The Problem of the Messy Restaurant

Description of problem

The dining room becomes messy. In other words, a large number of tables without customers have plates and glasses left on them. We might sketch out three reasons a messy dining room is problematic. First, it takes lots of time to clean tables, which reduces the capacity of the waiter to attend to present guests. Second, it is an eyesore to guests who are present. Third, the establishment's capacity to accept new guests is diminished.

Let's now discuss the **causes of the problem**. A messy dining room is caused by the existence of a notable number of dirty tables. The cause of a dirty table is quite simple to state. It is the decision of a waiter to not clean the table. This decision might be taken explicitly:

> "I do not want to clean this table right now".

Most likely, however, it is an implicit decision. The waiter wants to clean the table, but implicitly thinks:

> “it is more important that I prioritise requests from present guests, rather than tidying tables with no guests”.
>
> NDT

The latter thought—called NDT for Neglect Dirty Tables—seems to be very reasonable. After all, consider a guest who requests a bill. If you make the guest watch you tidying a table rather than fetching their bill, you will annoy the guest. This will discourage the guest from providing a tip and might even cause the guest to leave a negative review of their experience. So, it can appear very reasonable to prioritise dealing with present guests, and neglect tables with no guests. And so, it is from this honest motivation—to serve present guests well—that a messy dining room can arise.

Solutions to the problem

Let’s now turn towards **solutions to the problem**. The first observation we can make is that we may be able to **dissolve the problem** of a dirty table rather than solve it. The notion of *dissolving a problem* has its roots in the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who described many problems as arising from confusions about language. To dissolve a problem is to attack the very premises of the problem’s existence (rather than accept the problem as a problem, and dive in and solve it). For example,

instead of diving in and asking how to *quickly* clean a dirty table, or considering *when* to clean a dirty table, we might instead state:

> A messy table is a pseudo-problem. It arises from a confusion. The confusion exists in the waiter's actions leading up to the departure of guests from the restaurant.

In other words, we don't consider "dirty table" a real problem, and therefore we don't consider a "messy restaurant" a real problem. And we consider ways to prevent dirty tables *from ever arising in the first place*.

For instance, let's suppose we gradually remove items from the table, throughout the guest experience. If we do this, there may be very little to remove once the guests leave. We might call this concept "tidy as you go".

Let's try to formulate some rules that embody this attitude of *tidy as you go*. I call them **clean considerations**:

> (CC-1)
>
> **If** a table is not tidy
>
> **then** do not ask if they would like to see the desserts menu.

That is, the following habit is in your bones. Before opening your mouth and asking whether a table would like to see the dessert menu, you analyse the table. If the table has ketchup or dirty plates, then you remove these *and walk away from the table* before opening your mouth about desserts. A waiter with this habit in their bones cleans as they go.

(CC-2)

If a table is not tidy,

then do not invite them to consider the items on their bill slip.

That is, the following habit is in your bones. Before printing off the small white bill slip from the computer, you analyse the table. If the table has

any cutlery or any sauces or any dirty bowls or any dirty plates or any finished drinks glasses

then you remove these *and walk away from the table* before printing the bill slip.

Overall, the idea of Clean Considerations is that considerations should always be made in a clean environment. The mindset is as follows. To allow your customer to make the best decision at each stage, you want

them to be in a de-cluttered environment. It helps that this fictional story does have a ring of truth to it: people can improve their life by tidying their bedroom. Whether you agree with the truth of this or not, I *imagine* that it is my duty to provide the perfect conditions for each decision. This little imaginative exercise helps to keep the restaurant clean.

To summarize, the concept of clean considerations is all about providing the right conditions at each stage of the meal. Before asking if guests would like to see the dessert menu, provide the *conditions* for it. You absolutely must remove the plates from the main courses. Before presenting the bill, provide the *conditions* for it. Remove dessert plates and any drinks which are obviously finished. For example, a bottle of wine may be empty. A branded beer glass may be empty (water glasses, in contrast, must remain in case the guest wants to refill it with water from the jug on the table).

Why tables must end dirty

A messy table is a table with lots of *items* on it. Unfortunately, there are some items such that it is impossible to determine whether the customer wants to retain them. Examples include: a wine bottle with some wine left

in; a half-drunk cup of coffee; a somewhat scrunched napkin; a glass with a little bit of liquid in the bottom; a water glass with some tap water left in it; a half-full water jug. I call these items “indeterminables”. It would be quite annoying to ask the guest whether they are finished with each of these items, so I choose to presume they are still in use. All these indeterminables are best cleared only at the end.

That was an explanation of why it is false that we can completely eradicate the problem of a messy table by “cleaning as we go”. It was an explanation of why tables must **end dirty**. Namely, there exist certain “indeterminables” which need to be left on the table until the end.

In fact, on a table of six people, there might be so many indeterminables that by the time they leave, the items cannot all fit on one tray. There is likely to be:

1. a bottle of wine in a wine cooler;
2. three wine glasses;
3. a water jug;
4. six water glasses;
5. three drinks glasses (e.g. gin and ale glasses);
6. the bill plate and perhaps the bill;
7. dirty napkins.

All of these items will not even fit onto one tray. Water glasses do not stack. Therefore, it seems like the waiter has to spend two trips doing nothing but shifting items from the table. Suppose there is no where to place the second large tray of dirty items—it cannot be placed on a nearby table because the restaurant is full, and it cannot be placed on the table itself, which needs to be "set". You cannot set a table if there is a dirty tray on it. This means that a *third* trip is required, in order to remove that second tray of dirty items from the waiter's hands. In other words, it cannot be the case that there are just *two* trips, with the waiter, on her second visit to the table, removing the dirty tray *and also setting the table*. No, three trips are necessitated by a messy table. A **trip** is

> the combination of the waiter walking outbound from his station, and walking inbound back to his station.

We will rely on this concept of a "trip" throughout this essay. Anyhow, all this goes to demonstrate why a busy waiter might be rational in neglecting a dirty table. This proof that a messy tables demands three trips seems to justify NDT (Neglect Dirty Tables). It takes a long time to clear a table; for a table of six it necessarily takes three trips.

If we accept the conclusion that *tables can take a long time to reset*, what conclusions are we to draw from this? What does this conclusion

mean? The first thing to note is that you must do it. This may seem like an obvious conclusion, but it is worth reiterating, I think. It is worth stating that there is, in fact, a claim upon the waiter to reset dirty tables. This claim should compete alongside the claims upon the waiter to deal with the guests who are present.

Going further, we might distinguish some different strategies. For example, we might distinguish *tight resetting* from *loose resetting*. If you follow a tight resetting strategy, then you are very disciplined in resetting tables as soon as a guest leaves. The restaurant run by a person adopting a *tight reset* policy is such that:

1. particular dirty tables tend to exist for no more than ten minutes ("Messy Time Limit") and
2. the number of dirty tables simultaneously existing tends to never rise above two.

A person adopting a *tight reset* policy enjoys certain benefits. **(1)** Their guests are more relaxed, because they can see that the waiter is in control of the dining room **(2)** The waiter retains the ability to seat new guests immediately and **(3)** the waiter has time to deal with guest requests. Note that if somebody wanted to work on their personal tendency to let dirty

dining rooms develop, they could set, say, a ten minute timer every time a customer leaves and aim to have the table reset within ten minutes.

Do Tight Resetters have more time?

The first two benefits which the Tight Resetter enjoys will probably pass muster. But I suspect that the third benefit arouses suspicion. Does the Tight Resetter really have more time to deal with guest requests? Surely he does not, because he spends lots of time resetting tables. There is nothing to suggest that he has *more* time!

Let's now respond to this point. It seems impenetrable. But it can be responded to a nuanced way. We *can* in fact argue that the waiter who adopts of policy of *tight resetting* has more time for their guests. The argument begins with a number of considerations.

CONSIDERATION 1. It may sound cheesy, but the truth is that there is *always* a choice. In other words, few rules are absolute. Yes, food should be served immediately, but if you are finishing off the drinks for a table, then the pies are not going to be destroyed if held under the heat lamp for 30 seconds. If there is a guest at the door, then they should be seen to

immediately but if you are in the middle of a conversation with a guest, then you should allow the conversation to end politely and not dash to the door.

There are rules but there are also *always choices*. It is in this realm of choice, amongst the absolute rules, that skilful operation is forged. The choice to *not* be guided by a rule, at the appropriate the time, for the appropriate person—this is the stuff of expertise. This is how we squeeze the juice of resource management.

CONSIDERATION 2. It might be worth taking a moment to flip the perspective. There is no denying that a server who allows fifty percent of tables in the restaurant to become dirty has less time. This is because all these tables have a claim upon him. *He ought to clean them all*. In a situation like this, it is stressful for the waiter. It may be helpful to bring in the notion of *control*. With a messy room, it is more truthful to say that the room is controlling the waiter than to say that the waiter is in control of the room. So, we can be certain that in a messy restaurant, the waiter has less time than in a clean restaurant. He is less free to respond to new guests at the door or requests from seated guests.

Perhaps we can now start to see how the inverse holds. That is, see how in a clean restaurant, the waiter has *more* time. The only mistiness we need to rub away is the undeniable logic that clean tables are forged by

giving away time and so the waiter cannot have *more* time. Where is the crack in this logic?

CONSIDERATION 3. The Clean Resetter *decides* to reset tables. If you decide to do something then you are in control. Also, you make the decision to reset an individual messy table. The decision is never made to clean all the messy tables.

Those were three considerations that will help me to argue that the waiter who adopts a policy of tight resetting has more time to deal with guest requests. They were:

Consideration 1 – there is always a choice; rules can be broken

Consideration 2 – without resetting any tables, the waiter has *less* time and no control over the restaurant.

Consideration 3 – the Clean Resetter decides to reset tables

Multiple Claims, Snaps and Elasticity

It may be impossible to make a guest who has asked for the bill wait while you clean *four* tables, but it is possible that they wait while you clean *one*

table. This is a crucial insight. In maintaining a tidy restaurant, the waiter is <constantly justifying the resetting of individual tables>. The cold truth is that *things can wait*.

In a stressful environment like a busy restaurant, you will have multiple claims made upon you at the same time. The customer at the door must be seated. *This is one claim upon you.* The four cocktails for table X must be made immediately. *This is a second claim upon you*. Table Y must be reset. *This is a third claim upon you*. This is a regular situation that arises.

A single individual has three pressing claims upon them at the same time. The customers *absolutely* must be seated; the cocktails *absolutely* must arrive at the table; table Y *absolutely* must be reset. Advice from supervising staff usually only involves asserting one item in this tripartite terror (for example, “guests must be seated”) in situations when the server chose to respond to another claim, such as making the cocktails. Rarely does the advice—from supervising staff or in Mitchells and Butlers training materials—extend to the higher-level task that is choosing amongst the claims, in a systematic manner.

There is some **elasticity**. Guests will sit until their cocktails arrive; guests at the door will stay stood for some amount of time; nothing

disastrous will happen if a messy table remains messy for a moment. The skill is in balancing the elasticity of each of the claims. We want to keep the number of “snaps”—which occur when the elasticity reaches its limits—as minimal as possible.

A “snap” occurs when there is some negative consequence in the guest experience because there has been too much waiting. If a customer at the door leaves before being seated then “snap”. If a customer gets up and seeks out staff to enquire about their drinks then “snap”. If a customer comes to the door and we can only offer them dirty tables then “snap”.

Let’s refine the concept of a “snap”. First, snaps are negative guest experiences that directly feed back to the waiter. A customer asking “where is my beer?” is a snap because the waiter is made aware of some negative experience. In contrast, a disgruntled guest who leaves and never comes back is not an example of a “snap” because the waiter is not aware of the feedback. Second, “snaps” are related to time. A guest who has a coffee that is too cold is a negative experience. But it is not a “snap” because it is not related to time and elasticity. “Snaps” are waits whose duration has grown beyond the limit of social acceptability.

Two Conceptions of Resetting a Table

Earlier we established that it necessarily takes three trips to clear a table of six which is dirty. But it is important that you have the correct conception of "*resetting a table of six*". On a first conception, it is a complex task with multiple parts. You decide to embark on the task and do not attempt anything else until every part has been completed. So, if something else comes up while the table is half-cleared, then you make it wait until you have fully cleared the table. In other words, on this conception of *resetting a table of six*, we reset the table in one go. Resetting the messy table is like a transaction in computer science: It is either complete or not complete, with no in-between states.

We can distinguish a second conception of resetting a table from the Transaction Conception. Every time you return from the floor, you take plates from a dirty table, if there are any. So, if you deliver ketchup to a table, then instead of walking back to your station empty-handed, you fill your hands with dirty plates from a table and walk back to your station with these. So, you "tack on" one of the parts involves in *clearing a table* onto another task, such as delivering ketchup to a table. We might call this conception of resetting a table the *Distributed Conception*. The parts which make up the task of resetting a table are now distributed amongst other

tasks. We “tack on” the parts of the complex task to other tasks. The Distributed Conception of resetting a table has benefits over the Transaction Conception of resetting a table.

Implementing the Distributed Conception

How does a waiter learn to act as if their mind holds the Distributed Conception? The answer is that a waiter must be conscious about her movements. Rather than immediately and unconsciously returning to her base after delivering ketchup to a table, she must instead pause, and select a table to begin resetting, perhaps by clearing it. The motto is “think before you return”. The waiter needs to stop conceiving of herself as:

> developing action-plans at the base, moving away from the base to perform the action, and then return to the base to develop another plan.
>
> **CARTESIAN CONCEPTION**

Instead, she must form plans while away from the base. These plans are about how you will make your inbound movements useful. She needs to pre-empt the plan she *would* form at the station, and start performing the action *while already away from the station*.

Now, it might be objected that this does not quite work. Consider the first part of the complex task of resetting a table, which is clearing a table. Namely, removing the water jug and water glasses and wine bottle etc. In order to clear a table well, I need to have a tray. The tray enables me to carry many glasses at the same time and be efficient. Now onto the problem. It goes something like this:

> If I form a plan to clear a table whilst on the floor (amongst the tables) then there is no guarantee that I will have a tray.

If I do not have a tray, then I cannot clear a table. If I cannot clear the table, then I cannot perform the first stage of resetting the table. *And this is the problem with the Distributed Conception*. Certain parts (clear the table, wipe the table) within the task of resetting a table, have conditions. You clear a table well on the condition of possessing a tray, you wipe a table well on the condition of possessing a cloth. But if the waiter intends to clear a table while out on the floor, then there is no guarantee she will have the equipment to fulfil this intention. She does not have a tray, for example.

Complex Intentions

What might the defender of Distributed Conception say in response to this? They might say that what we need to start doing is bringing a tray out to the floor even when we deliver ketchup to a table. This way, I can deliver ketchup to a table and then clear another table. What we need to effectively start doing, then, is *leaving the base with multiple plans*.

An expert waiter never intends to deliver ketchup to table X. Rather, he intends to deliver ketchup to table X and remove a tray's worth of indeterminables from table Y. The former is an example of a simple intention and the latter is an example of a **complex intention**. To give another example, an expert waiter never intends to ask table X if they would like to see the dessert menu. Instead, she intends to

> ask table X if they would like to see the dessert menu and to remove a tray's worth of indeterminables from table Y.

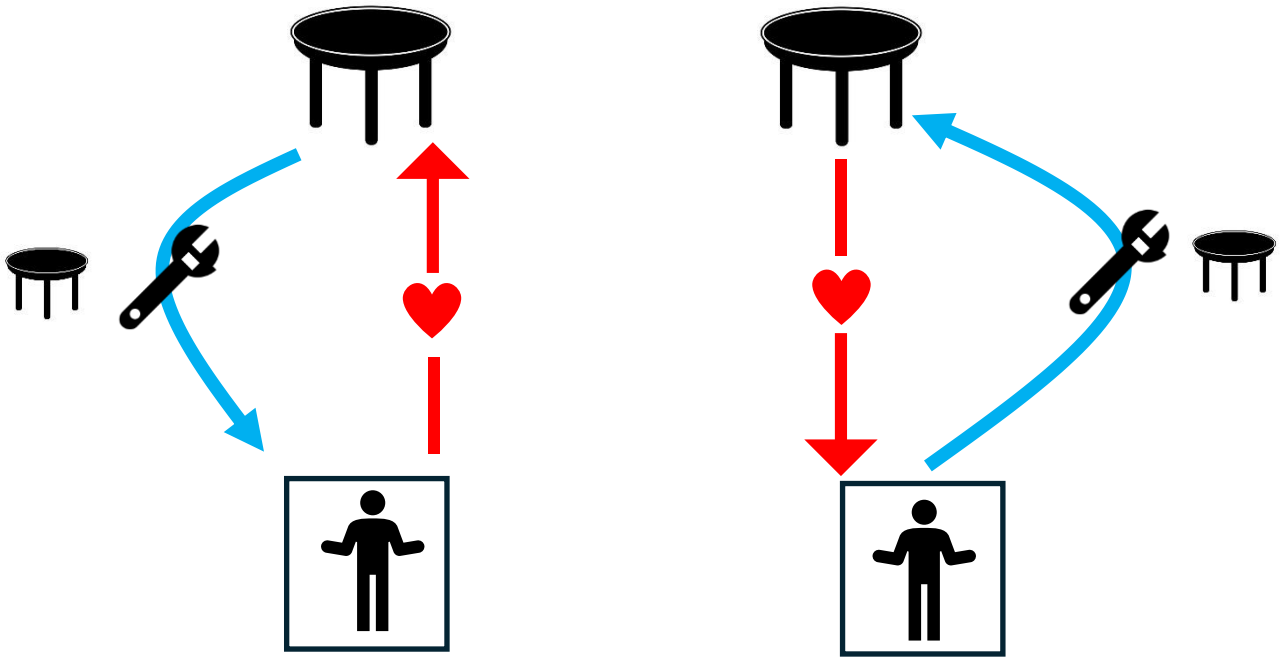
An expert waiter forms complex intentions each time she leaves the base.

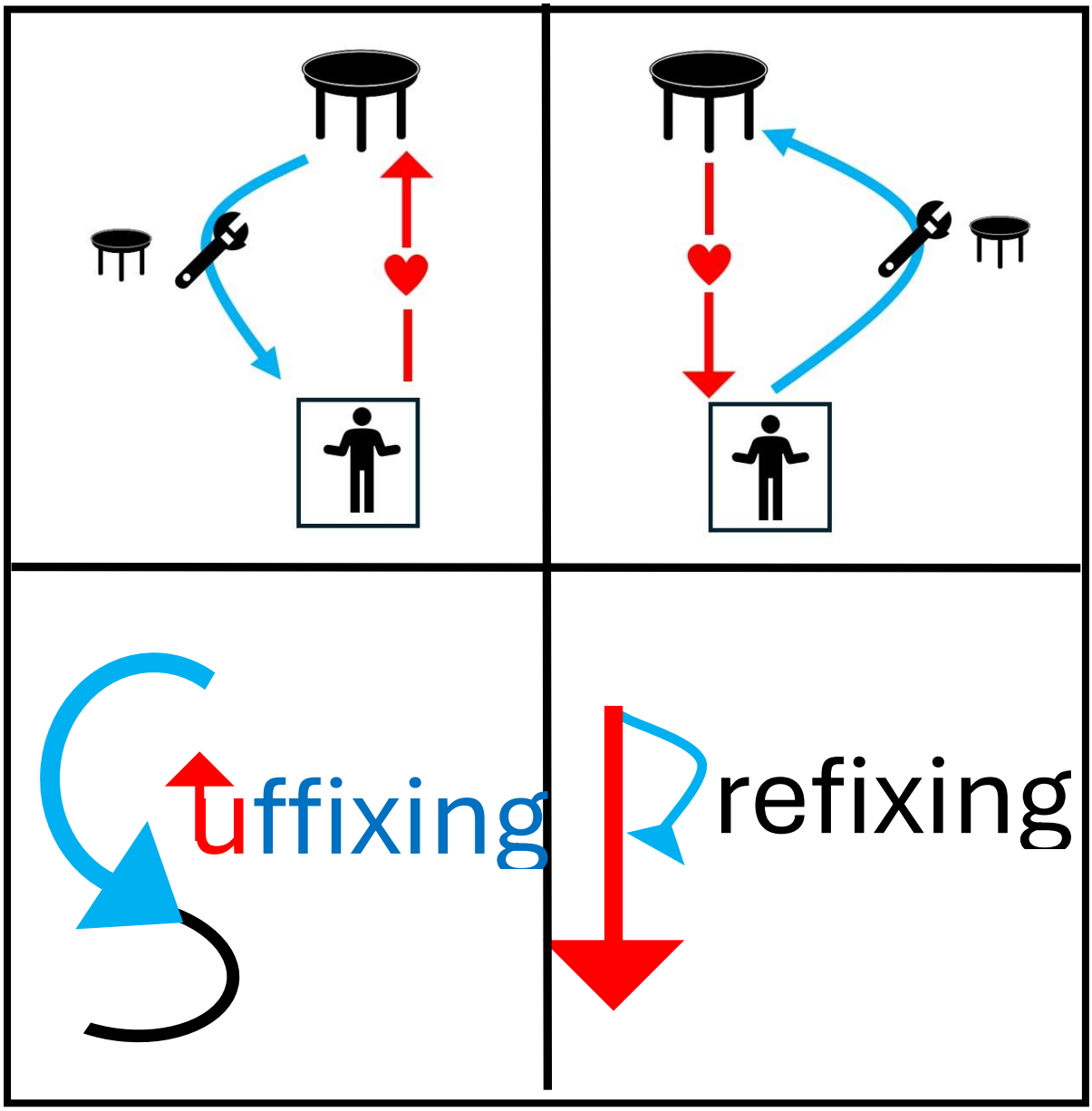
Something in those examples of complex intentions might strike you as worrying, though. There is a sense in which the waiter is not attending to the desires of the guest with enough immediacy. For instance, can you imagine if a waiter asked a table if they would like to see the desserts menu, understood that the guests *would* like to, and then proceeded to tediously remove glassware from a nearby table rather than fetching the

dessert menus? This would not be acceptable. The guests would wonder why the waiter is not fetching the dessert menus immediately. It therefore seems that we cannot always tack on the parts of resetting a table onto the end of visits to guests.

Prefix to appear punctual

We may not always be able to tack on the parts onto visits but we can still perform distributed resetting of tables. We simply need to practise Prefixing. Prefixing is the act of carrying out the work of resetting a table *before* taking in information about guest desires.





This diagram shows prefixing and suffixing. The red lines depict movements motivated by immediate guest desires. The blue lines are movements motivated by waiter desires (e.g. the desire to set a table).

The spanner icon shows that the waiter is doing some work at another table, such as removing dirty glasses from an empty table or setting an empty table or delivering drinks to a table.

We *preface* our visit to the guest with a tiny bit of tidying-up work. For example, we load up a trayful of glasses, leave it on the dirty table, and then ask Table X if they would like to see the dessert menu. If they say yes, then we swiftly collect our loaded tray of dirty glassware (from the messy table) and immediately return to base to fetch the menus. Prefixing maintains the waiter's immediate responses to guest desires. The practice might be thought of the act of delaying the waiter's learning of the guest desires, such that the knowledge of the desires can be acted on immediately. If we learned that the guests desired the dessert menus and then tediously loaded up a tray with dirty glasses, then this would be unacceptable. Remarkably, we delay the loading of knowledge into the waiter's mind to render her actions socially acceptable[1]. Load the tray and *then* ask about dessert menus. Present yourself as punctual by prefixing. Prefixing is the second tool in our armoury of complex intentions, alongside SUFFIXING.

How to prefix well

Let's now discuss how to expertly prefix. For it is not necessarily true that a waiter knows how to prefix *well*. "Prefixing" should be performed anytime

[1] Kant wrote that he had to remove knowledge to make room for faith.

you visit a table to gather information. Throughout the guest's stay, you gather information about **guest desires**: which drinks they desire; which food they desire; whether they desire the dessert menus. And the basic idea of prefixing is that you *gather material and then gather information*. You gather material glasses onto a tray, park it on the table, then gather information about the desires of nearby guests. You hop from your station habitually hungry for both things and facts.

These are situations when you need to be seen to be heading back to your station. You must be (seen to be) responding to the request immediately. Examples of such **Urgent Requests** include:

1. Inputting into the computer the
    a. main courses
    b. desserts
2. Fetching
    a. dessert menus
    b. sauces (ketchup, mayonnaise etc)
    c. the bill slip to give to a table
    d. a jug of water
    e. an extra item of cutlery

Urgent Requests involve a trip back to our station. This is taken as the starting point, or premise. The next question is how we optimize this trip back to base. One answer is to use our body to transport a tray of dirty glasses back to our station. Indeed, if we are habitually moving onto the floor and then clearing a table immediately, then we increase the likelihood that when a guest makes an urgent request to us, we will have a tray to bring back to our station.

Using Signs

Still, this picture of things presumes a fictional reality. For we cannot control when guests make urgent requests. For example, guests may ask for the bill when you are moving outbound from your station. Sometimes, it's while you are clearing a table. Sometimes it's as you move back towards your station.

What are we to make of this? Well, there are three possibilities for when a guest may ask for the bill. We can take each in turn. If a guest asks for the bill while you moving outbound from your station then you are either intending to:

- Deliver ketchup to a table and then clear another table

- Deliver food to a table and then clear another table or
- Deliver a “reset kit” to a table and set the table, and then gather some information or
- Deliver ketchup to a table and then gather food orders from another table or
- Deliver dessert menus to a table and then take food orders from another table

There is a possibility that the waiter forgets that the guest has requested the bill. Perhaps the likelihood of this is *even greater* if the waiter tends to form complex intentions (compared to those waiters who do not form complex intentions). After all, to remember to, for example,

- deliver dessert menus to Table 1 and
- clear Table 2, (constituting “Suffixing”), and
- bring the bill to Table 3

is quite a lot to remember. There are three things to remember, rather than the usual two items which govern the complex intention behind the outbound and inbound parts of a “trip”.

It’s even worse if the joint intention is prefixing rather than suffixing, as in the example above. For example, suppose the waiter intends to clear Table 2 (T2), and then take dessert orders from T1 (“*Take things, take*

facts"). Well, if T3 request the bill on his outbound trip, towards T2, then waiter probably does have some scope to justify the completion of his joint intention. That is, the waiter can justifiably clear T2 and take orders from T1 *in spite of* his knowledge of T3 urgent request. I believe that there is *not* a claim upon the waiter to abandon his intentions and deliver the bill.

The reason is that the guest has interrupted the waiter, W. The waiter left his station with the intention to clear a table and take orders. Therefore, the waiter is justified in carrying out these intentions, and not dropping everything to fetch the bill. Any reasonable guest submits themselves to the expertise, consisting in complex intentions, of the waiter W. In fact, this sort of intentional delay in the delivery of the bill to Table 3—arising from the W's knowing what he is doing—may be more reassuring to a guest than a pure reactivity to Urgent Request.

Nevertheless, clearing T2 and taking orders from T1 takes time and attention. Taking orders requires absolute attention, in fact. This means that there is a strong likelihood that W will forget that T3 has requested the bill. So, although W is justified in completing his joint intention, completing the joint intention comes with a cost. The cost is the increased likelihood that W forgets the Urgent Request. W hasn't so much gathered information

about T3 (specifically, that they desire the bill) – W has had this information thrust upon him.

If W is to operate using joint intentions, he therefore needs to have a way to remember Urgent Requests *throughout the completion of complex intentions*. What method is he to use? The general method is to deploy a series of **signs**. Each sign serves to remind the waiter at the appropriate point. The sign reminds the waiter of the urgent request, in case he has forgotten the urgent request. The waiter gets into the habit of generating these signs automatically. Let's now describe this general method in a more specific manner.

Trojan Lists

The waiter is heading to T2 to clear it when T3 asks for the bill. He says "the bill, yes" to acknowledge these guests. Then, he proceeds to clear T2 and take orders from T1. When the waiter takes his notepad out, to take the orders from T1, he writes "BILL FOR T3" as the first item on the list. This item is to sit amongst the other items, such as "Fish and chips" and "Cheese Burger". These are the food orders for T1. The waiter walks away from T2 with the following to-do list:

1. BILL FOR T3
2. F + C
3. Chee Bgr

The first item on the list is a *sign*, which will remind the waiter of T3's urgent request when he returns to his station. A to-do list, in which the first item on the list is of a different *type* from the other items, I call a *Trojan List*. The Greeks sneaked into Troy in a horse. We sneak a task, such as delivering the bill to T3, into our list of meals for T1.

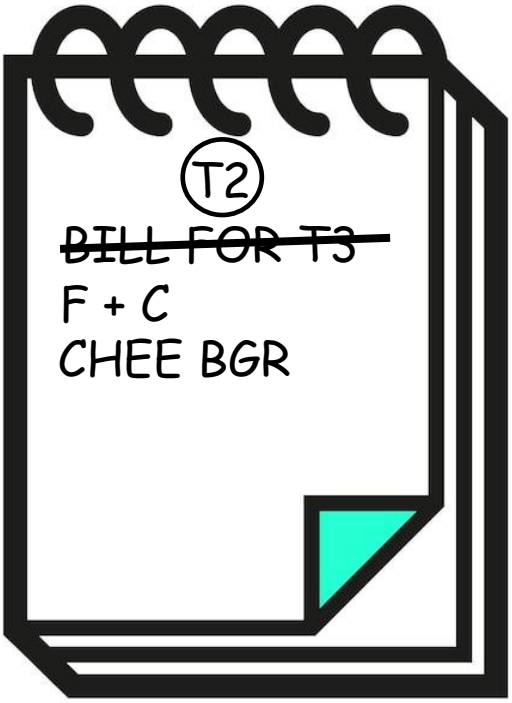
When we go back to the computer at our station, we will see the sign "BILL FOR T3" because we will be looking at the list. This will remind us about the bill for T3. Without using the Trojan List, we might have forgotten about the bill by the time we had finished inputting the T1 meals into the computer. We are going to complete our joint intention and input the T1 orders into the computer before we bring the T3 bill out. After all, we intended to take the food orders from T1 *before* T3 asked for the bill. Still, it is crucial that we use this sign to generate a second sign immediately. I place a silver bill dish in a particular place. For example, it is in the centre of a black waiter's tray on its own.[2]

[2] Having a black waiter's tray be part of our special sign is *particularly* useful because it enables us to use the tray to clear a table other than T3, as part of a joint intention. We carry the tray out with us to the floor to clear T4, as well as deliver the bill to T3.

The more unusual the sign is, the better. For example, if you lean the bill dish vertically on the till, then this better distinguishes the sign. The sign is better distinguished from bill plates that happen to be lying around. It is important that you do the same thing each time.

Now I have described what I do if a guest confronts me with an urgent request. If T3 asks me for the bill on my outbound trip, then I act immediately; to prevent myself forgetting this request I write a sign on my notepad. I make this an absolute rule I follow. A request for the bill means I make a to-do list on pad, without fail. I remain calm and confident. I clear T2 *in spite of my knowledge* of the desires of T3. Then I take orders from *T1 in spite of my knowledge* of the desires of T3.

The delay in my response to T3 is a property of the restaurant these guests chose to occupy (specifically, how busy it is). It is not a property of my knowledge how to serve (or its lacking). I return to my station, where I quickly process the single tray of dirty glasses from T2, putting them in the glass washer, as an unconscious habit. I move to my computer to input the T2 meals into the computer. The notepad's first item is BILL FOR T3, so I generate a secondary sign immediately—a bill tray positioned meaningfully on a black tray. I draw a line through BILL FOR T3.



An example of a Trojan List. The first item is unlike the other items. It is a reminder to bring material out to T3 – their bill.

Then I input FISH AND CHIPS into the till and strike through this item when I have inputted it into the computer. I form a complex intention. Specifically, a suffixing. I think about how I can utilize my inbound trip from T3, by filling my hands with some material. So, I intend to bring the bill plate to T3 and, say, clear T5. I look at the floor to see which tables need clearing before moving away from my station[3].

[3] Note that if T5 needs clearing and T6 need their drinks orders taking, then I can nest a PREFIX within my SUFFIX. In other words, my SUFFIX action is not merely "clear T5" but "clear T5 and then take drinks from

We focus on preparing a tray from a table, then we open ourselves up, and look for an opportunity to respond to an urgent request.

- We go and ask a table what main courses they would like;
- we ask a table what desserts they would like to select;
- we determine whether a table would like to look at the dessert menu;
- we determine whether a table would like any sauces;
- we determine whether a table would like a jug of water or a refill to a jug;
- we determine whether a table would like any extra cutlery.

Now of course, some of these things are determined by asking indirect questions. For instance, I never ask "would you like more cutlery" but if I ask "how is everything?" then a person missing a fork for their main meal will be able to ask for one. The slogan we might adopt is "load up, then open up". We load up a tray of "indeterminables" such as wine bottles and

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T6". Both of these acts—clearing T5 and taking orders from T6—form the suffix which is latched onto the end of delivering the bill to T3.

After delivering a bill slip, *take things and facts*. After delivering ketchup, *take things and facts*. After delivering dessert menus, *take things and facts*. After delivering water jugs, *take things and facts*.

water jugs, then we “open up”. When we “open up”, we’re looking for a way to make the back-to-base trip more valuable. It’s not a very valuable trip if all we do is return dirty water glasses to the base. But if we return dirty water glasses to base and simultaneously move to input orders into the computer, the trip is more valuable.

To summarize, we have introduced the notion of complex intentions. To have a complex intention is to practice both “prefixing” and “suffixing”. Paradigmatic examples of prefixing include:

1. Loading up a tray (CLEARING) and then taking drinks orders from a table
2. Loading up a tray (CLEARING) and then taking food orders from a table
3. Loading up a tray (CLEARING) and then asking a table if everything is going well with their meal
4. Loading up a tray (CLEARING) and then asking if a table would like to look at the desert menu
5. Loading up a tray (CLEARING) and then taking dessert orders from a table

Not all actions can be prefixed. For example, if you intend to remove dirty dishes from present guests, then you cannot also bring back a tray full of

glasses from another dirty table. The former action (removing dirty plates from a table) is an example of the concept of "clean as you go", which we discussed earlier. This is valuable in itself, as a means of preventing dirty tables. So we need not worry too much about the fact that we cannot prefix this action. Having looked at five paradigmatic examples of "prefixing", we can now look at paradigmatic examples of suffixing, which is tacking on acts:

1. Delivering menus to table X...
2. Delivering a jug of water to table X...
3. Delivering mains to table X...
4. Delivering sauces (e.g. ketchup) to table X...
5. Delivering desserts to table X ...

...and then removing dirty items from the floor.

These examples of suffixing are distinguished from the prefixing actions simply in virtue of the fact that the loading of the tray is performed *after* the visit to the table of present guests, not *before* the visit to the present guests.

Rules in your bones

These are five paradigmatic examples of “suffixing”. They translate into a few **rules** which should govern your action. These should be “in your bones”:

(i) **If** you are carrying out menus **then** also carry out a tray for dirty glasses.

(ii) **If** you are carrying out a jug of water to the floor **then** also carry out a tray for clearing a dirty table.

(iii) **If** you are carrying out mains to the floor **then** also carry out a tray for clearing a dirty table.

(iv) **If** you are carrying out sauces to the floor **then** also carry out a tray for clearing a dirty table.

(v) **If** you are carrying out desserts to the floor **then** also carry out a tray for dirty glasses (if possible).

Those are five rules which should be in your bones. The idea is that they are habits which are worthwhile developing. Because thinking is difficult in stressful situations, the idea is not that you think “which table should I clear?” everytime you bring out a jug of water but that you simply habitually *bring out a jug of water on a tray*, such that you increase the likelihood that you can deliver water to a table and then clear another table. These “in your bones” habits are *unconscious* habits which the waiter adopts to

encourage himself to develop *conscious* habits like forming complex intentions. *That* is the idea behind these rules which should be "in your bones".

Of course, sometimes we should not carry out a tray for dirty glasses. Instead, we should carry out a spray bottle and cloth, along with a tray of napkins and clean cutlery (ready to set the table). The term "reset kit" might be helpful here.

> **Reset kit** = { tray, spray bottle, cloth, fresh napkins, forks, knives, water glasses, drink's menu }

So, might say: "sometimes, it will be difficult to tack on the clean-up task because it will be impossible to bring a tray onto the floor". For example, if you are bringing out four main courses, then you cannot also bring out a tray for dirty glasses. You simply cannot carry all these things.

To summarize, we have given five paradigmatic examples of prefixing and five paradigmatic examples of tacking on. If a waiter is continually prefixing and tacking on, then we can say that:

In serving the present customer, he tightly resets the room.

That is to say *in* doing X, Y is achieved. The philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe made use of this notion of

doing X *in* doing Y.

Actions can fall under multiple descriptions. We can now see why we should reject the notion of "resetting a table" being a standalone action, which occurs in one go. To reset tables we must make use of every trip out to the floor and also every trip back from the floor.

Taxonomy of Visitations

Visitations to a table take one of four forms:

1. Gathering information
2. Depositing information
3. Gathering material
4. Depositing material

Gathering information visits are prime opportunities for prefixing. Depositing material visits are prime opportunities for suffixing.

What about depositing information? ("The restaurant is about to close", "we are all out of soup", "I have adjusted the air conditioning"). This

is probably better for suffixing. That is, depositing information is a bit like depositing material. You want to do it first, *then* attend to the messy table.

Can gathering material be prefixed?

Prefixing Gathering Material

What about gathering material? (e.g. collecting dirty dishes from present customers). This one is interesting because you cannot prefix, as your hands will be full with the present customer dishes. You cannot suffix either because, again, your hands will be full. However, this all rests on the assumption that prefixing involves only preparing a tray to bring back. In truth, prefixing does not necessarily involve this. It can also involve setting a table.

Depositing material as prefixing

An example of prefixing is *depositing material*. You might deposit a "refill" kit at a cleared table. Suppose there is a table which has been completely cleared of all dirty items. You can attend to this table with a refill kit. You walk up to it, wipe it with a cloth (which is in your refill kit).

Then, you set the table, depositing the napkins (which were in your refill kit) in the appropriate places. Now your hands are free. The napkins are on the table, as is the cutlery. The table was already cleared when you walked out to it, so hopefully you do not have any trays full of dirty glasses. You put the cloth in your pocket, the spray bottle on your belt and gather dirty plates from another table. *So, gathering material is a candidate for being prefixed after all*.

Adopt this rule in your bones: “intend to clear dirty plates from a table; look for a cleared table to bring a reset kit to”. Perhaps there is some motto that we can develop, such as:

Before gathering dirty plates, set a table for your mates.

If you’re about to take in the dirty plates from a table, make use of the fact that you are heading out with free hands, and see if you can spot a table that’s been cleared. Then, select the appropriate number of napkins and knives to bring out to it and *lay that table*.

Before gathering dirty plates,

Set a table for your mates.

Of course, this is just one example. We might do other things with are free hands, having set a table. For instance, we might gather the dirty glasses and sauces from a table who have just enjoyed their main course (and have already had their plates taken away).

The mind of the expert waiter should actually think about the napkin drawer (with a view to setting a table) when they spot a table full of dirty plates on the floor – this is how tight the mental associations should be. The acronym which you should run through (as you leave your station with free hands) is DSSS:

Drinks menus – Do any tables need drinks menus?

Set – Do any tables need to be *set*?

Spoons – Do any tables need soup spoons or dessert spoons?

Steak knives – Do I need to deposit steak knives on any table?

DSSS stands for Don't' Stumble from your Station Stupidly[4]. Make use of your free hands as you walk away from your station, in order to remove the dirty plates from a table.

Suppose there is a table in the restaurant which has the dirty plates of eight individuals on it. It is conventional to remove all the dirty plates in one go. That is, it is considered a bad thing if some of the people on the table are left with dirty plates for a significant period of time. This is because it affects the dynamics of the table. If all the plates are clear, somebody at the table can raise the idea of desserts to the others present. Therefore, dirty plates should be removed in one go, as far as is practicable. The process will take perhaps four trips for the waiter, if two plates are carried each time. Four times will the waiter make an outbound trip with empty hands, ready to fill his hands with plates. Four times can the waiter

[4] Now, why have we not included other materials which the waiter deposits in the list? For example, why have we not included bill slips and ketchup? The answer is that requests for these are Urgent Requests. If we treat ketchup for a meal about to be tucked into, and napkins, for guests which don't actually exist, as possessing equal standing, then something has gone wrong with our theory.

deposit material in a quick and elegant fashion. For example, on the first outbound trip he might deposit a bill to a table; on the second outbound journey he deposits a spoon to a table expecting a sticky toffee pudding; on the third trip he deposits a steak knife to a table expecting a steak; perhaps on the fourth trip he has run out of material that needs to be deposited. Anyhow, he has made his movements more efficient.

Some depositions are too lengthy. The waiter should not deposit napkins at a table and set a table while in the process of removing plates from the table of eight people. This is because this would interrupt the removal of the plates too much—it would break the rule which states that if removing dirty plates, they should be removed in one go. The rule says: clearing a table should be a transaction. (This is why we advise *Before gathering dirty plates, set a table for your mates*).

Similarly, the waiter should not deposit food at a table. The reason for this is not that depositing food at a table takes a long time. It does not take a long time. However, social conventions make the act a fertile one. *The waiter ought to ask if the guests would like any sauces if he deposits meals at the table*. If the guests would like ketchup, then the deposition has given birth to another trip—the trip to fetch the ketchup immediately. So, depositing food is a fertile act. The outbound movement of moving the food

to the table can generate inbound movements, to fetch ketchup. It is for this reason that I do not recommend attempting to deposit the meals of a couple while in the process of removing dirty plates from a table of eight. Nevertheless, it remains the case that depositing steak knives and dessert spoons etc can be interspersed amongst the task of removing dirty plates from a large table.

Conclusion

Through *prefixing* and *suffixing*, resetting tables is a continual process. It is a discipline. An expert waiter intends to reset dirty tables and he realizes this intention through *every action he takes* in the restaurant.

Review Questions

1. Why is it bad for the restaurant to be messy? Try to list clear and distinct reasons.
2. What are some examples of Urgent Requests?
3. What are five examples of Prefixing?
4. What are five examples of Suffixing?

5. What are five “Rules to Live By”?

6. What is the Cartesian Conception?

7. What is a snap?

8. Can you suggest why the notion of a snap might be relevant to this whole discussion?

9. What is an “indeterminable”?

10. What does it mean to adopt a policy of Tight Resetting?

11. If you’re intending to remove dirty plates for a table, what should you first look for in the restaurant?

12. If you’re intending to ask a table whether they would like to look at the dessert menu, what should you first look for in the restaurant?

13. If you’re intending to remove sauces from a table, what should you first look for in the restaurant?

14. If you’re intending to ask a table what they would like for desserts, what should you first look for in the restaurant?

15. If somebody asks for the bill while you are heading back to your station, what should you do immediately?

16. If somebody asks for the bill while you are heading away from your station, what should you do immediately?

17. What do we mean by “taxonomy of visitations”?

18. What are some rules that should be in your bones if you want to be good at suffixing?

19. What are some rules that should be in your bones if you want to be good at prefixing?

20. In which situations should a waiter look at the restaurant in order to determine how many napkins to carry out?

21. What does CC-2 state?

22. What does CC-1 state?

23. Complete the following slogan. “Before gathering dirty plates…”

24. What are all of the slogans which have been mentioned in the entire essay?

25. What are some examples of fertile visitations to tables?