



# Dishing it Out: In Search of the Restaurant Experience

*Robert Applebaum*

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## **Dishing it Out: In Search of the Restaurant Experience** Robert Applebaum

From the hamburger haven to the temple of gastronomy, the restaurant is a fixture of modern life. But why is that so? What needs has the restaurant come to satisfy, and what needs has it come to impose upon the experience of the modern world? In *Dishing It Out*, Robert Appelbaum travels around America and Europe and through the annals of literature and history to explore the social meaning of the restaurant – and to discover what we ought to be asking of the restaurant experience today. Since its founding in pre-Revolutionary France, the restaurant has always inspired contradictory feelings and served contradictory purposes. It has stood for a kind of liberation: the embrace of pleasure and sociability for their own sake. But it has also encouraged narcissistic consumerism at the cost of the exploitation of restaurant workers, and the self-deception of restaurant-goers. Drawing on the work of such writers as Grimod de la Reynière, Jean-Paul Sartre, Isak Dinesen and M.F.K. Fisher, and sampling fare from macaroni cheese in workaday London to oysters and sausages in seaside France, Appelbaum argues that though restaurants are inherently problematic as social institutions, they are characteristic of who and what we are. They are expressions of what we need as human beings. And for that reason, though they contribute to inequality they can also be used to promote the interests of cultural democracy. A unique rethinking of the restaurant experience, at once entertaining and learned, *Dishing it Out* is an important contribution to our knowledge of food, literature, history and society.

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