POSTMODERN IRONY AND RETRO CULTURE?



Inner city regeneration? Or what?

Barn Again @ The Biscuit Factory

Cultural heritage gone mad

I have held back on this one a while – not wanting to hammer the NE of England too much. But here goes anyway.

An ART warehouse, brand new interior, in an old food factory in Newcastle-upon-Tyne UK. Urban regeneration meets (aspiring) European city of culture.

“30,000 square feet on two floors … Britain’s biggest original art store … It?s a fun, relaxed place to buy original contemporary art in the heart of Newcastle

upon Tyne. Entrance is free.”

Great. Well, maybe – some of the stuff on sale was shockingly bad (clichéed). But it IS good to have challenging art available, accessible.

The warehouse has a restaurant – relocated, once called “The Barn”, and now “The Barn *Again*“.

We went for lunch, on a personal recommendation from a friend (and hence my reluctance to speak out) – this is, apparently, one of *the* places to eat in Newcastle.

The food was mediocre. Not my interest here.

No. Imagine this, instead. Old biscuit factory turned into gallery. Now has a mezzanine, is open plan, halogen spot lights everywhere.

Behind a hessian curtain – the restaurant. Decor (*deco?*) – contemporary gallery fittings; 50s and 60s retro features (tat – I remember the dreadful table lamps); yellow pine tables and chairs, from when yellow pine meant KNOTTY and YELLOW (here rustic, I guess); references to a wild west theme (cattle, horses, barn dances etc). But outrageously ill-fitting. Beyond kitsch. Retro – fusion – hybrid – and no design sense. Maybe it’s me. Maybe I can’t take this anymore. Maybe it is just SO sophisticated.



Then – the proprietor (well he is definitely the one in charge) is pacing up and down. It is London docklands, about 1988. As if fresh from commodity dealing, he wears a dark, buttoned up, pinstripe suit. And he has the attitude of Grant or Phil from Eastenders. In front of diners and with an outrageously affected local accent he tears a strip off a miserable waiter for being late. Boasts of telling a diner the night before – “you don’t like the food? – stick to your crappy business and I’ll stick to mine”.

Basil Fawlty turned Geordie entrepreneur.

