

Thursday of first week

Dear Post-supper-at-Simple-Simon Folks,

When I got home last night I spent a moment riffling through the Independent, which though it is still called a "broadsheet" has recently, physically, become a tabloid and two "new" words jumped ~~out~~ of the page at me. **Murderabilia** is clearly a word created on the model of *memorabilia*, while **starchitect** is the running together of two old words to make a neologism, on the same lines as **ginormous** (gigantic+enormous). I have put the above "new" words in inverted commas because they may have been around for yonks and it may just be that it took me till last night to bump into them. The other question mark over such words found on the ephemeral pages of the fourth estate is whether they will survive and become a staple part of the language. Only time will tell.

Last night was a feast, for me, of cultural experiences. I had real fun sitting opposite K [redacted], that bubbly, talkative Finn. She did confess, when confronted with her unseemly animation, that Swedish Finns have a pretty bad reputation in Finland as being unbearably noisy!!!! At the end of the meal I suggested to Ali that she might like a lift back up the hill to which her immediate reaction was to mention her return bus ticket. Maybe here we see the prudent, thrifty soul of the polders? At this point V [redacted] chips in across the table with the generous offer of relieving her of the moral burden of that return ticket. Could this be the Gallic mind seizing a golden opportunity with the lightning speed of a striking cobra?

In the baroque negotiations round the bill we had the clash of Northern Lutheran Europe, convinced deep down that each should pay for his own, and the more communal Latin South happy with a joint bill of which each should pay an equal share. All this might seem a petty detail but the reason it is actually quite a strong difference is because it deals with deeply anchored values.

When you have something of an anthropologist's mind set you can stand outside such clashes and enjoy observing, as you might observe the meeting of the river water and the incoming tide. I was also watching the reactions of the two islanders who were serving us... it was hard to know what they were actually thinking.

It is this sort of musing that makes my job so utterly fascinating. An anthropologist and observer of primates must always be introspecting as he could well turn out to be most hilarious of all the great apes he has ever observed! Of course I am just as much of a slave to inbred, implicit and often hidden cultural norms as anybody on this room.

Warmly yours,
Mario

