

I must take a certain amount of the blame. If I'd been able to read them myself then I might not have put temptation in his path. As it was, I'd relied on Marko to translate all the relevant documents for me as we went along, and he simply told me it seems whatever I wanted to hear. His plot was easily laid. He'd forged everything.

'Look, here,' said the inspector, waving our building permit. 'On the whole not a bad copy. But our friend made a stupid mistake a Freudian slip! Here, where it asks your nationality, instead of "Great Britain." he put "Greater Serbia." And besides, none of these documents were filed in any of the appropriate departments. We have no record of your being here at all! And colleagues in Kosovo and Albania tell me the same thing...'

'I'm afraid,' he said, looking around and shaking his head, 'your lovely house...'

Before she left I asked Sonia if there might be some hope of our starting again; applying for retrospective planning permission and renewing our commitment to world peace. 'You know where you can put your planning permission,' she said, dismissively. 'No wonder everyone calls you mental.'

Bottle Orchestra

Tony White

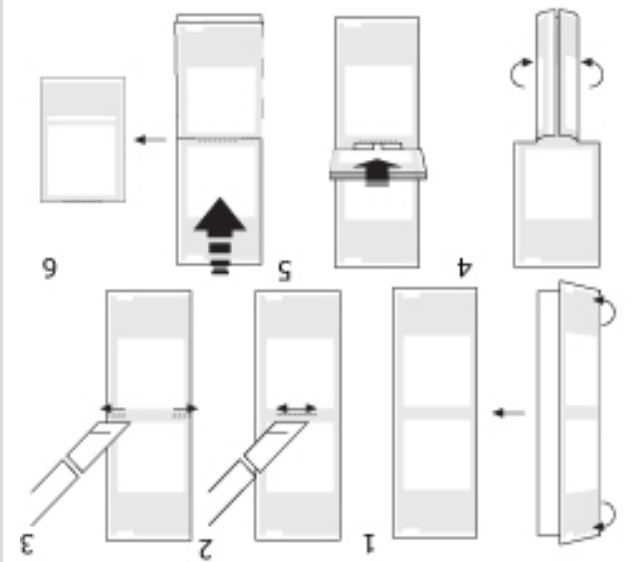
We were sick, Sonia and I, of the constant chatter about tariff walls, conferences and broken treaties, so in a spirit of international solidarity, to symbolise peace and co-operation and to promote environmental conservation, we sold up in the UK and set off for our first experiment in the simple life by building a house entirely out of 13,500 recycled plastic bottles in the adjoining mountain areas of Kosovo, Montenegro and northern Albania. The parlour was to be on the left side of the front door in Kosovo, the bathroom in Montenegro while the kitchen was to open up directly into Albania.

Once the foundations were laid, the translucent blue-green walls were quickly stacked upwards in the cause of peace, while our 'garden' rolled down to a rickety bridge across the exquisite silver broderie of a trout stream and into woods thick with silver birch and oak. It was a perfect spot. Above us a new, public-private-partnership-funded highway traced the contours of the hills' steep flanks, while looking down the valley we fancied that the rich cornlands might stretch as far as Bucharest or Krakow.

treize? I was asking myself. Maybe that wouldn't be so bad. Is it possible to lay thirteen people nightly? But when building inspectors arrived at our door from the Montenegro side of the house it turned out that Marko had not just been fucking my wife.

Any idiot who read the newspapers would have known that the Montenegro Government had formed a special task force to take energetic action in fighting illegal building. Unfortunately I'd never taken any steps to learn the language, so this was news to me at the time. I had no cause for alarm, though, for whatever I thought of Marko's more recent treachery he had, at least, been a good lawyer.

I invited the inspectors in. Our papers were surely in order and not only did we have the building permit, which was the prerequisite for starting with construction, but we had all the other necessary paperwork, too. But it was only then that the true scale of Marko's deception came to light, for all the permits and planning documents, the seals and stamps, the triplicate forms and the endless receipts for payments totalling thousands of Euros, all were worthless.



www.diffusion.org.uk
 DIFFUSION eBooks are designed to be freely available to download, print out and share.

created on: Fri Oct 19 08:08:26 2007

Bottle Orchestra
 Tony White

That first winter, though, we cursed the bitter wind that blew uninterrupted from those same eastern lands, and which found its way under the eaves and down behind the external panelling. Perhaps there was a reason why open-topped bottles are not commonly used as a building material: The gentlest breeze could start the upper edge of our bedroom wall humming like a kettle coming to the boil.

When the house was finished, we had a celebration, complete with commemorative peasantry and local delicacies. Afterwards there were half a dozen newspaper articles heralding 'the amazing strangers', none of which entirely misquoted our carefully prepared announcement about sustainable architecture and our vision for world peace, but that flurry of attention only emphasized the isolation that subsequently enveloped us. Not only were we a couple of bumpy miles from the nearest main road, but due to some geopolitical peculiarity of our tripartite cross-border location, we were in a mobile telecoms blind-spot.

The remoteness had been part of the attraction, initially. Neither of us quite anticipated, however, the effect that this might have on our

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons License: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives-2.0 UK.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/>
 Tony White's Balkanising Bloomsbury project is supported by Arts Council England through a Grants for the Arts award.
 This publication is supported by Proboscis as part of the 2007 Diffusion Generator case studies programme.

relationship. I took it for granted, I suppose, that it would bring us closer together. But like the wind that caressed its way into every crack in the walls of our experimental house, the isolation nagged away at every weakness in our relationship, and looking back, I'll admit that I was spending far too much time tending to the blog and writing to world leaders and celebrities. Take Marko, our lawyer. Jolly little Marko with his curly hair and his pot belly. He was part of our family almost, and we of his. We were invited to his family's Slava and he and his wife to our Christmas dinner. I still fondly remember his and my late night drinking sessions and how they fuelled his lectures which always began, 'I'm not nationalistic, but...'

We were beholden to him for everything; the work that Marko did behind the scenes to smooth our path in terms of planning permissions and building licenses. No sooner did we come across a bureaucratic hurdle than Marko had obtained the necessary paperwork from whichever office in whichever jurisdiction, established the scale of the fee that would be required, and then paid people to go and queue for him for days at a time, if necessary to expedite one satisfactory resolution

Author unknown. 'Funny old world: Serbia.' The London Paper, London. 20 August 2007.

Author unknown. 'The BALKANS PEACE PARK PROJECT.'

<http://www.balkanspeacepark.org/index.php>
Accessed 7 November 2007.

Author unknown. 'Prevention of illegal building,' Limun.hr. 23 May 2007.

<http://www.limun.hr/en/main.aspx?id=161174>
Accessed 7 November 2007

Forster, E.M. 'What Does it Matter? A Morality', *The Life to Come, And Other Stories* (edited by Oliver Stallybrass). Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975. p.163-4.

Gordon, Jan & Cora. *Two vagabonds in the Balkans*, London: The Bodley Head, 1925. p.100-101.

ICTY. 2005. Page 43434, 'Milosevic (IT-02-54) Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia'. International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.
<http://www.un.org/icty/transe54/050831ED.htm>

Accessed 7 November 2007

Copyright 2007 Tony White.

after another. Marko's efforts, though invisible to the rest of the world, were to me as much of an achievement as the house itself and no less beautiful: at once a virtual paper palace made of wit and derring-do in face of seemingly intractable regulations, and a legal superstructure that was as integral to the stability and safety of our home as the mortar, say, or the rafters.

It was Mika who knocked on the door one afternoon and metaphorically at least brought the whole thing crashing down. The Montenegrin portion of the house was built on Mika's farm. He'd been running, I could see that. And he was in a state of hysterical dishevelment. He started apologising and babbling about 'Madame Sonia'. Mika was better at speaking my language than I was his, but not much. Through a series of pantomime expressions and some painful acting, this much I was able to gather: He'd been walking the dogs over by the cemetery and there among the few dozen mouldering tomb-stones was my wife, half-hidden by the shadows. He thought nothing of it until he realised that she was sitting astride a familiar protuberant stomach, albeit one that he was seeing at an unfamiliar angle.

'Bottle Orchestra' was created by cutting up, remixing and re-narrating fragments from the following sources to create a completely new story:

--
achieve a common end.
dance of caterpillar tracks and hydraulics - to
all too brief but oh so carefully choreographed
their differences and co-operating - through this
abstract ambition to real people putting aside
symbolic to the political realm. From merely
in terms of Sonia's and my project from the
inspectors and demolition workers marked a shift
The cross-border collaboration of building
I can also take satisfaction from a minor victory.
resulted.
about the sudden breathy cacophany that
of the walls. Yet there was something pleasing
them in all shapes and sizes filled the wire frames
bottles were exposed. Open-mouthed ranks of
crash, as the panelling fell away, more and more
demolish the house. And with each nudge and
bulldozers one from each country came to
It was a blustery autumn day, when the

I was shocked of course. And the mind plays
funny tricks in such circumstances. Perhaps that's
why my first thought was to be grateful that we
we'd completed all of our paperwork that our
relationship with Marko had ceased to be a
professional one; that it wouldn't endanger the
project
Little did I know that Sonia's indiscretion with
Marko was the least of my worries. It turned out
that there were thirteen of us in this marriage. I
was unaware until that time that there were
eleven unattached men living within a 10-mile
radius of the house, but conventional notions of
availability or otherwise did not seem to have
figured in Sonia's dealings with the opposite sex.
This explained why it had been several months
since I'd been shown the fruits of Sonia's frequent
watercolour painting rambles her daily walks had
been nothing more than a simple ruse to fool an
all too trusting husband.
But even then, the spirit of conciliation and
compromise that had been at the heart of our
house-building project must have rubbed off on
me. Thoughts of leaving were far from my mind
rather I made some attempt, mentally at least, to
accommodate her philandering: A menage a