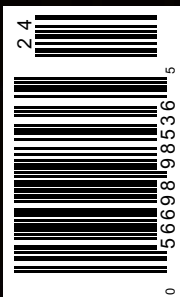


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The southern Spanish village of Júzcar, post-Smurfification. Photo Jonathan Allen.

PITUFO BLUES

JONATHAN ALLEN

In Gabriel García Márquez’s novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, José Arcadio Buendía—the founder of the book’s utopic jungle settlement Macondo—comes into conflict with the town’s new magistrate, Don Apolinar Moscote. The latter has been appointed by the national conservative government to keep an eye on affairs in Buendía’s contentedly self-governing community. The magistrate’s first act is to issue an order stating that all of the town’s houses be painted blue in celebration of the anniversary of national independence. “If you’ve come to cause disorder by making the people paint their houses blue,” Buendía retorts, “you can pick up your junk and go back to where you came from. Because my house is going to be white, like a dove.”¹

The mountainside village of Júzcar is one of the many *pueblos blancos* that lace the Serranía de Ronda in the Malaga region of southern Spain. The “white villages” are so named because of the sanitizing and

sun-reflecting limestone whitewash, known locally as *cal*, traditionally applied to the surfaces of most buildings. Júzcar claims to be the birthplace of Andalusia’s “Robin Hood,” the Christian rebel Umar ibn Hafsun (ca. 850–917), who gained considerable regional power during the Islamic Umayyad occupation of the Iberian peninsula by stirring resistance to the taxes that the Muslim occupiers exacted upon ostracized (although tolerated) Christians. The presence of an accepted Jewish population in the village can be confirmed in records pertaining to the area’s thriving silk industry immediately following the *reconquista*, whereupon Júzcar is thought to have become a slave colony at the request of the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. (To this day, Júzcarians are known locally as *moriscos*, or Moors). A royally sanctioned tin mine and factory flourished nearby in the early eighteenth century, and with the Napoleonic invasion in the early nineteenth century, Júzcar was granted the title *villa muy noble y fidelísima* by the restored Spanish monarchy in 1814 for its courageous contributions in the battle

for Spanish independence. With the closure of the tin mine in 1901, much of the village population drifted to larger urban centers, whereupon Júzcar joined the rest of the Serranía's white villages as a quiet and self-sustaining agricultural hamlet. This summer, however, a real-life Moscote arrived in the form of Sony Pictures Animation, when the village was completely repainted blue as a marketing stunt to celebrate the opening of the 3-D live-action/animation film *The Smurfs*.

The blue-fleshed, Phrygian cap-wearing, humanoid creatures known as the Smurfs were created in 1958 by the Belgian cartoonist Pierre Culliford, better known as Peyo. The Smurfs began their diminutive lives as sub-characters within the artist's cartoon-book series *Johan and Peewit*, but when they struck out alone, they soon eclipsed their progenitors in popularity and spawned a global merchandizing craze, boosted largely in the early 1980s by a Hanna-Barbera animated television series. Mythographer Marina Warner connects Peyo's creation to the medieval *gryllus* or grotesque, the modern "sentimental domestication" of which can be found in other contemporary figures such as E.T., Snow White's dwarves, and garden gnomes, all of which, like the Smurfs, are "neotenic, that is, they have retained in maturity characteristics of children."²

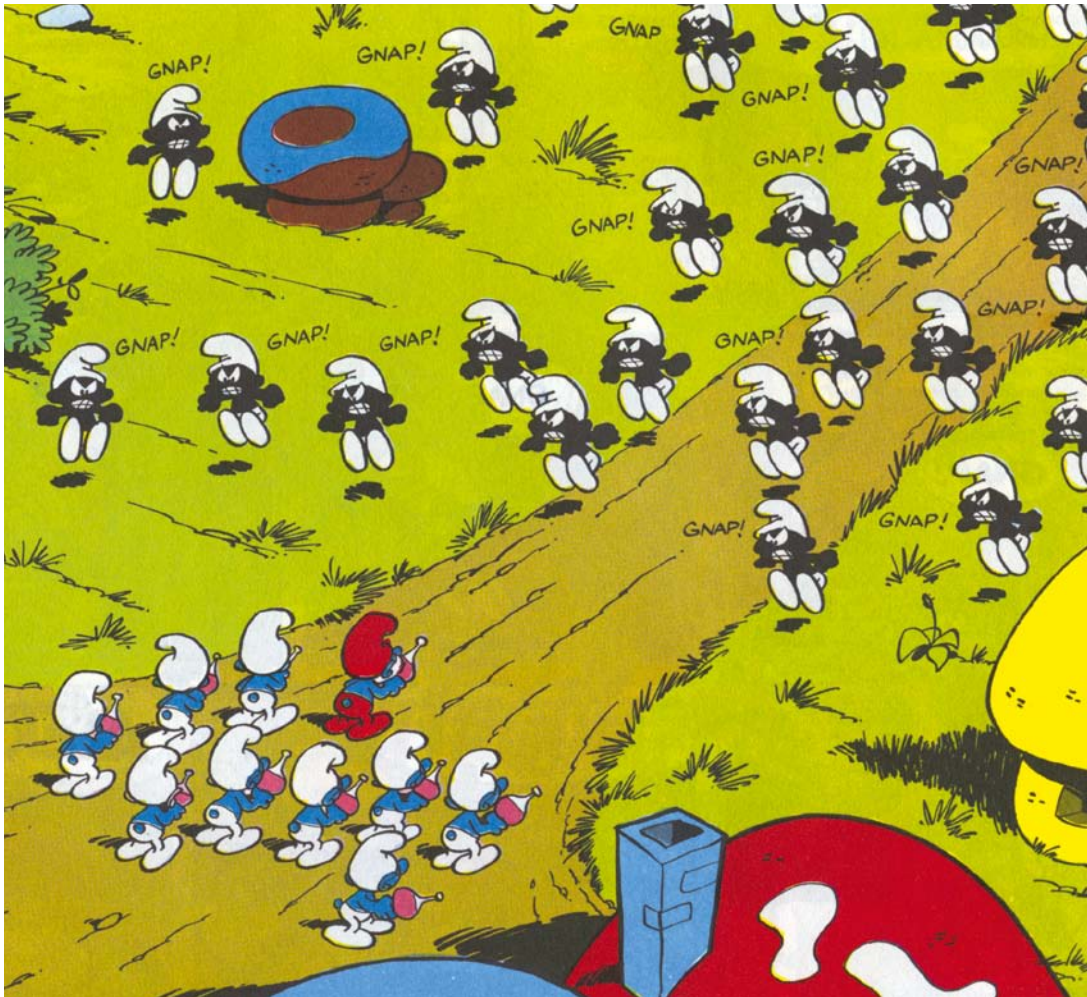
The Smurf world is comprised of an almost exclusively male community whose members embody a wide variety of human archetypes and occupations—Brainy Smurf, Panicky Smurf, Painter Smurf, Finance Smurf, etc.—all led by the white-bearded, red-garbed patriarch Papa Smurf. Life in and around the toadstool-roofed houses of the Smurf village is the focus of most storylines, and much like Júzcar, the fictional community has undergone calamitous changes of fortune, primarily at the hands of the Smurfs' archenemy, the malign alchemist Gargamel, and his feline sidekick Asrael. More destructive than these malevolent figures, however, were the bombs dropped on the village in a fifteen-second animated cartoon produced by UNICEF in 2005 that shocked Belgian audiences with its depiction of Smurfs fatally injured in a scorched landscape. This public information broadcast—a warning against child involvement in warfare—generated a furor within the Smurfs' fan base and beyond, despite the project having gained approval from the family of the late Peyo. Trey Parker perhaps had this incident in mind when he directed the 2009 *South Park* episode "Dances with Smurfs," which depicted another gory demolition of the toadstool village—"a Smurf holocaust"—as part of a layered parody of James Cameron's 2009 sci-fi epic *Avatar*. The latter featured another fictional blue-skinned

race, the Na'vi, whose sacred forests and traditional habitations faced destruction at the hands of a heartless mining corporation staffed by gun-toting mercenaries.

As if these tribulations were not enough, the latest shock to Peyo's seemingly innocuous fictional world came in the summer of 2011 with the unhappily timed publication of the cultural historian Antoine Bueno's *Le petit livre bleu: Analyse critique et politique de la société des schtroumpfs* ("The Little Blue Book: A Critical and Political Analysis of the Smurf Society"), in which the Smurf universe was exposed by the author as a harsh totalitarian utopia, run by a Stalinesque leader (Papa Smurf), and shot through with racism, anti-Semitism, and sexism. In one early story from 1963, for example, entitled *Les Schtroumpfs Noirs* ("The Black Smurfs"), a menacing black insect infects the community with a contagion that turns Smurf skin from blue to black, reducing its victims to moronic and stuttering versions of their former selves. According to Bueno, Peyo's primitivized black Smurfs are portrayed "roughly the way Africans were viewed by white colonizers in the nineteenth century."³ For this episode of the animated TV series, Hanna-Barbera shifted the infectious hue from black to purple, presumably to avoid overtly racist connotations.



Is New York next? A Smurf hovers threateningly over Manhattan in the 2008 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.



The dark side of the Smurfs. A page from the *Les Schtroumpfs Noirs*, Peyo's first Smurf-specific book. The black Smurfs were recolored purple for the US market.

Despite these various crises, the announcement in June 2008 that Sony Pictures Animation and Columbia Pictures had secured production rights for a live-action/animation movie based on Peyo's creation generated excitement among fans. It also triggered a promotional frenzy, including the presence three years in a row of a monstrous Smurf inflatable in Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade in New York, tie-ins with fast-food chains, and the mass production of collectibles. In the spring of 2011, the mayor of Júzcar, David Fernández Tirado, was approached by Madrid-based Bungalow25, an advertising agency tasked by Sony to generate international interest in the launch of its next blockbuster-to-be. Would Júzcar consider being painted Pitufo blue (a Smurf is known as a Pitufo in Spanish) with the proviso that Sony would return the village to its former white

state after an allotted time period, if its residents so wished? After all, there were strong similarities between the Smurfs' mushroom village and Júzcar. Both were set within a hard-to-find bucolic paradise and both had a strong interest in fungi. Júzcar even housed a mushroom museum. Perhaps sensing the economic benefits ahead for his recession-weary villagers, Tirado did not hesitate. Once the regional laws requiring that the *pueblos blancos* remain white had been circumvented, and permission obtained from the local bishopric and village priest, it took just fifteen days for the regionally based decorating company Pindecora, aided by twelve unemployed residents of Júzcar, to paint the exterior walls of the village with five thousand liters of brilliant cerulean acrylic paint.⁴ Only two areas remained untouched: the interior of the cemetery, and the house of one



A metaphor gone mad. The northern Spanish village of Sietes, post-Windowsification. Photos Jacinta Lluç Valero.



recalcitrant non-resident, whose building soon became known to villagers as “the house of Gargamel.” On 16 June 2011, Tirado opened the first Smurf village in the world.⁵

Júzcar’s azurification falls comfortably within the general category of the publicity stunt, the aim of which remains, as it was for the father of public relations Edward Bernays, the creation of news, “a departure from the established order” for the purpose of the “conscious molding of public opinion.”⁶ Color itself has played a central role in many public relation exercises, with few less effective than in 1957 when, at the height of USA Cold War space-race paranoia, *Life* magazine reported that “*Aviation Today*, a serious publication, predicts that on Nov 7th, the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, the Russians will fire a rocket that will dye the moon red.”⁷ Quite who was behind this largely successful attempt to “crystallize” public opinion, to use another Bernaysian term, remains unclear. Back on earth, in 1998 the toy manufacturer Mattel painted every house on a street in the English town of Salford bright pink in an effort to boost sales of its similarly hued Barbie doll, while in 2007 Microsoft descended upon the northern Spanish village of Sietes, and painted architectural details therein using its trademark palette as part of the launch of Windows7.⁸

Sony’s publicity stunt did indeed make international news, with most commentators responding with fascination to the apparent spectacle of a voracious international corporation striking a Faustian pact with a guileless village community for its chromatic soul. For some, fascination tipped toward outrage. This consternation perhaps exemplified what artist David Batchelor has described elsewhere as *chromophobia*, namely

a Western fear of “corruption through color.” “Color,” wrote Batchelor, “is made out to be the property of some ‘foreign’ body—usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological [and thus] relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic.”⁹ Batchelor goes on to discuss Le Corbusier’s paean to whitewash in *The Decorative Art of Today* (1925), but it was probably less the legacy of high modernism that concerned critics of Júzcar’s coloring than the preservation of the myth of simple, innocent village life, closely followed by the self-interested monitoring of property values in a region undergoing a process of problematic gentrification. For Batchelor, it is an aversion to color that has prevented architectural historians from recognizing that most of Le Corbusier’s buildings are not uniformly white, but instead selectively colored. “[Here] we are in the realm of *whiteness*,” Batchelor writes, referring to this misperception. “White as myth, as an aesthetic fantasy, a fantasy so strong that it can summon up negative hallucinations, so intense that it produces a blindness to color, even when color is literally in front of your face.”¹⁰ This observation tallies with the constructed touristic perception of the Andalusian *pueblo blanco* as an entirely white settlement, whereas in fact exterior coloring is permitted by local law in certain places on buildings, and many residents take advantage of this opportunity for chromatic expression.

At least two cultural shifts *have* taken place as a result of the layer of acrylic paint applied to the surface of Júzcar. Traditional limestone *cal*, whose porous nature allows the building materials below to respond to varying atmospheric conditions, cannot be used effectively following the application of contemporary acrylic

polymers. Although the owners of many of Júzcar's buildings long ago abandoned *cañi* in favor of its more easily applied modern alternative, Sony's stunt marks the village's final break from the region's centuries-old exterior painting tradition. Furthermore, Júzcar's folkloric lineage has been re-scripted from afar, so to speak. Running near Júzcar is La Ruta de Fray Leopoldo, a pilgrimage trail established in honor of the recently beatified Capuchin monk Francisco Tomás Márquez Sánchez (1866–1956). The gradual local embrace of the story of this homegrown celebrity is in sharp contrast to the commodifying imposition of Peyo's world over a period of scarcely six months, which has led to minor heresies such as the youth of Júzcar scoffing at the facial resemblance between Fray Leopoldo and Papa Smurf (and the comparison is not entirely misplaced), or, more scurrilously, at the Smurf-size stature of Júzcar's unusually diminutive village saint, the Virgin of Moclón. This emerging cultural incongruence might be understood as a challenge to the notion of shared values within a close-knit community, or worse, as a wholesale replacement of them with an impoverished barbarian mythology susceptible to cinematic fashion and the viewing habits of global consumers.

Sony's chromatic territorialization of Júzcar cannot be seen, however, simply as an example of dissonant acculturation or asymmetric globalization. Since the village's transformation took place, commercial activity within the municipality has thrived, responding to the vastly increased visitor numbers, which, according to Bungalow25, reached almost fifty thousand during the months of July and August 2011 alone. Within a region as economically depressed as the Serranía, these are not trivial figures. The need for a sanctioned visitor graffiti wall attests to the magnitude and international diversity of this new influx. Increased foot traffic has been matched by the psychotherapeutic benefits of the repainting, with villagers speaking of feeling more upbeat, energized, and responding otherwise positively to the effects of being bathed in the luminosity of reflected Pitufo blue.¹¹ Coincidentally, the pseudoscience of chromotherapy has its roots in the power of blue light, the mystical properties of which Yves Klein famously promoted.¹² The power of the word *blue* to trigger a multiplicity of poetic associations is examined in William H. Gass's *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry*, in which the hue is understood, among its many shadings as "the color of interior life ... the color consciousness becomes

when caressed."¹³ In Júzcar, more tangible benefits are being felt. One local tavern-keeper has become a minor celebrity by playing the costumed role of Gargamel behind his bar. The priest has reported that the church offerings have increased. At the very least, as one local resident noted pragmatically, the place got a much-needed coat of paint.

The Smurfs' presence in Andalucía has performed another unexpected service, that of highlighting an additional but little-known incursion within the municipality. As news of the painting of Júzcar broke within the international news media, it emerged that the ownership of 7,200 hectares of land, including one third of the land within Júzcar's municipality, some 1,384 hectares, could be traced to Libya—read, the late Muammar Gaddafi. Gaddafi purchased the land in 1993, and had planned to develop a touristic and residential "mega-project," "The Resinera Village," comprising spacious luxury dwellings, a golf course, and a palatial convention center. Although the simultaneous news of the "invasion" of the region by Gaddafi and the Smurfs was received with glee by some, news of the potential gated gentrification-from-afar of large parts of the region came as a significant shock for many, perhaps even stirring the historical memory of an area familiar with territorial and religious shifts in fortune.¹⁴ At present, the financial assets of the Gaddafi family have been frozen by the Spanish government, while a sixty-kilometer perimeter fence around the land continues to act as a salutary reminder of the pervasiveness, and divisiveness, of international capital.

At present, Júzcar's chromatic future is uncertain. A public referendum will soon take place in the village, following Spain's general election, to decide whether or not to return the *pueblo* to its original coloration. Given the flow of Smurf-related tourist capital within the region, Júzcar may feel an obligation, during a period of intense economic uncertainty, to remain wedded to Peyo's world for a while longer. Until then, however, the village might be twinned temporarily with another, not-too-distant blue settlement high in the Rif Mountains of northern Morocco. Just under two hundred miles south of Júzcar on the other side of the Mediterranean, Chefchaouen was founded in 1471 and quickly became one of the main refuges for Moorish and Jewish evacuees following the Christian recapture of the Iberian Peninsula. It is quite conceivable therefore that late fifteenth-century inhabitants of present-day Júzcar may have found refuge within Chefchaouen's newly established walls. According to contemporary accounts, the town's blue walls can be traced to its Jewish population and an Old Testament commandment (Numbers

opposite: Views of Júzcar. Note the "house of Gargamel," the one residence in the town that remains defiantly unblue. Photos Jonathan Allen.





The village of Chefchaouen in Morocco's Rif Mountains.

15:38–39) that instructs Israelites to color a single thread of their *tallit* (prayer shawl) using the blue dye *tekhelet* (a substance prepared from the shells of sea-snails) in order “that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring.” The dye’s formula has long since been forgotten, and quite how this commandment was reconfigured into an instruction for home decoration remains obscure.

The painting of Júzcar may even come to be seen as an absurd literalization of a wider cultural tendency. In April 2008, just two months before Sony exchanged contracts with Studio Peyo, the environmental activist Adam Werbach delivered a speech to an international audience at the San Francisco-based Commonwealth Club. “The Birth of Blue” was his belated follow-up to a eulogizing critique four years earlier in which he had chastised the Green movement for its myopic focus on the predicament of the natural environment at the expense of equally compelling social and cultural agendas.¹⁵ In his address, Werbach reworked cosmologist Carl Sagan’s evocative description of Earth seen from space as a “pale blue dot” by proposing a new chromatic metaphor for planetary stewardship, one that he hoped

might satisfy not just the concerns of environmental sustainability, but also those of economic growth, industrial production, and popular consumerism. Werbach had not been alone in his attempt to re-chromatize the ideological mainstream. A year earlier, the advertising agency JWT had predicted that “blue is the new green,” a marketing trend apparently detectable in emergent brands such as Volkswagen’s BlueMotion and Mercedes-Benz’s BlueTEC low-emission engines. Even demographers studying the habits and location of active centenarians had designated the regions in which higher-than-normal longevity could be found as “blue zones.” The early twenty-first century seemed destined to see the world through azure eyes.

It remains to be seen whether Adam Werbach’s blue movement is the chromatic banner under which progressive politics will rethink the relationship between nature and capital or is nothing more than a marketing gimmick which by appeasing capitalism’s logic simply legitimizes the ideological *status quo*. As the color of Júzcar’s walls hangs in the balance, however, consider an article published a few years ago in the *Daily Telegraph* during the propagandizing build-up to the UK’s most recent general election. In a survey of three thousand British homeowners, the Sandtex paint

company revealed that professionals living in houses decorated with blue paint (presumably Sandtex paint) out-earned those living in differently hued dwellings.¹⁶ Furthermore, this color-conscious consumer drives an Audi TT and takes a minimum of two holidays abroad to exotic destinations such as Barbados and the Maldives. Like Gabriel García Márquez's coercive conservative government, the UK's Conservative Party is associated symbolically with the color blue, and so perhaps it is no surprise that Sandtex's findings appeared in one of Britain's most reactionary daily newspapers during a period of determined electoral solicitation.

Rumor has it that both Peyo and Muammar Gaddafi lived, appropriately enough, in blue houses. Márquez's home, one might imagine, was painted dove white.

1 Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 57. The undisclosed South American conservative government of Marquez's novel can be seen in the context of the combative bipartisan hegemony of Colombia's Conservative Party and Liberal Party from the end of the nineteenth century until 2002.

2 Marina Warner, *No Go the Bogeyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999) p. 299.

3 Henry Samuel, "The Smurfs are 'anti-Semitic and racist,'" *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 2011. For Bueno, anti-Semitism in the Smurfs' world is embodied in the figure of Gargamel, a stereotypical Jewish caricature: a mean and hook-nosed magician obsessed with gold. The cartoon's sexist agenda is exemplified in the absence of female characters apart from the blond-haired and high-heeled figure of Smurfette, a stereotypical Aryan and one only created by Gargamel to seduce male Smurfs. The Marx-like bearded Papa Smurf, the only Smurf to wear red, wields unopposed power within what Bueno describes as "an archetype of a totalitarian utopia."

4 The paint's hue was generated with reference to Pantone color 298, and supplied by Industrias Kolmer Paints, where the color is now known simply as "Smurf Blue."

5 Billed as "a FIRST in the WORLD," a second Smurf Village was opened as part of the "Summer in Abu Dhabi 2011" festival just two weeks later, on 30 June 2011.

6 On page 217 of his influential publication *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), Edward Bernays quotes these lines directly from the political columnist Walter Lippman's book *Public Opinion* (1922).

7 "The Crisis and Its Precedents," *Life*, 28 October 1957, p. 34. In fact, it was not until 1959 that the Soviet spacecraft Luna 2 became the first human object to impact the moon's surface, having first "released a bright orange cloud of sodium gas which aided in spacecraft tracking and acted as an experiment on the behavior of gas," National Space Science Data Center. <nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/nmc/spacecraftDisplay.do?id=1959-014A>. Accessed 22 November 2011.

8 Like Sony's project with Júzcar, Microsoft's collaboration with Sietes was conceived and realized by the advertising agency Bungalow25. Two publicity campaigns elsewhere are of note. In 2010 in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, the British paint company Dulux filmed "All with Colours" a stop-motion sequence in which the walls of forty homes are painted using the company's color range as a compliment to the Blue City's own famously indigo-painted walls. A more permanently embedded public relations exercise has taken place recently on the streets of London, where Barclays Bank helped fund the introduction of a new bicycle-hire scheme. As a result, the green painted surfaces of the city's many bicycle lanes have been repainted to match the bank's corporate pale blue.

9 David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000) p. 22–23.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

11 Accounts similar to those heard in Júzcar were also heard in 2000 from the residents of the Albanian capital, Tirana, whose artist-mayor Edi Rama ordered many of the city's ramshackle buildings to be painted with a patchwork of brightly colored rectangular shapes, ostensibly to cheer up its economically and culturally depressed population. Rama's project was documented in the Albanian artist Anri Sala's 2003 film *Dammi i Colori*.

12 In 1876, A. J. Pleasonton (1801–1894) published *The Influence of the Blue Ray of the Sunlight and of the Blue Colour of the Sky: In Developing Animal and Vegetable Life: In Arresting Disease, and in Restoring Health in Acute and Chronic Disorders to Human and Domestic Animals*. See also Christopher Turner, "Cured By Colour," *Tate Etc.*, issue 4 (Summer 2005).

13 William H. Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Boston: Godine, 1975), p. 76, p. 57.

14 Sally King, "Gaddafi and the Smurfs invade Júzcar," *The Olive Press*, 18 June 2011, and Andrés Ramos, "La Resinera: El Araíso de Gadafi en Benahavís (Málaga)," *La Voz Libre*, 4 March 2011.

15 Adam Werbach, "The Birth of Blue," Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, 10 April 2011, and "The Death of Environmentalism and the Birth of the Commons Movement," Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, 8 December 2004. Werbach currently directs the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi's sustainability initiative "S."

16 "People in Blue Houses Most Successful," *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 2009. The article revealed the earnings per annum for inhabitants of the following colored houses: Blue £38,000; Red £23,500; White £23,400; Magnolia £23,100; Beige £20,800; Orange £20,000; Purple £19,600; Grey £19,000; Yellow £18,500; Brown £18,400; Pink £14,500; and Green £13,100.