TOTAL RECALL

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We set off giving ourselves a reasonable time to cover the 20-odd miles, from our new house near Kinlough, along the Dartry Road, to Sligo town, 45 mins max. No problem. Nice drive, weather fine and no hold-ups. This was our first Big Night Out since moving-in, early in July the previous month.

We had detailed directions including a hand-drawn map of how to reach our destination, The Factory Theatre. It is smack bang on the outskirts of Sligo town as you drive in from our direction. But not exactly obvious, at least not to us. A map was definitely a good idea, as The Factory is tucked away nestling at the back of a mini-industrial estate, formerly a slaughterhouse apparently. However, you know how it is with those hand-drawn, back of a fag packet maps: one man's map is another's jigsaw. In retrospect it was a very good map, but at the time we gave a tad too much emphasis to the nicely drawn sweeping bend off to left, ignoring the tight left, or filter, we should have taken. So, having parked-up realising there was more to this than formerly met the eye, we set off on foot. We probably circled The Factory for half a mile as we repeatedly tried to fathom out what was becoming an extremely obscure set of directions. The time pressure was mounting, showtime was in 15 mins. After 20 mins we were close to giving it up as a bad job and heading to the nearest pub, which in my book would not count as a total failure by any means.

We even checked out an ambitious and helpful looking roadside tourist map. But it had clearly been recently installed, as I spotted from the two new concrete mountings in the pavement. Hang on, across the road I could also see two holes in the pavement of roughly the same proportions. Surely they would not have simply re-positioned the map from one side of the road to the other without updating the You Are Here bit? Would that not mean everything shown on the left would actually be on the right, and vice versa, or something like that? Too many mental adjustments to be made here, and not enough time!

Nothing for it but to ask someone. But who? Then he appeared. An elderly but solid looking local walking purposely with possibly a bag of chips under his arm. Thank goodness, a knowledgeable looking type I thought. But, then again maybe not, as this thought was immediately followed by that kind of feeling it was not a goer. The clue being, that from no more than say ten yds, the reassuring eye contact I had confidently anticipated failed to materialise. Oddball was my next thought. By then it was too late for me to back-off. I was heading straight for him, and for all I knew he was deliberately avoiding eye contact. What would he think? Oddball or not, I had to go ahead and ask him. "Ahem, hello there". He pulled-up, eyes narrowed. Actually, his eyes were pretty much narrowed before he pulled-up but I only really appreciated this on close-up. Crikey, not only an oddball, but a potential nutter. What was really interesting was that his head was darting left to right as if he was trying to establish his best line of get-away should I, for example, attempt to mug him for his chips. Or, he had just come out of a very introspective moment and had been completely oblivious of me up till then. Blast, I could have walked straight on. "What, wha..." he kind of trailed off. Very anguished I would have said. Strange. Still, worth a punt. "We are trying to find The Factory". Eyes still darting. "It's a theatre". More nothing followed by "What, what...". "We think it's round here somewhere". Then the prospect of some real information. He turned and pointing back down the road, rather authoritatively I thought, began with what I can only describe as a quavering sort of delivery "You... had... better... go down there some way". Big pause. "Then... you had better ask someone else. Because I... (another big pause) have never heard of IT!". The 'it' kind of trailing off in a triumphant sort of shriek. "Hmm, thanks."

We did eventually find The Factory, and for some reason the performance was late in starting. So, we actually made it on time. Curiously, the cast proceeded by asking the audience to stand up and introduce ourselves to them! Weird on one level, but it also tells you something about audience size. I guess it helps them gauge if they might be in for some trouble later if, for instance, the issue of value for money crops up at the end of their performance. They can also single out the big tough-looking guys, and make a mental note to give them a nice wide berth in the stampede for the Exits.

So we did have our first Big Night Out, and we had a great time. Theatre, plays, all make for enjoyable entertainment, and we will no doubt revisit The Factory. But it never ceases to amaze me how much 'entertainment' each one of us actually encounter or witness, daily, if only we ever find the time to sit down, recall and record it. A daily mental trick the ancient Romans were good at; the Stoic philosopher Seneca providing a good model for anyone up for yet another new life-enhancing technique.

There you have it. I do pride myself on good recall. By the way, what was the name of that play....? Answers on a post card.... actually, a neighbour of mine, Doris, prints some very fetching scenic postcards e.g. winter at Fowleys Falls, atmospheric views over Lough Melvin etc. You can pick them up in our local Kinlough Spar, or even over a pint or two at the Wellington!