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An empty plate can refer to a full one before. Abandoned crumbs might point to a specific meal. If the plate is nearly clean, one can only assume what kind of antecedent dish was served. Because plates are equipped with adjectives—like flat or deep—and also because food has different physical conditions—like solid or frozen—it's not that difficult to make an educated guess. It is likely that something liquid, like soup, would be served in a bowl. And of course something dry (or almost dry) would be served on a wide plate; for instance a piece of bread can't run and doesn't need a border of porcelain to contain it. Glasses, on the other hand, are all made for something liquid. Similar to plates, however, glasses come in all shapes and sizes, each pointing to a special kind of drink. But never mind with which drink a glass has been filled, or plates with which kind of food. Much more important is that nobody counts how often they have been filled, emptied, cleaned, refilled, and so on. Quantifying this chain of activity wouldn't be difficult in a private household, but in a restaurant it would be nearly impossible. Maybe no one wants to know how often their dish is in use, or who used it before. As a momentary possession, as something intimate, it can be an unpleasant surprise to figure out that the shade of lipstick marking the glass doesn't suit the one drinking from it. But of course the former customer will not have been the only one. Dishes in restaurants are not used just once or twice, except at places where fast food is served in disposable tableware. Still, even when dishes are used for a single meal, counting the use of the material becomes complicated because of recycling. It seems unlikely that a plate would turn into a plate again, rather than into an ashtray, drawing paper or...

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