

Bushmeat and Metrophobia

I try to avoid big cities these days, but they have their advantages. For example I went to Paris recently to the exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of Le Corbusier's death. It is said that one should keep one's friendships in good repair, but so it is with one enmities as well, and I can hardly think of a figure worthier of hatred than Le Corbusier, still uncritically hero-worshipped in French architectural schools. It is true that some of the French are gradually coming to the view, long knowable and known that Corbusier was a fascist, not in the debased 1968 sense of the word, but in the boot-in-the-face 1938 sense of it. A page of his writing, or a glance at his plans for the Ville Radieuse should have been sufficient to convince anybody of it.

On the evening of my arrival in the city I had intended to go to the Thai restaurant near where I stay, but it was closed for the summer. I went instead to a nearby West African restaurant where they seemed almost surprised to see me. African restaurants are mainly for Africans and not many people have a taste for African cuisine which, though limited, can be good. I suspect that, subliminally at least, many Europeans mistrust its ingredients and it is true that in the remoter parts of the continent I probably ate rodent under the all-forgiving rubric of bushmeat.

My welcome was warm, however, and my praise of the food (which was sincere) pleased the owners no end. But I have no ambition or qualification to be a restaurant critic: what I really wanted to mention was the music played, not very loud, over the public address system in the restaurant. It was West African popular music that no doubt has a certain monotony

after a time, but which nevertheless conveys a *joie de vivre*, an enjoyment of and tenderness towards life, that is so missing in our own popular music. It lifts the spirit, it does not depress: one does not want to stop one's ears from it.

If a Martian were to descend to earth and were played West African and our own popular music and then asked which represented the higher civilisation, I have no doubt what answer he would return. He would conclude that the British were savages while the West Africans were endowed with finer feeling. And the fact is – I speak in wild generalisations, of course – their manners are better too.