

What We Talk About When We Talk About Lasagna

by Joseph M. Owens

When we talked about the lasagna, we were, I see now, talking about different things. I.e., I was talking about lasagna, and you were talking about almost everything but.

You weren't talking about the dry, burnt noodles or that the cheese emerged from the oven charred and crispy. I'd really thought you were, but you weren't. You were talking about how all of the above got that way, and by all of the above, you really meant, the way we argue.

With us, it was rarely about the thing the argument claimed to be about. Not really.

Not for you. It was the means that mattered, what were—and are—what are important. Like when I was strictly talking about lasagna, you were talking about my quick temper and defensiveness—the lasagna is just the scapegoat, Plato's *pharmakon*, transferred frustration, the medium for the message.

When I assumed your exasperation was precipitated by my taking the one piece of lasagna you'd had your eye on while I baked the surrounding noodle medley to a ubiquitously inedible crisp, you were really telling me that you were frustrated with my not having remembered to empty the dishwasher you'd run two days prior, and now—by which I mean, then—dirty dishes were piling up in the sink and had started making the kitchen smell.

And you'd've asked me again to empty it, but you knew I've always hated being harangued, repeatedly, to do things, even if

harangued only meant once, and you felt like you were in a no-win situation because I can be just so damn intractable sometimes and will become defensive when harangued, etc. but you took my feelings into consideration.

We were never arguing about what we were arguing about. We were arguing about the subtext of what we were arguing about, the multiple onion-like layers of what we were arguing about.

I know now that we were arguing about how we argue.

So, initially, you got mad when I got defensive because I'd asked you which piece of lasagna you wanted and you said you didn't care—which, at the time, I was certain you did care, but, admittedly, there was really only one piece of lasagna that could even pass for appetizing and your indifference signaled to me that that slice was fair game.

But when I got frustrated and defensive and threw my hands up and said: But you said you didn't care!

You just sighed and shook your head and told me, *You don't get it do you?* It's not about the lasagna.

And I didn't get it. I really didn't get it, until it was too late.

