds of services for the growing number of tourists. The hilltown is thus crowded during tourist seasons and almost deserted between them. As years go by, this trend will become ever more pronounced. While I was talking about this sorry state of affairs earlier today, I came up with a term that struck me as perfect for the stage set in the making: rent-a-town. Sooner or later, someone will indeed rent the whole town for a few merry weeks. But Motovun will be ready for the lucrative venture in just a few short years.

## MOTOVUN'S DEFENSE STRATEGY (August 11, 2014)

I have long entertained my friends with stories about Motovun's medieval walls, which could come handy once climate change takes its bite and marauders of every description start roaming the earth ("With a Little Bit of Savvy," September 8, 2006). Yesterday evening I talked about the walls with Ljubo Mišćević from the Architecture Faculty at the University of Zagreb, who runs the Summer School of Architecture in Motovun. I suggested that an interesting exercise for his students could be the transformation of the hilltown into a fortification once again. The exercise would demand quite a bit of thought. Several gates need to be rebuilt. Houses leaning against the walls need to be brought down. Subsidiary walls also need to be rebuilt. Trees growing around the Motovun hill need to be felled. All this needs to be accomplished while conserving both materials and labor. And it needs much thought about defense as such. If an additional requirement would be to accomplish everything in a fortnight, for the marauders have just crossed Učka to the east and are marching west, the exercise would become quite exciting. This morning I heard from Ljubo that he was considering my suggestion quite seriously. He may propose it to the summer school students as early as next year. After a few summers, we may well have Motovun's defense strategy considered from every plausible angle.

### *Addendum* (August 14, 2015)

This year's summer school is over by now, and both teachers and students are already gone, but Motovun's defense strategy has not been addressed at all. When I mentioned it in passing to the assembled students in a few words of welcome on the day of their arrival, they looked at me without comprehension. And Miscevic just giggled for all to see. I did not expect that my suggestion would fly any time soon, anyhow. Although I did hope that he would talk about it with the students, hope is only hope. The future is bright, though. Assuming that the summer school is still around in a decade or so, the defense strategy of the hilltown will surely be embraced by both teachers and students. The need for it will be palpable enough by then, I reckon.

## WHITE PLAGUE (September 15, 2014)

Soon after I arrived in Motovun, I learned that there were about a hundred pupils at the local elementary school. This number is easy to remember, and so it stuck in my mind. Two or three years later, it dropped to ninety, and I started getting worried. I remember being stunned a couple of years ago to learn that there were only sixty-five pupils left in the school. But I learned today that the number of pupils has plummeted to about fifty since then. To be exact, there are fifty-three of them this year. In short, the number of pupils in the school has been halved in a bit more than a decade. Flabbergasted, I let my

feelings rip: “That’s worse than the plague!” One of the people I was talking to just giggled: “That’s white plague for you...” Having calmed down a bit, I also learned that there was no first grade this year. This would require at least a few children six or seven years of age. But I hate to think what will happen in another decade or so. Chances are the elementary school will be history by then. There will be a rusty chain and a padlock on its front door. The few children left will be riding to one of the neighboring towns.

#### BON’S FOREST (October 2, 2014)

I must have slung at least five-hundred chestnuts into the woods under my house this year. And I must have slung at least as many around this time last year (“Helping the Chestnut Trees,” September 29, 2013). That adds up to about a thousand chestnuts so far. If one in a hundred gets lucky, that means there will be ten chestnut trees under my house one fine day. If I continue like this for ten more years, there will be fifty of them at least. Those in the know already call it Bon’s forest. As I write, a pile of chestnuts glows on my dining table. They are ready to go. Ready to go, too, my sling is right next to them. The forest’s name is none of their business. Neither is my impassioned writing about the fabulous forest of the future.

#### *Addendum* (October 21, 2016)

Bon’s forest is advancing at a clip, I am happy to report. Last year I slung about five-hundred chestnuts into the woods under my terrace. And around one-thousand and two-hundred of them went into the woods earlier this year. All told, this amounts to two-thousand and seven-hundred chestnuts over the last four years. At the rate of one in a hundred, which still strikes me as rather plausible, there will soon be twenty-seven chestnut trees under my house. If I continue at this pace for five or six more years, a hundred or so chestnut trees will take hold in the fullness of time. By and by, slinging chestnuts from my terrace will make ever less sense, as the reproductive cycle will establish itself. The chestnut trees themselves will provide all the chestnuts required. And Bon’s forest will no longer be a joke.

#### PIERO TOMAZ (February 9, 2015)

Martina Pahović sent me a mobile-phone text-message this morning to the effect that she and her sister-in-law-to-be. Samanta Pergar née Bertoša, would be in Zagreb this afternoon. The two of them took part in a presentation of Istrian wines in Hotel Esplanade because Martina’s husband-to-be, Robi Bertoša, could not come to present his wines. As soon as I entered a large hall with many stands piled high with wine bottles, I saw Klaudio Tomaz. We shook hands and exchanged a few words. Going around, I bumped into Marko Fakin and his brother,

Alen. Once again, we shook hands and exchanged a few words. At last I came to Martina and Samanta, whom I had hard time finding in the crowd of nearly fifty winemakers. After many hugs and kisses, we talked about everyone in Motovun. They asked me about my beloved, as well. Only then I learned that Piero Tomaz, Klaudio's grandfather, had died today. He was ninety-seven, a year less than thirty years my senior. Anyway, the news shook me much more than I would have expected. The last time I saw Piero was a bit less than a decade ago, but I always felt quite happy to hear that he was alive and well. There was quite a bit of pride when he told me himself that he was the oldest one around ("The Oldest One in Town," March 16, 2006). Shaken a bit, I hugged and kissed Martina and Samanta one more time, and then returned to Klaudio's stand. I shook his hand for the second time, this time with feeling. Words almost failed me, though. Piero was close to my heart.

#### MEGYER, MOTOVUN (February 25, 2015)

I just came across an article about an entire Hungarian village available for rent. The mayor of the village aims to put it on the map and thus bring in some cash. For about seven-hundred euros a day, interested parties can get the pretty but largely deserted village of Megyer with a population of eighteen people. An advertisement posted on the World Wide Web offers seven "peasant-style" houses, a cultural center, the mayor's office, and a bus stop. The story reminded me of my ideas regarding Motovun ("Rent-a-Town," August 2, 2014). I will have to talk with the mayor about this. For, say, ten-thousand euros a day, interested parties could get a pretty but largely deserted medieval town in the heart of Istria. It would be perfect for posh weddings, cultural events, and corporate gatherings. With Megyer as an example, much cash could be brought in and used for the upkeep of the hilltown. Hey, it would be like new in just a few years!

#### FORECASTS, SCENARIOS (March 22, 2015)

I am not fond of fiction, let alone of fiction writers, but I am thinking about the creed increasingly often. Their vaunted creativity may have a useful function, after all. My thoughts are driven by dramatic climate change, it goes without saying. Credible forecasts of things to come are expected from scientists, but they are focusing on funny numbers, at least from the vantage point of an average human. The increase of the average temperature on earth is uppermost on their minds. What does that mean for any particular place on the planet's surface, though? That is well beyond scientists, and this is where writers may be of help in years to come. They can come up with credible scenarios of things to come in place of barren forecasts. This is what I have been doing in connection with my hometown, as it were ("Motovun's Defense Strategy," August 11, 2014). The fortifications



from the Thirteenth Century may well come useful once again in the Twenty-First. Thinking further along these lines, I can see the populations of Kaldir, Brkač, and Sveti Bartol huddled behind the stone walls as marauders keep coming in ever-larger numbers. Protecting the food supplies will be crucial to them, and not only life and limb. And so on. A writer in all but name, I may help my hometown more by thinking through scenarios of this kind than by trying to fathom scientific forecasts of all sorts. Enough said. Long live fiction!

*THE MOTOVUN HERALD* (April 9, 2015)

The first issue of *The Motovun Herald* came out last month. I got a copy only today, but I was quite stunned by it. I assumed it was a small publication on just a few pages, but it is actually of the standard review format, and it counts nearly fifty pages. Wow! Bursting with excellent photographs by Martin Močibob and Romina Kotiga, both of them from the municipality, it is a pleasure to leaf through. Tomislav Pahović, the mayor of Motovun, is the editor. The issue opens with his letter to the municipality. The publisher is the Municipality of Motovun. Beside Motovun itself, the surrounding settlements of Brkač, Kaldir, and Sveti Bartol are presented in the review's pages.

All the projects conducted since the last municipal elections are presented, and it is amazing how much has been accomplished in less than two years. There are articles about the new façade of the communal palace, the new sewer system, and the refurbishment of the cultural heritage with the financial help from Veneto in Italy. Also, the new system of garbage collection is presented. The Program of Municipal Development from 2014 to 2020 is presented in considerable detail, and so is the Municipal Budget for 2015. All this could only be dreamed about under the former mayor, Slobodan Vugrinec, who was in power for twelve full years.

A large number of cultural events are also represented in the first edition of the review. There are articles about the Motovun Film Festival, the Festival of Teran and Truffles, the Veli Jože Festival, the Fruit Festival in Kaldir, the Motovun Downtown bicycle race, and so forth. The new Parenzana Train, which goes along the old railway route between Motovun and Vižinada, is introduced. The Italian Community is also represented with two articles. All this suggests tremendous changes in recent years that go in line with rapid tourist development in the municipality and Istria as a whole.

All in all, I am delighted with the new review dedicated to Motovun and the surrounding settlements. The first question that came to my mind after leafing through it concerned the next issue. When can we expect it? I am yet to talk to the new mayor about it, but it appears that there will be two issues a year. Given all the givens, this stands to

reason. But *The Motovun Herald* is here to stay. It is available to all on the Motovun Municipality's website, which has been redesigned only recently ([www.motovun.hr](http://www.motovun.hr)). This was unimaginable only a couple of years ago, but times are undoubtedly changing. My congratulations to the new crew at the municipal helm.

#### SAINT STEPHEN'S DAY (August 9, 2015)

Saint Stephen the First Martyr is the patron saint of Motovun. The church on the upper square is dedicated to him. He is celebrated the first Sunday after August 3, which is the actual date of the feast. Last year this date fell on a Sunday, and it was thus celebrated on that particular day, while this year it fell on last Monday. But a quick search on the World Wide Web shows that Saint Stephen is celebrated on Boxing Day, which falls on December 26, across much of the Christian world in the west, and on December 27 in the east. However, the magical date is August 20 in Hungary, and Saint Stephen is a major saint there in connection with a famous king of that name. Just like in Motovun, it is celebrated on August 3 in several other Croatian towns, such as Opuzen close to the Neretva River in southern Dalmatia. Whence so many dates, though? The simple answer is that not even the Catholic church could hope to keep its fickle flock in line on such a simple thing as the saint's date. Add the Orthodox and Protestant churches, and the problem gets even more complicated. In fact, it is a miracle Saint Stephen's Day is not all over the calendar by now. After a few more millennia, it surely will be.

#### THE LAND OF PLENTY (August 11, 2015)

Hotel Kaštel is situated on top of the Motovun hill. The largest tourist accommodation in the hilltown, it has more than thirty rooms. As there is hardly any place for parking around the hotel, tourists are brought to its door by the hotel van. Most of them cannot walk up the hill, let alone carry their own luggage. So, the van goes all the way up Gradiziol, across the lower square, through the archway leading to the upper square, to the hotel door between twenty and thirty times a day. As well the other way around each and every time. During lunch and dinner, when the three restaurants on the lower square are full, the van passes by at least ten times. There are many solutions to this annoying distraction, but all of them would involve touching the cultural heritage. For instance, an elevator for both passengers and freight could be attached to the town walls next to the hotel. Similarly, a funicular could ferry the tourist from further down the hill. All this is out of the question, for cultural heritage would be in jeopardy. The hotel van is just fine from the vantage point of the authorities concerned with such lofty issues. As far as they are concerned, it could trundle up and down the hill all day long. By now, the cobblestones all around Motovun are in dire shape, but they are not a

part of the cultural heritage for some strange reason. When it comes to idiocy, Istria is the land of plenty. Sorry, Croatia.

#### THE APPLAUSE (August 15, 2015)

Nemanja Zimonjić from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology or Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule in Zürich, Switzerland, recently brought to Motovun a large group of teachers and students of architecture from many different European countries. With the blessing of Ljubomir Mišćević, who runs the Summer School of the Architectural Faculty at the University of Zagreb, they are using the school's facilities on the upper square. Zimonjić asked me to give a talk to the group this morning. Anything about the hilltown would do, he instructed me. And so I spent about two hours talking about everything that crossed my mind. I covered the essentials of Motovun's history, its present problems, and some potential future issues. First I walked with nearly fifty people around the walls, and then I ended up on the upper square in front of the school's building. The last topic I talked about was Vedran Sinožić's claim that this was the venue of ancient Troy. There was quite a bit of surprise among all the assembled when they heard about the Greek origin of Istria's name, as well as the peninsula's place in the myth about Argonauts. When I finished talking, there was a long and loud applause. Several hours later, I was with Martina Pahović when she was telling several friends about the heartfelt applause, which she had heard while at morning mass in the church. "You should have heard it!" she concluded with a chuckle. I made a joke about it, but her story came to me as a big puzzle. I remembered the applause visually, as it were, but I did not actually hear nearly any of it. I could see many hands clapping, and I could see my own hands clapping when I joined the applause at some point. But the sound came to me only when Martina mentioned it hours later. Indeed, it was long and loud. The upper square reverberated with it.

#### *Addendum* (December 15, 2015)

As luck would have it, I learned from a source I could not but trust that one of the students who was on the upper square that summer afternoon reported several days later to some friends and relatives that my talk was hard to take on account of my overwhelming conceit and arrogance. Reportedly, the student in question found me no less than ridiculous in my dotage. In retrospect, the applause meant much less to me than this scolding reproach, which came my way by sheer accident. If anyone asks me to give a talk to students visiting Motovun ever again, I will flatly refuse it. Applauses I do not need, no matter how long and loud, but offhand remarks about my conceit and arrogance I need even less. Much less, as a matter of fact. The same applies to any public appearance whatsoever. They are history. Concerning my ideas and opinions, I will make them public only on

my *Residua* website. Anyone who wishes to communicate with me regarding any of my writings can do so *via* the website's feedback function. And that is that. Farewell, fellow humans!

#### TOO DESOLATE BY HALF (January 14, 2016)

Motovun comes to my mind every few days. Not that I miss it, I hasten to add. I only feel kind of sorry for the hilltown. Packed with tourists in the warm months, it is deserted in cold ones. Its permanent inhabitants are dwindling, too. Many of them are quite long in the tooth, and thus I wonder every winter how many of them will be gone by the time I return in the spring. By and by, my hometown will be deserted for true. Even the street cats will be gone sooner or later. My sadness is accompanied by a touch of guilt, I must confess. Winter after winter, I feel like a deserter of sorts. Having become used to my winters in Zagreb, I cannot even imagine staying in Motovun all year long any longer. It is too desolate by half. Which is why my heart goes to the few remaining friends, who somehow manage to survive the desolation year after year. But how much longer, I wonder?

#### VUGI (January 25, 2016)

I dreamt that I was poking fun at Slobodan Vugrinec, the former mayor of Motovun, at a large gathering of municipal politicians and administrators from Istria, where he was also in attendance. Everything I said was couched in terms of mock praise. I went on and on about his alertness and shrewdness, his powerful connections and knowledge of the law, and his spitefulness and pitilessness. To make my argument as cogent as possible, I used my own experience with him as a pertinent example. It was no hearsay I was talking about, that is. As one of the former mayor's many victims, I felt his many skills on my own skin. As I went on, I started referring to him as Vugi, the name I always use in mock endearment when I talk about him. I also talked about his erstwhile girlfriend from his municipal office, whom I lampooned as Vugina in my praise of his sexual appeal and proficiency. There was much laughter as I proceeded, and so I invited Vugi to the platform from which I was speaking. In small and unsure steps, he joined me at some point, but he never looked up in a combination of modesty and shame for everything I had said in his, as it were, praise. He looked outright pitiful with his head bowed down. In the end, I felt like hugging him in front of the merry audience, but I never did. I woke up kind of elated by the funny dream. Feeling sorry for my most bitter Motovun enemy is a wonderful way to start the day.

## NEW FUCKING TUSCANY, AGAIN AND AGAIN (March 30, 2016)

I was already in bed last night when the electricity conked out. When I checked the time, it was about half an hour before midnight. This struck me as a problem far from Motovun. Quite likely, a good part of Istria was without electricity in the early days of this year's tourist season. And so I waited to see when the electricity would come back. The house got colder and colder, for the central heating system cannot work without electricity, and I wrapped myself ever more tightly in my bedding. I would doze off from time to time, but I kept waiting for the heating system to kick in once again. When it finally did, I checked the time again, and it was around one o'clock in the morning. There was no electricity for an hour and a half, no less. The heating system went crazy, and it kept working at full tilt for quite a while. And Istria is trumpeted far and wide as the new fucking Tuscany, as though good wine and olive oil are sufficient for such a bold claim! To this day, the morons who run the peninsula regularly forget that tourism makes little sense without the basic infrastructure: electricity, water, sewage, roads, parking, garbage collection...

## THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING (May 4, 2016)

I asked several people in Motovun where I could get real eggs, or eggs laid by chickens that are free to roam around their owner's house. This is what my beloved asked me to do before she left several days ago. Everyone I talked to suggested that I should talk to Branka Šćulac from Divjaki, a hamlet visible from Motovun. She is the head waitress at Hotel Kaštel on top of the Motovun hill, and I know her ever since I moved here. I also know her husband Irenko, as well as her son Kristijan, who works at the hotel reception. When I told Branka that I wanted to buy some eggs from her, she chuckled. "Tell me how many you need," she said, "and I will bring them in a day or two." She has only fifteen hens, and it takes a while for them to lay the eggs. "Oh," I smiled, "bring me any number you can." We agreed that I would pick them up the next day, which was yesterday. Branka had six eggs for me. Each one was different in shape and color. When I told her that I wanted to boil them, she suggested that I should wait until today. "Just laid eggs can be hard to peel when boiled," she explained. I boiled the eggs earlier today, and I cracked open one of them a minute ago. It peeled without any problem, and it was delicious. My beloved will be pleased. To my surprise, I felt outright fortunate to have found real eggs so close to my home. Knowing Branka and her family so well only added to my exuberance. Out of the blue, the delicious egg struck me as the proof of the pudding. Moving to Motovun was the right decision, after all.

*Addendum* (August 18, 2016)

Since this piece was penned, Branka has brought me four or five batches of eggs. They are always very to my liking. Talking with her about her hens is a special joy, too. But the last batch of ten eggs, which I got from Branka yesterday afternoon and boiled this morning as per her instructions, delights me no end. The range of colors, sizes, and shapes is simply stunning. To begin with, it is clear that each egg comes from a different hen. On top of that, there can be no doubt that all the hens are quite different in color, size, and shape. To my chagrin, it will be almost painful to start breaking and eating them the next few days! I shudder way in advance...

WINEMAKING (May 14, 2016)

I was at Benjamin's yesterday evening when Marko Fakin appeared on television. He was celebrated as the winner of a major wine festival in Istria. A moment later, Klaudio Tomaz appeared on the screen, soon to be followed by Nikola Benvenuti. I was delighted to see three winemakers from Motovun in the same show. Wherever I go this morning, I mention their great success. Everyone I talk to is pleased about it, too, but they are also a bit surprised by my enthusiasm, which strikes them as over the top. And then I mention that all of the winemakers in these parts came to prominence after my arrival to the hilltown. Not a single one among them bottled wine at the time, but sold it in bulk. I also mention that Fakin was only twelve years old when I first met him. By and by, everyone I talk to agrees that winemaking has made great strides in the last decade or so. My enthusiasm explained, I feel kind of vindicated. But the fact remains that Motovun is ever closer to my heart. My feelings are over the top, no doubt. Once again, I seem to be falling in love with the place. And winemaking is only a small albeit delightful part of the story.

THE INCESSANT BUZZING (May 28, 2016)

As I am fooling around with weeds in my garden, I hear a wasp close by. I look around, but I cannot see the insect. The buzz becomes stronger a short while later, and I look around once again. It must be a much bigger insect, I reckon. Only then I realize that it is a drone. A drone with a camera, that is. I look toward the sky, and I spot it soon enough. It is quite high above the Motovun hill, but its buzz is still very close. Uncomfortably close, too. It does not take me long to start feeling annoyed by the drone. Someone has brought it over to get a few good pictures of the medieval town, but all the others have to listen to the insect-like buzzing of the contraption. Modern technology in a nutshell. For all its pluses, it carries even more minuses for all concerned. And the incessant buzzing is not even mentioned in so many ads for drones with cameras nowadays. What is more, their

owners could not care less about the effect their toys have on everyone within an earshot. Tired of the noise, I return to my house. But the buzzing is still with me. Alas, it penetrates the closed windows and doors with utmost ease...

*Addendum* (May 29, 2016)

As I learned later in the day, it was Luka Laganis's drone that annoyed me so much yesterday. His photographs will be part of an upcoming show staged by a just-established association of young photographers from Motovun, the surrounding villages, and other parts of Istria. Aptly named Fotovun, the association is also investigating the rich photographic heritage of the hilltown. A good part of it will soon be shown, as well. Apparently, it will be an event to remember in these parts. Having learned all this, I calmed down quite a bit. "Alright, alright," I slapped Luka on the shoulder in mock seriousness, "but make sure the show is a smashing success!" He agrees that the buzzing can be annoying on occasion, but he argues that the photographs taken with the drone are pretty amazing to behold, too. Granted. Coming from the neighboring Kaldir, he knows the value of peace and quiet. I only hope that new generations of drones with cameras will be less of a bother to the ear. A great challenge for the vaunted technology!

SPINNING IN HIS GRAVE (June 3, 2016)

Today and tomorrow, Vladimir Nator's tale about Veli Jože—that is, Big Joe—is being celebrated in Motovun. The powerful giant symbolizes the struggle of Slavs against Venetians, as well as all other "invaders" upon the Istrian peninsula and other lands populated by Slavs. The novel came out in 1907, when Slavic states, such as Croatia and Slovenia, were still nothing but pipedreams. Yugoslavia was formed only in 1918 as the country of South Slavs. Of course, Nator forgot that it was actually the Slavs who were invaders in these parts from the Fifth Century onwards. They reached Istria only in the Eighth Century, when they were perceived explicitly as invaders. Anyhow, it is interesting to witness the celebration a quarter of a century after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The tale of Veli Jože is meant for children only! Nator must be spinning in his grave. Actually, his novel was meant for grownups only! Children were farthest from his mind around the turn of the century, when the tale of the powerful giant started taking shape in his mind. Alas, history's twists and turns are beyond anyone's ken.

SWEARING AT IVAN MATEJČIĆ (June 23, 2016)

The day was hot, and so my beloved and I decided to spend the afternoon on a beach near Novigrad. Of all the towns on the western

coast of Istria, it is the closest to Motovun. A recently completed road makes it a cinch to get to. It was quite a joy to take a dip, as well. It was my first in some seven years! On our way back, we had an early dinner, and then we headed home. As my beloved drove up the Mirna valley, which is greener than ever after much rain, I waited to see the hilltown. It is always a joy to see it from afar.

When it finally appeared in the distance, I immediately started swearing at Ivan Matejčić. And at the top of my voice. The color of the communal palace is no less than disgusting, and it was his very choice (“The Five Bifore,” March 22, 2014). The only two houses facing west that are not painted his favorite Croatian gray are Miro Kopčalić’s and my own. Miro’s is terracotta, and mine is pink. Again, all the other houses are in myriad shades of Croatian gray (“Croatian Gray Forever!” May 6, 2011). The pits.

After much effort, Matejčić has succeeded in obliterating Venetian colors from the top of the Motovun hill. Dominant as it is, the communal palace should have been either terracotta or ocher in color. The only reason I stopped swearing at the purported leading expert in protection of Istrian historical heritage was my beloved. Indeed, I felt sorry for her. Although the communal palace was painted a couple of years ago, this was the first time I saw it from the road to Novigrad. For the Venetian in me, Matejčić’s Croatian taste is simply disgusting. Nay, revolting.

*Addendum* (June 27, 2016)

On return from our second day on the beach this afternoon, I started swearing at Ivan Matejčić as soon as Motovun came I sight one more time. Once again, I could not believe my own eyes. The hilltown looks despicable in Croatian gray. But I also noticed this time around that there was another pink house visible from the road to Novigrad. On top of the town walls, it belongs to family Grubor. Although its color is very similar to my house, I missed it the last time because it is on the small side. Returning to my passionate swearing, my beloved stopped me soon enough. “C’mon,” she sighed, “enough!” She knows my opinion of the purported leading expert in protection of Istrian historical heritage well enough. In fact, I have been swearing at him ever since I moved to Motovun.

THE STONE WELLHEAD (July 2, 2016)

The hotel terrace was kind of full this afternoon, and so I had my drink in a little courtyard behind the main building of the hotel, where I was all alone. Right next to my table was a stone wellhead bearing the coat-of-arms of the Polesini family. They erected their erstwhile palace in the Sixteenth Century and occupied it until the end of World War II, when they left for Italy. They were the key noble family in



Motovun for centuries. On one side of the wellhead, there are four characters that spell something like “ISIG.” In fact, it is the year it was made, which is 1516. It did not take me long to figure out that this was exactly five centuries ago. When I finished my drink, I went to the office of Igor Legović, the hotel director. His wife’s family owns the hotel since Croatia’s independence. “Hey,” I grinned at him happily, “that stone wellhead in your courtyard needs celebrating!” He was surprised at first, but then he promised to think about it. Five centuries is hardly a joke, and a little celebration would be good advertising for the hotel. If this opportunity is missed, the stone wellhead will have to wait an entire century for the next one. But it has all the time in the world, anyway.

#### CUSTOMERS FROM HEAVEN (August 11, 2016)

My Internet service went awry in mid-morning. I kept trying to get to the World Wide Web time and again, but without any success. And then I talked to a number of people around Motovun, including restaurant and café owners, and many of them told me that their Internet service was also dead. Still, none of them complained about the problem. In the early afternoon, I called the Internet service provider. It took me a while to get to talk to anyone, but I quickly learned that there were other complaints from the hilltown, albeit only a few of them. The problem remained unchecked, though. In fact, the Internet service came back to life only in the mid-afternoon. That is, some six hours later! And I am talking about the Croatian branch of Deutsche Telekom, of all service providers. Right in the middle of the tourist season, the World Wide Web is not available for hours upon hours without anyone in the company even noticing that something is amiss. Used to all sorts of problems with the infrastructure, including the vaunted Internet service, most of the Motovun inhabitants would not even think of complaining. They have long learned that complaining is for the birds, anyhow. Come to think of it, this is a perfect business environment for Deutsche Telekom. Just perfect. Croats are customers from heaven, no less.

#### HOMAGE TO FOTOVUN (September 4, 2016)

There is an exhibition of vintage photographs from Motovun in Hotel Kaštel on the upper square. Organized by Fotovun, an association of photographers from the hilltown, its environs, and the rest of Istria, it is worth visiting many times over. I go through the gallery once a week at least. All the photographs are black-and-white. Some of them are quite musty, and I learned from the organizers that it was quite a job restoring them for the exhibition. Taken between the very end of the Nineteenth Century through the middle of the Twentieth, they depict the hilltown as it was well before it became a tourist attraction of renown. In the first half of the Twentieth Century, it was still real, as it

were. More often than not, I come out of the gallery with a heavy heart. And this is how I feel after my last visit a short while ago. What struck me as almost incredible while I was going from one photograph to another this time around was that I was born close to the end of the exhibits on offer. In fact, the first precise date is 1898 and the last is 1948, two years after I was born, but there are a few photographs taken in the Fifties, when I started going to school already. Coming out of the gallery, I felt ancient. The black-and-white photographs made me feel my age, and I could easily spot my face in any one of them. But Fotovun made it as clear as clear can possibly be. Congratulations!

#### HEATING OIL BLUES (September 22, 2016)

This is an exciting day for me. Very exciting, indeed. This morning I made arrangements for the delivery of heating oil. The cistern will be here early Sunday morning, three days from now. If everything goes according to plan, that is. If not, a new arrangement will have to be made. And then another. At any rate, I am quite excited. Heating oil is coming! Sooner or later, the tank in my basement will be full to the brim once again. The fall is here already, and it is getting nipper by the day. Besides, the winter is likely to be quite long. As of late, winters stretch well into springs. It never gets really cold in these parts, but it would be tough without heating oil still. Whence my excitement, of course. As well as a dash of anxiety, for one can never be sure about the delivery of heating oil. It can always go awry for some reason the cistern driver alone knows. More often than not, the annual ordeal takes quite a few days. And this is the very first day this time around. With some luck, everything will be just fine. Oh, I can already smell the heating oil in my basement! The bliss.

#### *Addendum I* (September 23, 2016)

Well, well. Ljubica Handjal's heirs are refurbishing her house for rental to tourists, and scaffolding has just appeared in front of it. As I write, the temporary steel structure is reaching higher and higher up the derelict façade on top of Borgo. To my horror, the cistern cannot possibly squeeze between the scaffolding and the Bellini house across the street. This morning I talked with the man leading the construction team engaged to refurbish the façade, and he told me that their job would be finished in about a month, the weather permitting. The scaffolding would come down soon afterwards. In short, I will have to make new arrangements for the delivery of heating oil by the end of next month. Motovun! Heating oil blues for true.

#### *Addendum II* (September 27, 2016)

A few days after the first *addendum* was penned, things have changed once again. As I write, I can smell the heating oil in my basement.

And no kidding. What happened? The heating oil was delivered to Marko Koraca in the Motovun foothills, and then he brought it to my house close to the top of the hill with his tractor and trailer. He has a large plastic container in the trailer, as well as a hose long enough to reach my basement. Marko is quite nimble with his tractor, and he squeezes past the scaffoldings on top of Borgo without any problem. Given his prowess with delivery of all sorts of awkward things, including wood for my fireplace, I may well entrust the heating oil delivery to him in the years to come. He seems to be quite chummy with the fellow who drives the cistern, which closes the circle. With some luck, this may spell the end of the heating oil blues for me. Fingers crossed.

#### ATTRACTIONS OF NEW TUSCANY (October 7, 2016)

Electricity has conked out again. Judging by recent outages, this one will take a few hours to be fixed. But this is one of the many attractions of New Tuscany.

#### THE MOTOVUN STATUTE (October 8, 2016)

Today was a special day in Motovun. There was a presentation of a book about its ancient statute in Hotel Kaštel, which was followed by a feast for all the assembled. And the lecture hall was packed full. Written by Ivan Milotić from the Faculty of Law at the University of Zagreb, it was published by the Motovun Municipality.[16] Tomislav Pahović, the mayor who oversaw the project over the last three years, opened the presentation. Three bishops were in the audience, one of whom was already retired. Purportedly, the statute goes back to the time when Motovun was in the hands of the patriarch of Aquileia, centuries before the Venetian acquisition of the hilltown. Thus it represents a particular combination of the church law and common law. The original documents are not in existence any longer, but there are their incomplete transcripts originally published in Trieste by Luigi Morteani, a noted Motovun historian from roughly a century ago.[17] Counting four-hundred and twenty-six pages, the book will take a while to digest. But the original Latin is a joy to browse through at once. “*De pena comitentis homicidium,*” I read first.[18] “*Dominus potestas, qui pro tempore fuerit teneatur pro comuni facere tenere corniclos muri castris vel barbacani apertos et bene mondatos sicut convenit in hac arte,*” I read next.[19] “*Nemo sit ausus, nec debeat loqui cum aliquo bandito Montone nec eis aliquid dare, vel mittere, aut consilium, vel favorem aliquem exhibere,*” I read last.[20] Sated, I put the book aside with a smile on my face. As I said, it will take a while to digest.

### BEFORE I DO (October 13, 2016)

Today is the third anniversary of Ljubica Handjal's death. Any thoughts? The only thought that comes to my mind is that Ljubica cannot possibly die before I do.

### A QUESTION OF TIME (November 27, 2016)

Ever since I bought my house in Motovun nearly fifteen years ago, I marveled at a stone wall lining the access road to the Barbacan parking lot. The wall displayed a big belly close to its base. It was only a question of time when it would collapse and jam the access to the parking lot. Ever longer rainy periods increased the likelihood of such an event. Whenever I would pass under that belly, which kept growing over the years, I stared at it in awe. If someone would be with me, I would point at the belly and sigh: "A question of time!" After a long rainy period, the wall collapsed last night. Luckily, no-one got hurt. The loose stone strewn across the access road was removed to the parking lot within hours. A bulldozer was at work much of the night. Right now, the hole in the wall reveals the roots of a chestnut tree towering above. For the time being, it is holding the earth and loose stones around it. The question is when the wall will be repaired, though. The rest of the wall will need to be brought down, as well, and the chestnut tree is thus in peril. One way or another, it will take a while to fix the problem. If only it were carefully planned and taken care of ten or more years ago...

### *Addendum I* (November 28, 2016)

On one of my uncharted journeys through my writings, I came across a piece dedicated to many a wall in Motovun that threatened to collapse, as well as the underlying cause of all such problems: poor drainage ("Drainage," January 8, 2006). Written a decade ago, it shows clearly enough that the wall along the access road to the Barbacan parking lot needed attention even then. Indeed, climate change has brought much more atmospheric water per unit of time than in the past, and drainage must be carefully considered across the entire hilltown. In the meanwhile, Motovun is in peril, as I concluded so many years ago.

### *Addendum II* (December 19, 2016)

On my walk around the town walls earlier today, I went by the hole in the wall on the ramp going up to the Barbacan parking lot. The passers-by are protected with a few planks under the hole, which is carefully marked with red-and-white plastic bands. To my chagrin, though, the chestnut tree above the hole is gone by now. It threatened to topple down onto the ramp and the houses across it. The same fate awaits all the other chestnut trees along the crumbling wall. Planted a century ago or so, they are past their prime, but I still feel sorry for

them well ahead of their demise. Luckily for them, I have flung many a chestnut from the hotel terrace and the Barbacan parking lot into the forest under my terrace (“Bon’s Forest,” October 2, 2014). The future is bright enough.

*Addendum III* (May 15, 2018)

The restoration of the wall that collapsed two years ago is nearing completion. As I write, it is a matter of hours. Underneath the stone there is a sturdy concrete wall with reinforcement of steel. At this stage, the stone is there only for decoration. It was put in place with great care, though. Members of the municipality’s maintenance crew—Djino Brajković, Antonio Flego, and Luka Pavletić—are rightfully proud of their achievement. In just a few years, the wall will look as old as the town wall behind and above it. Which is why they have chiseled this year into one of the shapely stones. Let there be no mistake about it! Old as Motovun is, it is being restored all the time. Without an able maintenance crew, it would have crumbled into dust long ago. Congratulations all around!

THE TURD STREET (December 5, 2016)

Whenever I go up or down Borgo, I pay close attention to all the turds on the cobblestones. There are many of them. Now that Motovun is almost empty, there are more and more of them, too. Most of the turds are on the small side, which means that they are left by street cats. There are no tourists any more, and so they spend most of their time around garbage cans and next to a few houses that are still inhabited. But some of the turds are rather large, suggesting that a few dog owners around Motovun let their pets leave them wherever they wish. Lately, navigating up and down the street thus requires ever more attention. Now that the sun is setting just past four o’clock in the afternoon, I am thinking about carrying a torch with me when I go out in the evening. The street is poorly lit, and I am sure to step into a turd sooner or later. An unappealing prospect, to be sure. Cleaning my walking shoes with their jagged soles is far from easy. Annoyed by an ever-larger number of turds along my street, I am thinking about proposing to the Municipal Council that Borgo needs renaming. The Turd Street sounds just right, I reckon.

*Addendum* (August 9, 2017)

It is summer, and there are plenty of street cats on Borgo, including this season’s kittens. Their turds are everywhere, as well. Once again, cleaning my sandals with their jagged soles is not an appealing prospect. Which is why renaming of the street has crossed my mind one more time. Given the hilltown’s origin, it should be in Veneto, the language of its erstwhile master. Calle de Merda thus strikes me as the right name for Borgo. Everyone in town would understand it at once,

as well as appreciate its aptness. And so would everyone from Venice and its many former possessions along the coast of the Mediterranean. Calle de Merda is the right name, to be sure. I only wonder what the Municipal Council of Motovun would do about the proposal I am contemplating.

#### *SEPVLCRVM FAMILIÆ BARBORVM* (December 10, 2016)

This evening was quite special in Motovun. It opened with an exhibition of photographs by the members of an association of photographers bearing the hilltown's name, Fotovun. Hotel Kaštel hosted the event. The exhibition hall was quite crowded, and the atmosphere was rather special. After the opening, there was a concert in St. Stephen's church next door. Among several choirs from Istria, a male *a capella* choir known as *Klapa Motovun* was foremost. I went to hear them. As I was listening to their sonorous songs, my eyes came to rest on a large marble stone on the floor of the isle of the church where I was standing. The Latin text on the marble polished by untold feet attracted my attention: *Sepvlcrvm familiæ Barborvm*. Indeed, the Venetian family Barbo played a prominent rôle in the hilltown between 1278 and 1797, when Motovun was in the hands of the Serene Republic. The family tomb in the middle of the church testifies to their prominence in no uncertain terms. All of a sudden, the singing of the *a capella* choir close to my heart acquired a new meaning for me. I was back in the Venetian Republic many centuries ago. Choked, I left St. Stephen's in a jiffy.

#### I LOVE MOTOVUN, AGAIN (December 17, 2016)

This morning I went for a cup of coffee to Hotel Kaštel on top of the Motovun hill, and then I went to the grocery store on Gradiziol. On my way, I met a whole bunch of people from the hilltown and neighboring villages. Each and every time, I stopped for a few words. There was much laughter, too. By the time I returned home, I went through the names of all the people I met. And here they are, in alphabetical order: Stanka Babić, Mila Benčić, Rebeka Bernat, Zlata Brajković, David Kadić, Ana Krnjus, Dragan Legović, Maria Matijasić, Kristijan Ščulac, Elvira Pišak, Mate Šebelić, Vesna Simić, Josipa Valenta, and Sonja Vivoda. Delighted by all these names and all these people, most of whom are women, I decided to write a few words about my walk to the hotel and the grocery store this morning. There is nothing to it, to be sure, but these names mean a lot to me. As such, they make me happy. To put it in slightly different words, I love Motovun. Again.

## ON CHRISTIAN HOLIDAYS AND TOURISM (December 30, 2016)

After the Christmas quiet, Motovun is coming to life once again, as it were. Unseasonable though it is, the weather is splendid. It is sunny and unusually warm. Tourists are coming along in search of surprises. Some of them will stay here through the New Year's, too. Chances are that there will be quite a few of them in the hotel, where there will be a big party spanning the two years. But it will all peter out by Epiphany less than a week later. The tourist season will finally be over, and everything will close. Although Easter is coming rather late next year, there will be very few tourists before it. The hilltown will enjoy about four months of dead and quiet. *Cimitero di Montona*, as I like to call it. Anyhow, I am putting all of this down just to point out how important are Christian holidays in charting the tourist season in these parts. They mark its beginning and end with great precision.

## THE HORRORS OF YESTERYEAR (April 2, 2017)

How does Motovun feel after three whole months? Yuck. The municipal elections a bit less than two months from now are bringing up all the horrors of yesteryear.

## “WHOEVER DIGS A PIT...” (May 9, 2017)

I am going around Motovun the last few days and telling people of a brand-new proverb: “Whoever digs a pit for oneself will fall into it.” Everyone corrects me, pointing out that this is an old proverb. When I repeat the first clause, they start laughing. They missed it, of course. The standard version of the proverb is known to everyone: “Whoever digs a pit for others will fall into it oneself.” Once the laughter subsides, I explain that the new proverb is emblematic of Motovun, and especially in connection with municipal elections, which never fail to bring out the very worst from the inhabitants of the hilltown. My explanation brings out much laughter once again. Of course, the original proverb comes straight from the bible: “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it” (Proverbs 26:27). Amazingly, the original version mentions neither others nor oneself. To wit, digging a pit is enough to cause all the trouble. Which is quite to my liking, I must admit.

## THE MOTOVUN HERALD, AGAIN (May 19, 2017)

The municipal elections are right ahead of us. They will take place this very Sunday. Tomica Pahović, the current mayor, and his Independents in coalition with Social Democrats are being challenged by the Istrian Democratic Assembly one more time. And I cannot but shake my head in disbelief. The three issues of *The Motovun Herald* are right in front of me on my dining table (“*The Motovun Herald*,”

April 9, 2015). As I like to put it, all it takes is to browse through these issues to make up one's mind. And everyone in the municipality has gotten all three issues for free. The first came out in March 2015, the second in April 2016, and the third in May 2017. Each issue lists the achievements of the current mayor and his mates since May 2013, when they came to power, and these achievements tower well above those by the Istrian Democratic Assembly ever since independence, which stretches over no less than five terms of office. Wow! But will the voters of the Motovun municipality browse through any of the issues of *The Motovun Herald* before this Sunday? For my sins, I cannot but hope that they will. They simply must. All it takes is a tiny bit of rationality, I reckon. Actually, nothing but a smidgeon of it, too. Fingers crossed.

#### THE FACEBOOK BATTLEFIELD (May 20, 2017)

Facebook is billed as a social-networking website that allows registered users to keep in touch with friends, family, and colleagues. Across the globe, millions of users visit it from day to day. Among other places, it is quite popular in Motovun, as well. Quite a few people I know are avid users, but I have abandoned it long ago ("Fuck Facebook, For Good," August 17, 2010). From what I hear around the hilltown, both friends and enemies enjoy the website as of late. Families and colleagues are right behind them, too. The upcoming municipal elections have made it a veritable battlefield, no less. Comments follow comments, and so do likes. Likes are counted avidly by all sides in the strife, and they are commented upon in turn. In a municipality counting no more than a thousand inhabitants, friends and enemies are in plain view of all concerned. By and by, the Facebook battlefield is offering all sorts of insights into the local politics, not to mention the most likely outcome of the municipal elections. Although I remain innocent of it all, and for good, my thoughts occasionally swing toward Mark Zuckerberg and his mates at Harvard who started it all more than a decade ago. And I cannot but pity the whole lot for their vaunted brainchild. The battlefield accessible to all around the entire world...

#### BEHIND US (May 21, 2017)

The municipal elections are behind us at long last. Phew! The Istrian Democratic Assembly has done everything in its power to topple Tomica Pahović as mayor of Motovun and his Independents in coalition with Social Democrats as the majority in the municipal council, but it has failed one more time ("A Revolution in Motovun," May 19, 2013). The political game got pretty dirty along the way, and dirty is the word, but the leading Istrian party will remain in opposition for four more years at least. It is my hope that it will gain power in Motovun never again, though. In power across much of the Istrian



peninsula ever since Croatia's independence, it has taken roots that are too deep by half. Not surprisingly, charges of corruption and organized crime are piling up as years go by.

I am delighted by the news even though I did not vote, which would break my solemn promise to the former Croatian president ("My Best Wishes: A Letter to Croatian President Ivo Josipović," April 15, 2011). I will vote in Croatia never again. Or anyplace else, for that matter, as I have promised myself in the meanwhile ("A Recipe for Foolproof Subversion," May 14, 2013). Voting is for the birds, at any rate.

Returning to the mayor and his team, there is much to do in the next four years. The second term will be far from easy. Motovun is becoming a tourist attraction to reckon with, and this comes at a cost. Much of the existing infrastructure needs rethinking and revamping because of the growing number of visitors. In addition, the existing facilities are gradually becoming stretched to their limits ("Motovun's Capacity Limitations," May 20, 2015). Soon enough, the inflow of tourists will have to be checked well before they reach their destination. There are only so many cafés, restaurants, shops, galleries, and sleeping quarters on the top of the Motovun hill. Aimless tourist throngs cannot but spoil the experience for those who have managed to find a temporary foothold. But I leave all this to the mayor and the municipal council. And I trust that they will be up to the task in years to come.

#### BACK HOME? (June 15, 2017)

After a fortnight in the Croatian capital, where I went to take care of my teeth, I am back in Motovun. And I am over the moon, I must confess. Once again, I feel that I am back home. The only problem is that "home" has become a fraught notion ever since my collision with the Istrian Democratic Assembly nearly a decade ago. The leading lights of the dominant Istrian party in the hilltown and farther afield made me feel like a foreigner in the land of my ancestors. Me, a foreigner? Many of them hailing from far, far away, they did everything they could to chase me away only because I was opposed to the golf and polo scams in Motovun, Istria, and Croatia as a whole. For that reason, I am weary of mentioning "home" ever again, but my return to Motovun is a delight nonetheless. Back home? Will I ever dare mention "home" without all the anxiety accumulated over the years, though? I doubt it, but my doubts are still worth mentioning whenever they surface. And in writing.

To the Istrian Democratic Assembly

#### FOUR AND A HALF CHESTNUT TREES (July 8, 2017)

As of a few days ago, there are only five chestnut trees left on the hotel terrace. Well, make it four and a half instead. The sun has clobbered the trees to the south of the terrace the last decade or so. The southernmost tree was reduced to a single branch, and its neighbor to the east was felled by a ferocious storm a week ago, while its neighbor to the west was crushed in half by the unexpected fall (“A Single and Puny Branch,” April 9, 2010). Only a stump now remains of the southernmost tree. Its neighbor to the west will also be gone in just a few years, for the sun has become merciless lately. And then the northernmost trees will go one by one as their protection wilts away. In another decade or two, there will be no chestnut trees left on the terrace. And there must have been nine of them half a century ago (“The Nine Chestnut Trees,” June 25, 2012). Which means that their number has been halved by now. With some luck, though, their progeny will thrive in the foothills of the Motovun hill. With the help of my sling, thousands of chestnuts have already found home to the west of my house (“Bon’s Forest,” October 2, 2014). As of late, this is my only solace.

#### *Addendum I* (September 3, 2017)

The remaining chestnut trees on the hotel terrace have suffered quite a bit the last few months. To begin with, the ferocious sun has shriveled the leaves at the top of their crowns. Most of them are brown by now, and many of them have fallen off already. On top of that, ever-more violent storms have battered the crowns of the remaining trees the last few weeks. Many branches have been broken. Close to the end of the summer, the crowns of the surviving trees are so thin that the shade is nearly gone. Which is why most of the terrace is now covered with sunshades of all shapes and sizes. Otherwise, it would be unbearable on a sunny day. To wit, the four and a half chestnut trees still on the terrace are a far cry from their former selves. Their end is nigh. Sadly, they will also produce ever less fruits to fling into the woods from my terrace. I will be lucky to collect a hundred of them at the end of this season. In just a few years, all that will remain of the chestnut trees on the hotel terrace will be a topic of conversation.

#### *Addendum II* (March 23, 2018)

The chestnut trees on the hotel terrace were in bud a week ago, and I expected the first leaves in a week or two at most. But they got trimmed the last couple of days. Just like their kin along the Barbacan parking lot, they got pollarded (“Pollarding,” September 15, 2008). This time around, though, the trimming was much less severe than a decade ago. Although it was painful to see so many budding branches crash to the ground, chances are that the remaining chestnuts will be in good shape in a couple of months. If everything goes well, pollarding will stretch their lives for a few years, as well. Fingers crossed.

A FRIENDLY CHAT (January 8, 2018)

I dreamt that I had a friendly chat with Tomica Vugrinec and his brother-in-law, Slobodan Knežević. If I remember correctly, we were sitting on the terrace of Tomica's café under the Motovun tower. He was facing a nasty legal conundrum with someone from the old town, and we were commiserating with him. Tomica went inside to fetch something at some point, and I turned to Slobodan. "This is a strange world," I mumbled. "People living so close together make trouble for each other!" Slobodan nodded in agreement, but he remained quiet. When I woke up in the middle of the night, I delighted in my dream. Tomica stopped greeting me ten years ago, when his brother, Slobodan Vugrinec, took me to court first for libel and then for insult. And I am still in court to this day, but now I am suing Croatia for its crooked courts. In the intervening years, my human rights have been trampled many times over. I fell asleep soon enough, but the dream is still with me this morning. Motovun is getting closer and closer. No matter what the court in Strasbourg eventually decides, my troubles with the former mayor are history already.

*NOSE* (March 12, 2018)

Thus the title of a new book of mine that I dreamt about last night. It was dedicated to my beloved and her prominent nose. Nose for life, that is. The book was on the slim side, for it contained mainly poetry in prose, but many of our friends were delighted with it nevertheless. They leafed through its pages with relish. The dream was reminiscent of our early years in Motovun. There was much excitement at the time. The sky was the limit, or so it appeared to us all. Back then, there were many parties in my house. The livingroom floor was often jammed with people hopping and swaying to African rhythms. Quite a few merry faces from those nearly-forgotten years appeared fleetingly last night in connection with my book. My beloved was in the center of jubilation. There was much love and rejoicing everywhere I turned. My new book was a smashing success with our closest friends. When I woke up in the morning, my beloved was still asleep next to me. I do not miss the times past a single bit, I hasten to add, but it is still wonderful to come across all those fading faces in a dream. Nose for true. My beloved's trademark.

SORRY FOR MY ENEMIES (March 23, 2018)

On my walk around the hilltown, I met a score of locals. And I was delighted to talk with all of them. By the time I returned home, I felt sorry for my enemies.

## FAREWELL, DEAR NEIGHBOR! (April 8, 2018)

When I first heard that Stanka Babić was taken to a nursing home in Novigrad, I froze. I could not believe my ears. Only a year my senior, she was in perfect shape. Even though she looked as though she was in her early eighties, she was steady on her feet. She could be seen strolling up and down the lower square almost every day. Every now and then, she would walk down Gradiziol to visit the grave of her husband, Milan, who died five years ago (“Deaths, Births,” February 15, 2013). She was hard of hearing, but she communicated with all her neighbors without a glitch. And I loved talking to her about all and sundry, and especially about the hilltown’s love-affairs old and new. That was her favorite subject, to be sure (“Romeos and Juliets,” January 12, 2004). But the closed shutters on her house abutting the loggia on the lower square give me shudders after her departure several days ago. Yet another empty house on, as it were, my street. As well as yet another house for rent this tourist season or maybe next (“Rent-a-Town,” August 2, 2014). Which is perhaps why Stanka has ended up in a nursing home, anyhow. Be that as it may, now I feel like waving toward Novigrad from the old loggia. Farewell, dear neighbor! Farewell!

## FUCKING TOURISM (May 21, 2018)

The tourist season has barely started, but Motovun is under siege already. Wherever one goes, there are busloads of tourists crawling hither and thither. They come from all over the world, but one quick look is enough to place them in the grand scheme of things: the *hoi polloi*. Nowadays, touring the world is a must even for the lowest social strata. And no kidding. In spite of their meager means, they cannot afford to skip any tourist attraction on offer. Perish the thought! It is their right, after all. By and by, it is becoming impossible to avoid them. The best I can do right now is to hide in my house. Although I can hear them traipsing up and down Borgo, at least I do not have to look at their unsightly faces, hanging bellies, and abominable holiday gear. “Fucking tourism,” I growl every now and then, “fucking tourism!” Year by year, the throngs of tourists are becoming ever more of a nuisance in the hilltown. At the same time, my house is turning into a veritable refuge. My escape hatch, as a matter of fact. Fucking tourism, indeed.

## ENDNOTES

1. Translated by Juan Mascaró, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 46.
2. Trieste: Leghissa, 1963 (first published in 1892).
3. London: John Calder, 1999 (first published in 1983).
4. *Op. cit.*, p. 7.
5. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
6. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 215.
7. Blackmore, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
8. *Op. cit.*, p. 242.
9. *Op. cit.*, p. 243.
10. *Op. cit.*, p. 246.
11. London: Penguin, 1996, first published in 1995.
12. *Op. cit.*, p. 365.
13. London: Penguin, 1997.
14. Trieste: C.A.C.I.T., 2008, pp. 59-64.
15. London: Chatto & Windus, 2006.
16. *Motovunski Statut i Odluke Općinskog vijeća Motovuna: Prijevod, komentar i studije (The Motovun Statute and Decisions of the Motovun Municipal Council: Translation, Commentary, and Investigation)*, Motovun: Općina Motovun (Motovun Municipality), 2016.
17. *Archografo Triestino*, Vol. XIX, 1894, pp. 447-482, and Vol. XX, 1895, pp. 5-120.

18. Milotić, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

19. *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

20. *Op. cit.*, p. 89

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