

Chapter Two

Food for Thought

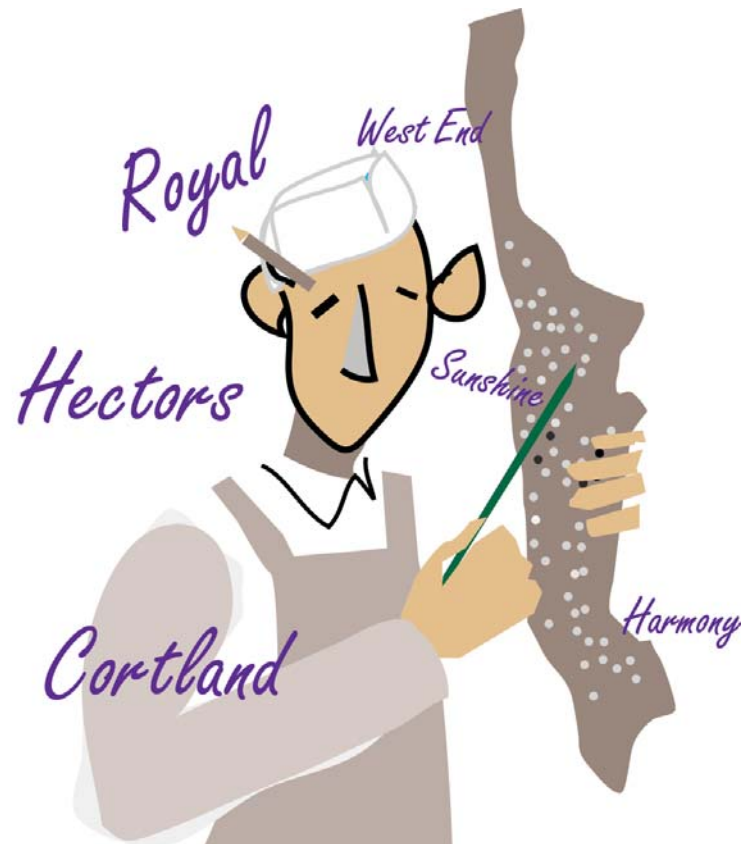


Cafeterias became a staple of city social life during The Great Depression (1929-1939), offering respite from the pressures of the endless job hunt. Cafeterias also provided sanctuary to youthful apartment dwellers eager to escape the confines of their all too close-knit families.



The cafeteria was particularly popular among New York's immigrant population. Mastery of English was not a prerequisite for cafeteria service. One simply had to point.



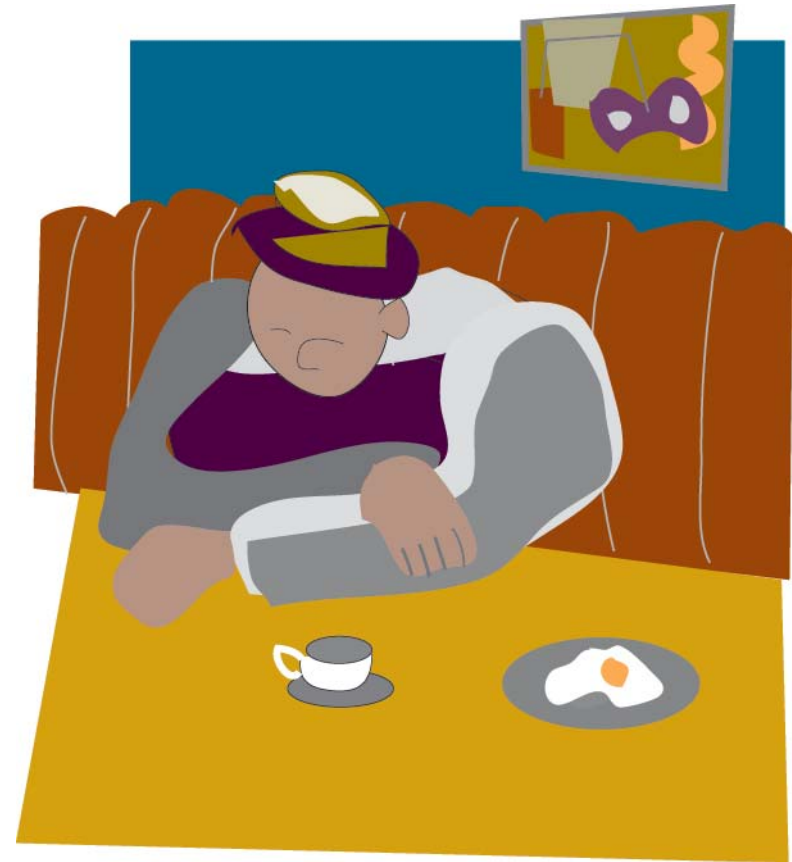


During the 1940's and 50's, the island of Manhattan housed over one hundred cafeterias. Of course, each of these culinary meeting houses was unique in its own way.



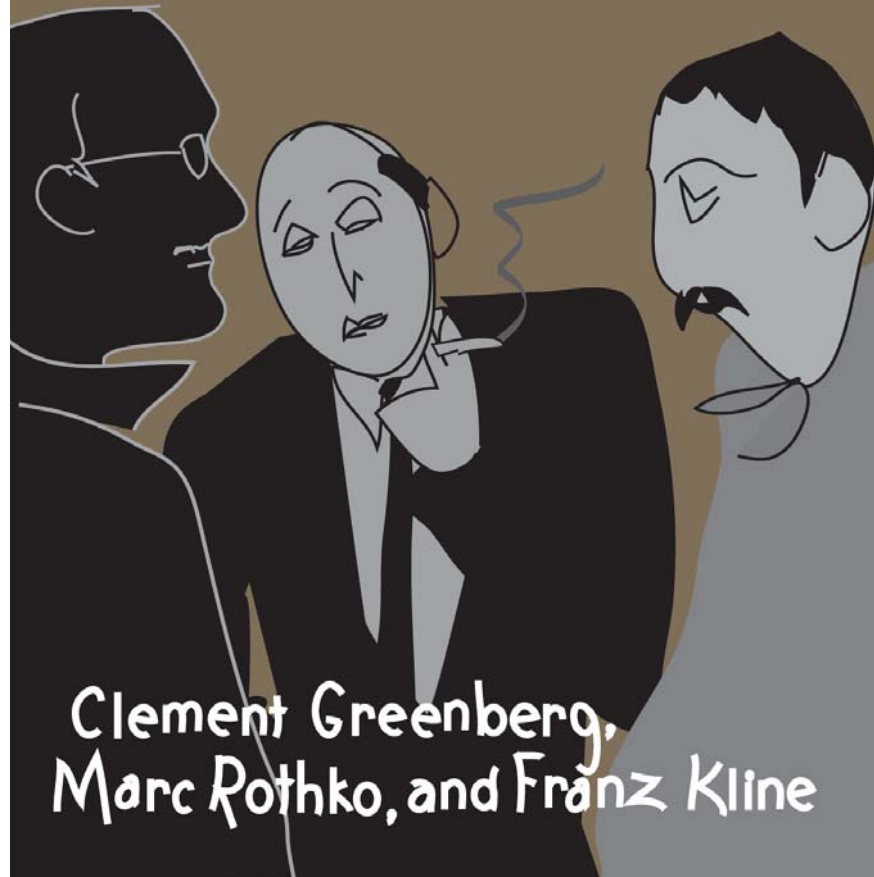
The cafeteria as a source of inspiration has gone largely unheralded.

Leading lights of the Yiddish Theatre such as Molly Picon, Stella Adler, Zero Mostel and Max Davidson went to the Royale to unwind after performing at the Yiddish Art Theatre on Second Avenue.



Charlie Parker was known to frequent Hector's midtown cafeteria after late night gigs at Birdland.

Immortal art was not created in New York's cafeterias. However, the theories explaining what makes immortal art were developed over plates of blintzes, cups of coffee and overflowing ashtrays in the early morning hours at Bickford's on 8th Street and 6th Avenue.



Clement Greenberg,
Marc Rothko, and Franz Kline

Over the years, cafeterias were replaced by fast food establishments which took up less square footage, thereby pleasing New York's omnipresent real estate interests. The cafeteria's demise was further hastened by the fast food chain's initial promise: cheap food served quickly.



Cafeterias are still part of the everyday life of substantial segments of society, particularly educational and penal institutions. Every day, throngs of healthy appetites are sated en masse, though patrons may have to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune on Pot Luck Wednesdays.



The closest thing to a public cafeteria that still exists in New York is Katz's Delicatessen located on Houston (that's How/ston to you out-of-towners) and Ludlow Streets. Customers receive a ticket upon entry, take a tray, choose from an array of entrees behind glass counters, tip the cheerful counterman for a choice cut, and choose one's own table in a spacious eating hall just like the good ole days.

*send a salami
to your boy
in the army*

