

Dinner, and Other Things

Chris Cole

Phil- "Is a table needed? Shall I bring glasses? If one were required to purchase a fork will spoons be provided? These questions must be asked, for you have invited me to dinner. I eat my dinner in layers of stacked quantities; salad, bread, meat, soup. I value quantity, there is evidence in quantity. But interruptions are prevalent here, which prevents me from responding to your invitation." - Interruption 1 - "No one has invited you to dinner! They only asked you for directions to dinner!"

Interruption 2 - "Why would someone ask you to dinner, friend? You obviously have no sense of social grace?"

Interruption 3 - "I too believe in being asked to dinner. You have asked some very appropriate questions."

Dinner must shift from its casually elegant mannerisms to a propelled atmosphere that shuns disguises and well meaning blood soaked prime-rib plates. Dinner must acknowledge the cavities of the body as its primal source of in and out goodness. Dinner must free itself of table cloths, seated cushions, and napkins. For they are the well meaning accessories which provided us with such details as a 28.00 dollar shrimp and steak plate. Dinner must...

Phil- "Yes, of course I accept your invitation regardless of what those obnoxious fellows say. They've probably never dined in their lives. They've reduced themselves to hamburgers and malt liquor beer. Well of course my questions concerning the table and glasses were relevant, many restaurants have little to do with such 19th century technicalities as spoons and knives. The majority of restaurants allow the customer to create their own unique dining experience."

The Restaurateurs Convention which is held yearly at the Savanioug Convention Center took issue with the changing concept of "the dining experience." Jack Derof, a restaurant consultant specializing in "dining alternatives" was this years key note speaker. He stated, "For the past 25 years we in the restaurant business have assumed that the overwhelming issue to contest with is the quality of the food we serve customers. The way in which food was prepared and accessorized was highly contested and subject to much debate, but now fellow restaurateurs as they say times have changed. We are confronted with a society whose emphases has shifted from the pleasures associated with taste to a culture which questions the assumptions of what the dining experience should involve. What this means ladies and gentleman is the customer will no longer willingly comply with such traditional staples as

tables, waiters, and chairs, etc.... We as restaurateurs must be willing to confront this situation head on. We can no longer deny the shift in our customers' needs. I have been director of research and development for Hansen Restaurants for the past seventeen years and I have personally seen this dramatic increase in customers' demand for a more stimulating dining experience. I shall review a variety of ideas my team has developed in addressing this new demand."

IDEA 1 - Individual vs. Customer

"Individuals will no longer tolerate being referred to as customers. Why, you ask? Our research indicates that many people feel it reduces them only to a systemized product which is there only to be served and disposed of within a specifically allotted time. The word "customer" formulates a holistic self that eliminates any possibility of diversifying into other areas of the social strata. When the waiter or waitress hands the individual a menu they are leaving the individual no choice but to regulate themselves to a specific, confining identity-the paying customer. Also the social enforced "dining time," which of course remains unstated, creates a machine-like atmosphere which affects various aspects of the dining experience, from the taste of one's food to the ability to carry on a interesting conversation. We conducted a study which analyzed the relationship between time and the taste of food. One test group was given 20 minutes to eat a New York steak and the other group was given 45 minutes to eat the same cut of meat. The meat was identically prepared for each group. The 45 minute group gave the dish an 82 percent approval rating while the 20 minute group gave the meal only a 1 percent approval rate. This statistical evidence indicates that time has a much greater effect on the quality of a meal than we had been led to believe."

A man from the audience stands and interrupts Mr. Derof's address, "Excuse me, but might this enormous statistical discrepancy have something to do with the fact that one group was told to eat under the threat of gunpoint and the others were not?"

Mr. Derof replied, "We have yet to analyze that aspect of the study. Please do not interrupt again."

Interruption - "Yea, I was at that Restaurateurs Convention, some guy pointed out that one of the test groups had a gun pointed to their head which "greatly affected the subject's response." Sounded like some sort of gag, might have been a set up, I don't know. "Hey, where's the fuckin' ketchup!"

Dinner never meant much but peas and white wine, for white bread sirloin types with a feel for clean finger nails and airy neck ties. Napkins were always present, but never needed. Their outer lips were never confronted with a bit of sloppy potato or mustard sauce. The mouth's outer skin was kept clean, it was used for other things. The food was always eaten. No one once refused it.

Mr Derof's Individual vs. Customer scenario- Door opens, individual enters the restaurant. Speakers are placed at the corners of the four walls. The speakers speak, "Welcome, please instruct us." The individual asks to be prepared as a dish. The speakers ask him to lay on a platform which has emerged from the far right wall. The speakers ask the individual to explain their request, so it might be used to gauge population trends. "I have always consumed the food that has been prepared for me. I am bored by this procedure, this repetitive action which I have never once questioned. I wish to experience the entree's point of view. To be treated as an object that someone is paying to consume." - What is occurring in this brief instance? Is it a capitalistic\sexual\power plea? The words, "paying," "consume," "object," arrange this subject into a three-eyed dye, that refuse to fuse all three terrains of knowledge/desire into one complete "Happy 25th Anniversary" greeting card. The dye rolls "capitalistic."

CAPITALISTIC

The grocery store owner questions the thickness of the canned tomato sauce which he has placed in aisle four. Can it be thicker than a dollar bill, he asks himself? This question annoys him. Five minutes pass. He realizes that he is a grocery store owner who has just questioned the thickness of tomato sauce in relation to a dollar bill. This annoys him further. A customer enters the store. The customer places a 5.00 dollar bill and two boxes of Twinkies on the counter. "The Twinkies are free," says the owner. The customer smiles. "And everything else to, take as much as you like." The customer runs through the store, grabbing as much as he can. The customer leaves, still smiling. Within 2 hours the store is cleaned out. He is pleased. He is no longer a grocery store owner, just a store owner. He lights the carpet on fire. The fire spreads throughout the vacant store. 45 minutes pass. He has no store left. The store is no longer a store but a space in which he may use to exact a precise stance that has evaded him due to tomato cans and other debatable accessories. He thinks.

IDEA 2 - "Let's go out to Dinner." - A PHRASE IN DISPUTE

Jack Derof- "Does this request have any significant power left to initiate social, sexual, or business contacts? Our research indicates that the phrase "Let's go out to Dinner," is currently viewed as an outdated approach to social interaction. By in large people view it as "pseudo-50's pleasantness" that crops up sporadically when the public is confronted with a social, sexual, or economic crisis. The phrase symbolizes stability and cohesion which many people cling to, to ease their fears. We will demonstrate the use of this phrase by playing a bit of 50's nostalgia ourselves. Roll it Steve "A screen descends from the curtains. The faces are white and young. Their bodies are made of clothing; sweaters, t-shirts, and jeans. Only their necks, hands, and faces look human. They require speech to be believed-
He- "Can I ask you something?"

She- "Go 'head."

He- "Na, forget it."

She- "No, what we're you gonna ask me?"

He- "Well, would you, na, you'll just say no."

She- "Just ask me."

He- "Well, how 'bout you and me go out to dinner some time."

Can this be looked at in terms of handball? Each request or response is constructed as a small blue rubber ball which is hit and consumed by a wall. The wall resembles each of the clothed figures. The game begins; ball/phrase Can I ask you something— ———The ball is unsure. He recognizes the ball is limp. It is a childish plea which he thought would help him get away from girlie magazines and foul language. He tries to relax himself as the ball is about to be swallowed or rejected. She is quite familiar with this ball/phrase. Its smell and motion is a distinct mixture of naivete and aggressive sweat. She opens her mouth to accept it. Why? She feels these types of phrases have possibilities. Though she is aware of what this phrase will eventually lead to, she enjoys it for its single nature. It may still leave her the ability to escape with a chance. She reconfigures the ball/phrase in terms of allowing him to ask his question. She waits a few seconds though, letting her possibility at another scenario last a bit longer. She responds- G o'head— — —. She waits. He is hit by the ball/phrase quickly. He expected something different. A giggle or maybe a no. He accepts it in fear of appearing inadequate. -But these are only simulations. The intentions given to each character are purely imaginative speculation, so the characters would, consequently, exhibit a humanistic/poetic dimension which would enable the phrases to develop into a more telling form of expression. These bodies of clothing are themselves phrases constituting a social/economic function which ends in middle class ahhh and tiresome lint removal. For example a sweater.

SWEATER

Fact- The "He's" mother purchased the sweater at the local Under Five Dollar Store. She believes that clothes should be durable, fashionable, and cheap. She feels that sweaters have the ability to appear masculine, if one is able to find one with the right color scheme, and soft without being thought as "soft," which denotes femininity and potential "queer" status. She states, "I've always thought men looked handsome in sweaters. When me and my husband used to date in high school, he always showed up at the front door wearing this lovely green and white argyle. He was so handsome. But what persuaded me to start buying them for my son is when I realized how incredibly popular they've become with the young people. Every time I turn on the television some teenager is struttin' around wearin' one of those things. So I said why not my boy, he's just as handsome."

Sweaters- Given at Christmas, birthdays, and anniversaries. Worn by fathers, mothers,

sons, daughters, and grandmas and grandpas. Sweaters are worn on all prime time programs. These shows are predominantly domestic comedies involving a husband, wife, and two or three kids. These shows never discuss why the characters choose to wear sweaters. Jim Arpello, a well known producer of one of these "domestic comedies" discussed the sweater issue stating, "I really don't know what to tell you. What sort of question is that anyway? You asking me to talk about why the characters in the show wear sweaters? You see in the past I've tried to be as polite as possible with these types of questions. I say to myself, 'Hey it's some no-nothing, no-offense, grad student probably working for his college paper, or maybe he's working on some idiotic research report that quote ""explores television's influence on the public."" So what do you want me to say that since Sears is one of our major sources of advertising revenue that we have deceptively made our actors wear sweaters to increase Sears' sales, which leads you to believe that Corporate America dominates every aspect of our lives. See, you didn't think I knew that angle did ya. I went to college to ya'know. Took Communications 101. Learned all about the ""mass media."" I oohed and ahhaed all semester. Well I'm here to say after 15 years in the television business, IT AIN'T LIKE THAT! You know why I have my actors wear sweaters? Do you! Because Woolworth's put out a sweater catalog which my wife can't get enough of. She suggested quote ""how lovely"" they would look on t.v., and after about six months of her bitchin' at me about it, I put 'em on the air. So now when I come home all I got to hear is her whine about the new car she wants. Maybe I'll have all my actors drive around in new Chevys so you can do a paper on how G.M. controls the entertainment industry. Now, would you please go away."

Gave him a sweater. He'll wear it most likely. He doesn't like sweaters, but I know he'll use it. It will stay in the closet and be taken out occasionally. Maybe for playing in the park with his son. He will forget I gave it to him after a couple of years. He might ask his wife, "You got this for me last year?" She'll remember, and tell him I bought it. "Oh yea," he'll say, and smile.

DJE ROLLS-POWER

Card Game- Five men sitting around a table playing cards.

First man- He is tired of coco. He drank it every night for two weeks. He drank it to warm himself before he went to bed. After two weeks the chocolate flavor seemed sour. But he did not drink it for its flavoring. He drank it because he felt cold. He drank the coco in his den, so he could watch the television. He would watch bits of videotape. He never thought to question why he chose certain scenes. They made up so little of his day.

SCENE

A bald man appears. His name and title are shown at the bottom of the screen- Arthur Franklin, Art Director, Metropolitan Museum of Art. He speaks, "What Expressionism does is

say we're not going to portray the outer world, but the inner world. We're not going to paint the skin, we're going to paint the bone and sinew." Consequently there are shots of various paintings which provide evidence for Mr. Franklin's assumptions. The paintings are thought of as innovative for their time. The web of colors overlap, creating distorted figures which are in need of a response. He thought of what Mr. Franklin said about the inner world. How would the expressionists have painted him, "the guy with the cup of cocoa?" Perhaps the painters would betray his calm scene. Would he be torn into streaks of blue and black? Would his portrait, entitled "Man with Cup" been selected by the producers of this documentary? He felt they could have used him.