

Trip report E.W. Dijkstra, Barcelona 5-7 June 1983.

I left Nuenen on Sunday morning at 7:40 and returned on Tuesday evening at 23:10. (Marcus, my elder son, drove me to the railway station; Ria did not feel like driving, having just returned from the hospital, where she had been subjected to a back puncture.)

On my way to the airport I had a narrow escape. Maintenance of one of the railway bridges had been scheduled for that Sunday morning, and that would have caused a considerable delay. But the water level of the rivers was so high that the maintenance had been cancelled, and I arrived at Schiphol well in time.

The KLM flight, during which I started refereeing a (too?) long article submitted to ACTA INFORMATICA, was smooth, and dead on time I set foot - for the first time in my life - on Spanish soil. My secondary hosts, Fernando Orejas and Pere Botella of the Facultat d'Informàtica of the Universitat Politècnica de Barcelona, met me at the airport.

My primary host was Benno Aladjem, Chairman of the Program Committee of the Convencion Informatica Latina. That conference would start on Monday and Aladjem had asked me to deliver the opening address. After I had made all travel arrangements I learned that the conference would start on Monday at 17:00. As a result I gratefully accepted Orejas's invitation to visit his Department of Computing Science as well.

After we had gone to the hotel and I had checked in, Orejas and Botella showed me the medieval part of the city, which was within walking distance from the hotel. Having recently observed how personal computers are being pushed down our throats, I saw Gothic cathedrals with other eyes. Not too successfully I had always tried to understand the phenomenon of those huge medieval churches as manifestation of a collective devotion I could no longer reconstruct. This time I looked at them as to technology-driven products, and each time I wondered why these churches had been built I saw visions of people enamoured with the realization that they knew how to do it. It even supplied a plausible explanation for the most absurd ornaments (of which Barcelona now has many). After a few hours we parted.

The hotel was quite modern (meaning that it is practically impossible to write in your room). I read the International Herald Tribune, which had been given to me on the plane, and listened to classical music — I had my (very portable) FM receiver with me —. At 21:00, Aladjem would collect me for dinner.

He phoned me at 21:05 that he was on his way; he arrived a quarter of an hour later. The first restaurant he took me to was closed; so was the second one. The third one was open, but only for the invited guests of a party. He drove me all through Barcelona and I have lost count of the number of closed restaurants we met on our way.

It was absolutely ridiculous. Eventually, well past 23:00, we ended up in a fish restaurant. There I learned that Catalan is a language to be spoken very loudly in public places; but the food was very good: I had (white!) asparagus, followed by grilled (genuine!) sole.

The next morning, Botella collected me at 9:15 and took me to the Department, which is temporarily housed in a deserted nunnery. It was the beginning of a nice, but long, day.

A general discussion started, and it did so very quickly since both Orejas and Botella, who - at different occasions - had both been in my audience - were very familiar with my work. (Botella told me that he owned a copy of my "Notes on Structured Programming" since 1969, the year I typed them! That that text had been circulated at such an early date in Spain was new for me.)

Suddenly it was 11:00 and I had to give my lecture. It went very well, though I was a bit short of blackboard space. Had I had more blackboards I would have manipulated my regular expressions with the same degree of detail as I had done several weeks ago at Imperial College, London. The mathematics was still quite fresh and the audience was duly surprised by this unusual application of regular expressions.

At 13:00 the talk was over and I was taken to the

Dean's Office, where I was the first to sign the young Department's "Guest Book". Then lunch until 15:00.

At 15:30 we were at the Congress Centre. I had been asked to be interviewed for the Catalan journal of science, and the next hour was devoted to that interview. After 30 minutes meditation I was ready to give my opening address. From 17:00 to 17:45 we had the official speeches; I spoke from 17:45 until 19:00. I had tried out my visuals two months ago in Helsinki, where I had to speak at a very similar occasion. The Helsinki rehearsal was better than the Barcelona performance. There was simultaneous translation into Spanish, Portuguese, and French, but it was not too simultaneous. I could hear all three interpreters and found it very distracting to hear how far they were lagging behind.

The Convencion Informatica Latina was embedded in a fair/exhibition; after the reception I was taken to the (most impressive!) office of the director of the fair where I was asked to sign the golden guestbook of the fair; it was the first time I signed in the presence of clicking cameras. It was very funny! With three people of the University of Barcelona and two from Madrid I had a nice Catalan dinner.

The next morning the interview for the Catalan science journal continued until Orejas took me to the Airport. Shortly after 16:00 I

was back on Dutch soil. I went home by train, interrupting my journey at Leyden where I had a dinner appointment with Andrei P. Ershov from Novosibirsk. Ershov was in Leyden for a conference on teaching and told me that in Siberia he had been "fighting violently" the introduction of BASIC in the secondary school system. His profound disapproval of BASIC did not surprise me - he is knowledgeable enough - , the fact that the battle had to be fought in Siberia too was new for me.

I left Leyden with the 20:58 train, changed in Rotterdam and came home at 23:10. There I was chagrined to learn that Ria's "post-punctural" headache had not subsided. Two days later she was treated for that, the day before I left for the USA.

California Institute
of Technology
PASADENA
United States of America

13 June 1983
prof. dr. Edsger W. Dijkstra
Burroughs Research Fellow