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Open Society or Closed Salon?  
A Reading of Brillat-Savarin's  
“Physiologie du goût”

by

Chikako Hashimoto



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# Open Society or Closed Salon?

## A Reading of Brillat-Savarin's "Physiologie du goût" \*

Chikako Hashimoto \*\*

*This article tries to define the concept of 'gastronomy' as constructed by Brillat-Savarin, whose ideas were much affected by the physiological and philosophical thought of the Ideologues, especially Cabanis. Despite the title of Brillat-Savarin's main work, Physiologie du goût, he pursues in the end a pleasure which is far from a sheerly sensual gratification in eating. This article will initially consider his justification of gastronomy as a kind of virtue; next we shall examine how he shifts from the physiological investigation, to the social and moral dimensions, and his tendency to apparently undervalue the same sensual pleasures which he had previously justified, to develop instead his idea of a 'social gourmandise'. Pleasures are in the end just a means to achieve the joys of what he calls 'conviviality', a kind of social pleasure accessible to those who possess "bon goût", a formula that adds an intellectual facet to the sensual idea of taste.*

### 1. The Idéologues and Brillat-Savarin

The *Physiologie du goût* by Brillat-Savarin<sup>1</sup>, the famous gourmet of early 19<sup>th</sup> century France, has been translated and re-printed many times up to the present day. Particularly, his *aphorismes* are mentioned wherever

\* This text is based on a previous article in Japanese, that has been strongly modified and developed: Chikako Hashimoto, "Mikaku kara kyōshoku no tanoshimi he: Brillat-Savarin, Mikaku no seirigaku dokkai [From 'taste' to 'conviviality': a reading of Brillat-Savarin's *Physiologie du goût*]", *Bigaku* [Aesthetics], The Japanese Society for Aesthetics, 239(2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante; Dédié aux gastronomes parisiens par un professeur* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982 [1826]), abbreviated from now on as PhG.

French food culture is spoken of, even outside the academic domain. Many of his remarks are seen as universal—thus this ‘symbol of French gastronomy’ is often viewed in isolation from the historical context.

Of course, Brillat-Savarin’s work has, on occasion, been considered from the historical perspective; reference to it is indispensable for any study of modern French food culture. Since Paris at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is known for the naissance and the rapid increase of the number of the *restaurants*, it seems quite natural that his work, born at the same time as this social phenomenon, be mentioned as a proof of this situation. Previous studies all describe the Parisian scene transfigured into a carnivalesque space of food, with its starting point the French Revolution<sup>1</sup>. Such studies often seem to suggest that Brillat-Savarin himself was the first to represent the carnivalesque atmosphere of the time. However, a closer reading into the *Physiologie du goût* makes us doubt that the pleasure of eating that Brillat-Savarin wanted to realize should be identified with gastronomic indulgence.

The preceding studies also treated his work as only one among innumerable sources, making too much of the role of the dramatic societal change experienced at the beginning of the century. It is also possible to suggest that the book is too complex, or too confused, to be analyzed from a scientific perspective, and that for this reason it has been neglected over the years. While it begins with a very ‘scientifique’ dissertation, in the following the book provides a variety of essays and reminiscences placed in a disorderly manner. It is thus difficult to suggest that it is a work of systematic *gastronomie*, the science of ‘eating well’.

In most cases, these descriptions of Brillat-Savarin’s are regarded as pedantic and rarely broached in relation to his ideas. Jean-François Revel characterizes the text as a parody of the theories of Condillac or of the *Idéologues*<sup>2</sup>. It is true that the book is a work of a non-specialist, as the

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> “Pour comprendre comment est faite toute cette potée, il faut noter que la *Physiologie du goût* appartient à la manière *héroi-comique*, éteinte aujourd’hui. C’est une parodie, et en particulier dans les parties en apparence sérieuses, par exemple dans la *Méditation I, Des Sens*, une parodie de Condillac et des *Idéologues*, par un de leurs disciples amène et taquin”. Jean

author himself seems to have written it as an aspect of the gastronomic hobby he had enjoyed all his life. However, certain of his ideas were influenced by post revolutionary historical circumstances. Michel Onfray suggests that Brillat Savarin was influenced precisely by the *Idéologues*—particularly Cabanis—but without any detailed analysis<sup>3</sup>. Pascal Ory points out as well the possibility that Brillat-Savarin himself was an *idéologue*, and also “un penseur libre”, again without further qualification<sup>4</sup>. François Picavet, author of a classic work on the *Idéologues* that were active in the revolutionary period, suggests that Brillat-Savarin was a member of this group<sup>5</sup>. A scrutiny of his relations with the *Idéologues* enables us indeed to understand some of the concepts underlying his gastronomic ideas.



Besides his being the author of the *Physiologie du goût*, we also meet Brillat-Savarin’s name in a political context. He was born in 1755 in Belly and, following the tradition of his family, after studying first in Lyon and then in Dijon he became a lawyer. A Girondist during the Revolution, he was appointed *constituant*<sup>1</sup>. He authored then a political work (a small

François Revel “Présentation”, in *Physiologie du goût* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), 8. The ironic character of Brillat-Savarin’s prose had already been suggested by Roland Barthes: “Son projet de fonder une science du goût, d’arracher au plaisir culinaire ses marques habituelles de futilité, lui tenait certainement au coeur ; mais il l’exécute avec emphase, c’est-à-dire avec ironie ; il est semblable à un écrivain qui mettrait des guillemets autour des vérités qu’il énonce, non par prudence scientifique, mais par crainte de donner l’image d’un naïf (ce en quoi l’on peut voir que l’ironie est toujours timide)”. Roland Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 303.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Onfray, *La raison gourmande: philosophie du goût* (Paris: Grasset, 1995), 107-109.

<sup>4</sup> Pascal Ory, “Brillat Savarin, dans l’histoire culturelle de son temps”, in *Gastronomie et identité culturelle française: discours et représentations XIX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles*, ed. Françoise Hache-Bissette et al. (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2007), 39-50.

<sup>5</sup> François Picavet, *Les Idéologues: essai sur l’histoire des idées et des théories scientifiques, philosophiques, religieuses, etc. en France depuis 1789* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1891), 422-423.

<sup>1</sup> Thierry Boissel, *Brillat-Savarin, un chevalier candide* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1988).

book of only 110 pages) titled *Vues et projets d'économie politique*<sup>2</sup>. In the *Décade philosophique* of June 29<sup>th</sup> 1802 we find a review of this work, according to which the intention of the author is to “draw attention on various things that are essential to a good administration and the public prosperity (appeler l'attention sur différens objets essentiels à une bonne administration et à la prospérité publique)”<sup>3</sup>. On the one hand, there is no deep discussion of political economy and, the book reviewer says, “one cannot expect new and profound ideas that the author did not pledge (il ne faut pas en exiger des idées neuves et profondes qu'il n'a point promises)”. On the other hand, he finds an idea worthy of note: the proposal to establish a special educational institution (“une classe d'aspirans”) for young people who would be future employees of the administration. Approving the foresight of Brillat-Savarin, Picavet writes in a footnote to his work: “Isn't it the School of administration of 1848 and the school of political sciences of today ‘in eminently practical form’? (N'est-ce pas ‘sous forme éminemment pratique’ l'École d'administration de 1848 et l'école actuelle des sciences politiques?)”<sup>4</sup>.

According to the definition of Michael Sonenscher, the *Idéologues* were “a group of moral, political and more technically philosophical thinkers associated with the French journal the *Décade philosophique* and the class of moral and political thinkers of the French Institute that was established in 1795”<sup>1</sup>. With this in mind we must hesitate to define Brillat-Savarin as a member of the *Idéologues*, since this lukewarm review was signed by “L. B.” (J. Le Breton) and published in their organ. The *Idéologues*, hardly unanimous in doctrine, can be considered as a group because they shared

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Vues et projets d'économie politique* (Paris: Impr. de Gignet et Michaud, 1801). As other works of Brillat-Savarin, see *Discours de M. Brillat-Savarin (...) sur la manière d'organiser les tribunaux d'appel, prononcé le 23 juillet 1790* (Paris: Impr. Nationale, 1790); *Essai historique et critique sur le duel d'après notre législation et nos mœurs* (Paris: Caille et Ravier, 1813); *Fragment d'un ouvrage manuscrit, intitulé Théorie judiciaire* (Paris: impr. de Hacquart, 1808).

<sup>3</sup> *La Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* (An X, n° 28, 10 messidor [June 29<sup>th</sup> 1802]), 78-82.

<sup>4</sup> Picavet, *Idéologues*, 422.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Sonenscher, “Ideology, Social Science and General Facts in Late Eighteenth-Century French Political Thought”, *History of European Ideas* 35 (2009): 24.

the aim to establish a ‘social science’ that would be the basis of all the sciences. Georges Gusdorf identifies the common trait of the *Idéologues* in their methodology of social ‘analysis’, the latter being a concept borrowed from Condillac: that is to say, to “break down (*décomposer*), compare (*comparer*) and find the relations (*saisir les rapports*)”<sup>2</sup>.

If the *Idéologues* are considered as a group that aimed to implement the methodology of social analysis, then we can see that Brillat-Savarin could be associated with them on account of certain literary traits of the *Physiologie du goût*, rather than because of the *Vues et projets d’économie politique*. In fact, only in the later work Picavet finds some elements that can be connected to the program of the *Idéologues*:

Il y a cependant, dans la *Physiologie du goût*, un idéologue. C’est lui qui range, suivant “un ordre analytique, les théories et les faits”, étudie “l’origine” de la gastronomie et fait l’histoire philosophique de la cuisine, qui parle de la gastronomie analytique et de ses recherches sur les effets des aliments, découvre, dans la langue de l’homme, les mouvements de spication, de rotation et de verrition, inconnus aux animaux, et donne sur le sommeil et les rêves (...) des réflexions et des observations qui rappellent Cabanis et sont encore bonnes à consulter<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed, Brillat-Savarin was most famous for being a gastronome. Not satisfied in seeing it as a kind of diversion, Brillat-Savarin decided to write a book on gastronomy in his later years. He peppers the book here and there with the physiological knowledge he acquired throughout his life while developing his original ideas on the topic in *Physiologie du goût*. Of course, Brillat-Savarin may truly have been influenced by the *Idéologues*, given his friendly contact with the group via Volney, Destutt de Tracy, Jean-Baptiste Say, Dupont de Nemours. The idea of establishing a science founded on physiology, intended for the aim of perfecting social life<sup>2</sup>, might have reached him particularly through the influence of Cabanis in the salon of Mme. Helvétius, where Brillat-Savarin was introduced by Volney<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Georges Gusdorf, *La conscience révolutionnaire: les Idéologues* (Paris: Payot, 1978), 372-373.

<sup>1</sup> Gusdorf, *Idéologues*, 433.

<sup>2</sup> Ory, “Brillat-Savarin”, 42-44.

<sup>3</sup> Boissel, *Brillat-Savarin*, 82-83.

Although his work, viewed as a physiological treatise, lacked in technical strictness and couldn't reach a high enough level in the physiological literature, we can still assert that his gastronomic theory was in some sense revolutionary, because he tried to redefine *gourmandise* as a kind of virtue, in spite of the traditional conception that until the 18<sup>th</sup> century had long despised it as a vice. Brillat-Savarin was praised in the article *Gastronomie* of the *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, because after him “one no longer blushes for being considered a gastronome, but no one would ever like to be known as a gourmand or a drunkard (Depuis Brillat-Savarin, on ne rougis plus d'être un gastronome, mais on ne voudrait à aucun prix passer pour un gourmand ou un ivrogne)”<sup>4</sup>. However we cannot say that this dictionary had understood precisely the meaning of Brillat-Savarin's text. On the one hand, it is true that he put forward the idea of 'gastronomy' as a science, a practice of which there is no longer the need to feel ashamed; on the other hand, he always described a 'gourmand' as a pleasant man, one who has no faults and cannot be criticized. We need to pay particular attention to what Brillat-Savarin meant by the word 'gourmandise'. In light of the fact that his work is regarded as the turning point for this concept—the change from vice to virtue—and that his work has had for future generations an important effect on the notion of 'gourmandise', to examine the formation of his gastronomic idea in the context of the history of ideas will provide a provocative frame for the analysis of what is meant by 'gourmandise' today.

## 2. Justified pleasure of eating

At least until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, 'gourmandise' was seen as a vice, as it is evidenced by even a quick glance at some 18<sup>th</sup> century dictionary definitions of the words 'gourmand' and 'gourmandise'. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* define it as a vice, a

<sup>4</sup> “Gastronomie”, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie classique Larousse et Boyer, 1866-1878).



synonym for ‘glutton (glouton, goulu)’ and don’t suggest any other nuance<sup>1</sup>. The definition in the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* is similar to this. It defines the ‘gourmand’ as “he who eats greedily and with intemperance (celui qui mange avec avidité & intempérance)”, ‘gourmandise’ as “greed, intemperance when one eats and drinks (avidité, intempérance au manger & au boire)”. It adds also the tradition of the vice of *gourmandise* by mentioning the Latin word *Gula*, and emphasizes the negative nuance of this notion by saying: “the gourmandise is not a gentlemanly vice (la gourmandise n’est pas un vice des honnêtes gens)”<sup>2</sup>.

Today we think that the process of cooking—to combine and heat raw materials in order to improve their flavor—belongs to a high level of culture. But this positive idea of cooking is a post-19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. Jean-Claude Bonnet, in his analysis of cooking discourses through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has shown how it was considered negatively, both in the moral-religious context and in the medical-dietary. The “ragoût”, a word which means a sauced meat or a dish highly seasoned for the purpose of increasing appetite, was put in opposition to the idea of raw food, and became a symbol of the “gourmandise”. To strict followers of religious principles, it looked like something stirring a forbidden desire. In brief, the pleasure of eating was a target for moral criticism<sup>1</sup>.

Brillat-Savarin, having spent half of his life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is of course aware of this general understanding of the notion of “gourmandise” and he had to worry about appearances. He had first to get rid of the hedonistic, decadent image that clung to the pleasure of eating at the time of the publication of his work. At this point it is worth focusing on the title of his work. Brillat-Savarin initially considered the title *Méditations gastronomiques*, but later settled on *Physiologie du goût*. In conversa-

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, 4<sup>e</sup> éd (Paris: V.B. Brunet, [1762]; 5<sup>e</sup> éd., Chez J. J. Smits et Ce., Imp.-Lib., rue de Tournon, N<sup>o</sup>. 1133, Faubourg Germain, [1798]).

<sup>2</sup> “Gourmand, gourmandise”, *Dictionnaire universel français et latin contenant la signification et la définition tant des mots de l’une et l’autre langue, avec leurs différents usages, que des termes propres de chaque état et de chaque profession, communément appelé “Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (Nancy: chez Pierre Antoine, 1740).

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Claude Bonnet, “Le Réseau culinaire dans l’*Encyclopédie*”, *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 31 (1976): 139-165.

tion with friends, Brillat-Savarin admits to some hesitation in publishing his work: “Parce que, voué par état à des études sérieuses, je crains que ceux qui ne connaîtront mon livre que par le titre, ne croient que je ne m’occupe que de fariboles” (PhG 21).

It is true that at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century people began to enjoy a new type of pleasure from eating in public spaces without unease. But Brillat-Savarin, who lived half of his life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, feared that by adopting the word “gastronomy” in the title of his book he would be considered as an epicurean. Finally the words “*Méditations gastronomiques*” were moved to the subtitle, the definitive title being *Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante*.

As suggested by this new title, this work is full of physiological notions expressed in an academic tone. The literature on Brillat-Savarin tends to dismiss the importance of this knowledge of physiology<sup>1</sup>. We see clearly that he is keen to give an academic appearance to his work, as evidenced by the word “transcendante”. But there is more at stake than mere superficial academic dignity. This physiological content, beginning with the meditation 1 “On the sense”, explains the composition and function of the human body in terms of nutrition. It draws the only conclusion that it is natural for humans to have a good appetite and therefore it is quite normal to feel pleasure while eating. This assertion is also emphasized in the next passage: “Le goût paraît avoir deux usages principaux : 1° Il nous invite, par le plaisir, à réparer les pertes continuelles que nous faisons par l’action de la vie. 2° Il nous aide à choisir, parmi les diverses substances que la nature nous présente, celles qui sont propres à nous servir d’aliments” (PhG 47).



<sup>1</sup> Béatrice Fink, “Brillat-Savarin and the destiny of nations”, *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century* 335 (1995): 355-367.

As the pleasure of eating is important in promoting the maintenance of life, to refuse the pleasure of eating is to harm the body in a physiological sense. We have already seen that cooking was criticized in the medical context in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The author tries to confute the consensus on the action on the action of cooking on the body with his ‘cutting edge’ physiological learning. He show no explicit hostility towards the medical profession, but he does criticize those who seem to forbid taking pleasure in eating. He suggests that such direction is useless and provides the following reason:

Je dis inutiles, parce que les malades n’appêtent presque jamais ce qui leur serait nuisible. Le médecin rationnel ne doit jamais perdre de vue la tendance naturelle de nos penchants, ni oublier que si les sensations douloureuses sont funestes par leur nature, celles qui sont agréables disposent à la santé. (PhG 156)

Consequently, he suggests that the gourmand will actually live longer. Here, the pleasure of eating is justified via physiological knowledge and becomes free of any criticism concerning damage to health. This scientific justification overcomes the sense of taboo and leads us to the conclusion that the pleasure of eating can have a religious justification:

Sous le rapport physique, elle [la gourmandise] est le résultat et la preuve de l’état sain et parfait des organes destinés à la nutrition. Au moral, c’est une résignation implicite aux ordres du Créateur, qui, nous ayant ordonné de manger pour vivre, nous y invite par l’appétit, nous soutient par la saveur, et nous en récompense par le plaisir. (PhG 142)

In this way, the gourmand’s desire for feasts, or disposition towards satisfying this desire, is vindicated. Since its justification comes from the natural complexion of the human race, the act of *gourmandise* is considered relevant to all people of every class. And of course, gastronomy—the science of *gourmandise*—is equally universal in its application: “Elle s’occupe aussi de tous les états de la société; car si c’est elle qui dirige les banquets des rois rassemblés, c’est encore elle qui a calculé le nombre de minutes d’ébullition qui est nécessaire pour qu’un oeuf frais soit cuit à point” (PhG 63).

But his “gastronomy” is no longer subject to the risk of social criticism. Brillat Savarin’s careful attitude relates to the fact that there are also political implications in the text, issues concerning the means to realize an ideal society for the happiness of all. His arguments, from this point of view, can be considered as the premise to a certain assertion: that is to say, that good eating habits combined with moderate pleasure of eating has precise relations to the society to which he himself belongs. This thesis will be examined in the next section.



### 3. The physical and moral

In order to understand the limitations of Brillat-Savarin’s gastronomic concept, we need to pay attention to his remarks concerning restaurants. He makes both positive and negative comments, with the more negative ones being largely ignored in previous scholarship. Here is an example of a positive evaluation:

Avant l’époque dont nous avons parlé (1770), les gens riches et puissants jouissaient presque exclusivement de deux grands avantages : ils voyageaient avec rapidité, et faisaient constamment bonne chère. L’établissement des nouvelles voitures qui font cinquante lieues en vingt-quatre heures, a effacé le premier privilège ; l’établissement des restaurateurs a détruit le second : par eux, la meilleure chère est devenue populaire. (PhG 278-279)

Just before this sentence, he points out four concrete positives contributions that restaurants have given to gastronomy: 1. You can dine whenever you like, 2. You can dine without exceeding your budget, 3. You can eat and drink whatever you like, 4. Even those who don’t have their own kitchen can dine. However, these positive aspects are all referred to the

convenience of the restaurant and cannot be considered integral to the essence of the gastronomic concept. And in the following Brillat-Savarin presents two elements of negative evaluation: “Nul doute que l’occasion et la toute-puissance des objets présents n’entraînent beaucoup de personnes dans des dépenses qui excèdent leurs facultés. Peut-être les estomacs délicats lui doivent-ils quelques indigestions, et la Vénus infime quelques sacrifices intempestifs” (PhG 280).

As we saw in the first section, the pleasure of eating was considered positive because it contributes to keep the human body healthy. For the same reason, it would be logical to reprove immoderate ingestion leading to the absorption of too much nutrition. The convenience of dining at any time, provided that there are no financial constraints, the number of available dishes, the development of a social discourse that creates a myth surrounding certain cooks “of genius”, are all elements that may provoke excessive desire and help spread the habit of ‘gluttony’. Brillat-Savarin adds another negative aspect to this commentary:

Mais ce qui est bien plus funeste pour l’ordre social, c’est que nous regardons comme certain que la réfection solidaire renforce l’égoïsme, habitue l’individu à ne regarder que soi, à s’isoler de tout ce qui l’entourne, à se dispenser d’égards; et par leur conduite avant, pendant et après leur repas, dans la société ordinaire, il est facile de distinguer, parmi les convives, ceux qui vivent habituellement chez le restaurateur. (PhG 280)

As this citation shows, Brillat-Savarin sees dining alone as a negative behavior and stresses the importance of dining in company. Thus we might wonder what kind or form of dining he contrasts here with restaurants—and through his whole work, we can easily see that many of his directions concern the home dinner party. We appraise his emphasis on the importance of eating with others (that is to say, on the pleasure of *convivialité*) in the next part. Here we will focus on his purported concern about the bad influence of restaurants, that can bring about isolation and increasing egoism.

The two negative aspects of dining at restaurants outlined above are in fact connected. According to Brillat-Savarin, ill-health resulting from intemperance and poor moral development, and lack of sociableness, are

closely connected through the medium of the act of eating. In order to keep oneself sociable and avoid selfishness, one first has to preserve one's own mental health. But physical health is a pre-requisite of mental health. Therefore he insists that appropriate nutrition keeps not only the physical body healthy, but the spirit as well. Regarding the close relationship between the act of eating and the spirit, he highlights the function of "digestion":

La digestion est de toutes les opérations corporelles celle qui influe le plus sur l'état moral de l'individu. (...) Ainsi, la manière habituelle dont la digestion se fait, et surtout se termine, nous rend habituellement tristes, gais, taciturnes, parleurs, moroses ou mélancoliques, sans que nous nous en doutions, et surtout sans que nous puissions y refuser. (PhG 189)

He goes so far as to explain the process of digestion in a detailed physiological fashion.



About twenty years before Brillat-Savarin, Grimod de la Reynière had published some works on *gourmandise* which enjoyed a good reputation in Paris. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with restaurants springing up across Paris, it was the *Almanach des gourmands* by Grimod de la Reynière that Parisians used as a guide to practical gastronomy<sup>1</sup>. After the success of this work, a host of imitators wrote books on *gourmandise* and the genre became fashionable. It is hard to think that Brillat-Savarin was unfamiliar with Grimod's works, although he never mentions them. Quite a few ideas of his do seem to have been taken from Grimod<sup>2</sup>, but their gastronomic concepts are fundamentally different.

<sup>1</sup> Grimod de la Reynière, *Almanach des gourmands*, 8 vols. (Paris: Maradan, Joseph Chaumerot, 1803-1812).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Garval, "Grimod de la Reynière's *Almanach des gourmands*: Exploring the Gastronomic New World of Postrevolutionary France", in *French Food on the Table, on the Page*,

If we compare Brillat-Savarin's thought to that of Grimod, we see that the latter does not deny a certain element of gluttony in *gourmandise*, and is liable to consider indigestion as the *champ d'honneur* for the gourmands's death<sup>3</sup>. Moreover Grimod, in his equally successful *Manuel des amphitryons*<sup>4</sup>, considered *gourmandise* as something to be enjoyed in private, something to be shared with a few friends with similar values. He saw the dining space as a stage, where food was to be tasted with concentration, and for this reason he didn't like to have a servant in the dining room—he had a special voicepipe in order to connect the dining room directly to the kitchen. He drew analogies between the pleasure of eating and sexual pleasure, using sexual expressions in the matter of food, and vice versa.

On the contrary, Brillat-Savarin maintains that the gastronomic act should concern everyone, insofar as they have a human body. This is a fundamental difference between them, which may also explain why Brillat-Savarin's work is still read today, unlike Grimod's. Brillat-Savarin popularized gastronomy as a kind of pleasure which would be accessible to everyone (although we shall draw attention to some restrictions on the 'openness' of Brillat-Savarin's gastronomy in a later section).

The idea that the physical situation effects directly on the spiritual is a common theme among the *Idéologues*. Their 'social science', in Cabanis' view, is a 'human science' (science de l'homme). According to him, "medicine and ethics are two branches of a same science, that together compose the *science of man*. Both have a common base: physical knowledge of the human nature (la médecine et la morale sont deux branches de la même science, qui, réunies, composent la science de l'homme. L'une

*and in French Culture*, eds. Lawrence R. Schehr and Allen S. Weiss (New York: Routledge, 2001), 51-70. Jean-Paul Aron, *Les mangeurs du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Payot, 1989). Pierre Varillon, "Grimod de la Reynière et la *Physiologie du goût*", *Revue des Deux mondes* 1955: 503-510.

<sup>3</sup> The expression is used by a correspondent of his in a "jolie lettre" he publishes in the *Almanach*, vol. 3, 114, 119. In Grimod's thought, gluttony is one of the indispensable conditions for being a gourmand: thus he equates "les solennités gourmandes" to "les jours d'indigestion" (*Journal des gourmands et des belles, ou, L'épicurien français*, Paris, Capelle et Renand, 1807, vol. 2, 116).

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Claude Bonnet, ed., *Écrits gastronomiques: Almanach des Gourmands, suivi du Manuel des Amphitryons* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1978).

et l'autre reposent sur une base commune ; sur la connoissance physique de la nature humaine)<sup>1</sup>. Cabanis maintains that social customs can be improved operating on the mechanisms of sensation and instinct, and on the effects of age, constitution and habits of sleeping or eating on the individual spirit.

There is undoubtedly a great distance between the physiological knowledge displayed by Cabanis and that of Brillat-Savarin, a mere *médecin-amateur*<sup>1</sup>, as he describes himself. Nevertheless, they converge in emphasizing the influence of physiological phenomena on the human spirit. Moreover, chapters in Brillat-Savarin's work that seem to have not much to do with eating, such as "On sleep" or "On dreams", might well have been inspired by Cabanis' *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, a work consisting of twelve memoirs, the eighth of which, "On the influence of regimen on moral dispositions and habits (De l'influence du régime sur les dispositions et sur les habitudes morales)", contains meditations on 'air', 'food', 'drinks', 'exercises', 'sleep' and 'work', and has a lot in common with the contents of Brillat-Savarin's work. Brillat-Savarin does not talk about air and exercise, but does have a chapter on hunting in the *Physiologie du goût*: hunting has a double role for *gourmandise*, in that it is a kind of sport that also supplies food.

In Brillat-Savarin's work, eating is always the main theme; at the same time, however, in order to preserve a healthy body and spirit, his description of a 'gourmand' is not simply that of an 'eater', but entails more rounded nuances:

L'homme qui a réfléchi sur son existence physique, et qui la conduit d'après les principes que nous développons, celui-là prépare avec sagacité son repos, son sommeil et ses rêves.(...) Il a mangé avec discernement, ne s'est refusé à la bonne ni à l'excellente chère. (...) En tout il s'est montré convive aimable, amateur distingué, et n'a cependant outrepassé que de peu la limite du besoin. En cet état, il se couche content de lui et des autres, ses yeux se ferment ; (...) Alors des rêves agréables viennent lui donner une existence mystérieuse ; (...) Enfin, il sent le som-

<sup>1</sup> Georges Cabanis, *Œuvres philosophique de Cabanis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> part (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1956), 209-210.

<sup>1</sup> PhG 34.



meil se dissiper par degrés, et rentre dans la société sans avoir à regretter de temps perdu (...). (PhG 213-215)

To preserve a good “existence physique” one is required to live an ideal life both physically and morally, and also to be an ‘amiable guest’, who keeps to moderation in dining. >From the author’s perspective, physical and moral health are closely related and by keeping a balance between them the individual can also develop good relations with others. To examine this relation between the physical and the moral is one of the main functions of gastronomy. “Elle considère aussi l’action des aliments sur le moral de l’homme, sur son imagination, son esprit, son jugement, son courage et ses perceptions, soit qu’il veille, soit qu’il dorme, soit qu’il agisse, soit qu’il repose” (PhG 63). In this perspective, “gastronomie” is far from a luxurious diversion, but rather offers the rules for a well-regulated meal, in good harmony with natural human constitution.

Brillat-Savarin suggests that gluttony and intemperance cause social problems and, at the transition between the first and the second part of the book, he hints that the main reason for writing his book has been to disentangle gastronomy from such problems: “de définir avec précision ce qu’on doit entendre par *gourmandise*, et de séparer pour toujours cette qualité sociale de la glotonnerie et de l’intempérance, avec lesquelles on l’a si mal à propos confondue” (PhG 303).

In brief, both moral and physical ill-health is the result of intemperance, from which it results that social interactions are also affected. Restaurants play an important part in making solitary dining accessible, thus promoting the link between eating and being anti-social. We thus see that it was conviviality (“convivialité”) that Brillat-Savarin most feared losing. However, he did not welcome just everybody to the scene of ideal gastronomy. How did Brillat-Savarin select those who were worthy of participation?



#### 4. Selection of guests: the criterion of “goût”

In order to consider more specifically Brillat-Savarin’s gastronomy and the role of those considered worthy of being members, we need to reconfirm the exact nature of the ideal of gastronomy that he tried to defend. He divides the pleasure of eating into two kinds:

Le plaisir de manger est la sensation actuelle et directe d’un besoin qui se satisfait. Le plaisir de la table est la sensation réfléchie qui naît des diverses circonstances de faits, de lieux, de choses et de personnages qui accompagnent le repas. Le plaisir de manger nous est commun avec les animaux ; il ne suppose que la faim et ce qu’il faut pour la satisfaire. Le plaisir de la table est particulier à l’espèce humaine ; il suppose des soins antécédents pour les apprêts du repas, pour le choix du lieu et le rassemblement des convives. (PhG 170)

As we see in this citation, he distinguishes “the pleasure of the table” from “the pleasure of eating”, that concerns only the food served. The latter, as we saw previously, provides the basis for openness of the gastronomic concept. Here he advances a conception of “the pleasure of the table” as a meta-leveled pleasure that rests on the premise of “the pleasure of eating”. Thus, at this level, his concept of gastronomy starts to display some limiting elements.

Through what process does this “pleasure of the table” occur? Brillat-Savarin points out four conditions for its realization: 1. Good food of appropriate quantity, 2. Good wine, 3. Good company, 4. Enough time. They are all necessary, but the third is regarded as the most important among the four. In other words, in order to enjoy the pleasure coming from human relationships, the other three conditions must be fulfilled. This thought is also confirmed in “the various conditions for the best realization of the pleasure of the table”, which he proposes as the basis of the other four conditions. Most of these twelve conditions can be interpreted as advice for hosts or hostesses of dinner parties in designing a hospitable and enjoyable party. “Que le nombre des convives n’excède pas douze, afin que la conversation puisse être constamment générale. (...) Que les hommes soient spirituels sans prétention et les femmes aimables sans être trop coquettes. (...) Que le salon qui doit recevoir les convives soit assez

spacieux pour organiser une partie de jeu pour ceux qui ne peuvent pas s'en passer, et pour qu'il reste cependant assez d'espace pour les colloques post-méridiens" (PhG 174-175). These images evoke not restaurants, as the new social creature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rather the traditional salon scenes of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Brillat-Savarin expects his dinner parties to mirror exactly that atmosphere in terms of pleasure and sociability.

Brillat-Savarin argues that the issue of dining guests only emerges with regard to the dinner party, as formal invitations must be issued. Given that the pleasure gained from human interaction is the most important aspect of the eating experience, what kind of people to invite to the party is a big issue that must be urgently addressed. What is the criterion for deciding whom to invite, especially when it seems that Brillat-Savarin advocates that the gastronomic act should be open to everyone? In Meditation 14, "On the pleasure of the table", Brillat-Savarin offers this advice concerning the choice of guests: "Qu'ils soient tellement choisis, que leurs occupations soient variées, leurs goûts analogues, et avec de tels points de contact qu'on ne soit point obligé d'avoir recours à l'odieuse formalité des présentations" (PhG 174). But it is important not only to have similar tastes, that is, likings, but also to have the 'taste' for gourmandise and to possess 'taste' in the most general sense.

In Meditation 12 "On the gourmand", Brillat-Savarin says: "(Mais) il est une classe privilégiée qu'une prédestination matérielle et organique appelle aux jouissances du goût" (PhG 150). He insists, with a hint to physiognomy and innate ideas, that this predestination can be recognized by certain features of complexion or countenance: "Ils ont le visage rond ou carré, les yeux brillants, le front petit, le nez court, les lèvres charnues et le menton arrondi" (PhG 151). After having enumerated various kinds with their different marks and traits, he declares that gourmands are the first to be invited. The aptitude expected to characterise these gourmands is, needless to say, taste—"goût"—in an overall physical sense. While this "goût" is principally innate, people of certain classes and professions can acquire it through experience: financiers, doctors, men of letters and (external) devotees, all have in common the potential to learn to appreciate high-level dining.

Nevertheless, via the description of “M. de Borose”, who is presented by the author as an ideal gourmand, it is clear that Brillat-Savarin takes into consideration not only “goût” in a physical sense but also what is supposed to belong to the ‘spiritual’ domain: taste in and for conversation, music or literature, as the prerequisite for an ideal gourmand. It seems clear that Brillat-Savarin expects guests to have “goût” in all senses.

It is well known that the meaning of the word “goût” had been expanding in connotation for two centuries before Brillat-Savarin. Although a detailed account of this development is beyond the scope of this paper, it is necessary for us to take a glance at the ambiguity inherent in this term, especially with regard to its relationship to eating. According to Jean-Louis Flandrin<sup>1</sup>, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, “goût” was only used to refer to the physical sense. It remains unclear when this word began to be used to refer to the spiritual realm, as in the domains of plastic arts or music. However, by the second half of the century, the latter usage became more widespread than the former and the notion of “le bon goût” spread to all domains. We can thus assert that both meanings were already in usage and had a certain reciprocity throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However there are still certain factors to be considered. The aesthetician Atsushi Tanigawa<sup>2</sup> has pointed out that physical taste, in relation to Kant’s discussion of taste in the third *Critique*, has come to be distinguished from spiritual taste because it cannot be objective, since it lacks a “distance” between the subject and the object—the act of eating, f.i., consisting in

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Louis Flandrin, “Pour une histoire du goût”, in *La cuisine et la table, 5000 ans de gastronomie*, ed. J. Ferniot (Paris: Le Seuil, 1969), 13-19. See also Odile Redon, Line Sallmann et Sylvie Steinberg, ed., *Le désir et le goût: une autre histoire (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, actes du colloque International à la Mémoire de Jean-Louis Flandrin, Saint-Denis, septembre 2003 (Saint-Denis: Presses Univ. de Vincennes, 2005), II partie, L’invention des goûts.

<sup>2</sup> Atsushi Tanigawa, “Mikaku no fukô [The Mishap of Taste]”, *Gendai Shisô* [Contemporary Thought] 16-11 (1988): 191-201; Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement de goût* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), Post-Scriptum. Norbert Elias, in his *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation* (1939), showed how social differentiation was achieved by introducing sophisticated table manners—in other words, by controlling direct desire and eliminating animal instincts as much as possible. Elias studied French society between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when behavior during eating became gradually more sophisticated; see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 2000).

putting food into the mouth. He refers to Pierre Bourdieu, who has first exposed the desire for social differentiation behind Kant's discussion, in order to conclude that "goût" could become a criterion of social differentiation by being simply objective "goût", that is, through eliminating any more direct sense of "goût". As pointed out by Tanigawa, the "distance" required for creating an objective criterion of "goût" was indispensable in order to emphasize social difference.

But in the work of Brillat-Savarin, who lived in a later age, we find "goût" in a physical sense kept together with the objective understanding of "goût" in a spiritual sense. He does not reject one sense in favor of another, but rather attempts to incorporate both the spiritual and the physical into one. Any 'distance' that remains is not due to priority given to one over the other. In this perspective, Brillat-Savarin adopts a more reflective standpoint, defining three different stages in "goût":

La sensation directe est ce premier aperçu qui naît du travail immédiat des organes de la bouche, pendant que le corps appréciable se trouve encore sur la langue antérieure. La sensation complète est celle qui se compose de ce premier aperçu et de l'impression qui naît quand l'aliment abandonne cette première position, passe dans l'arrière-bouche, et frappe tout l'organe par son goût et par son parfum. Enfin, la sensation réfléchie est le jugement que porte l'âme sur les impressions qui lui sont transmises par l'organe. (PhG 52-53)

It is clear that this "goût", associated to a reflective element, differs from that of the previous discussion. However, it is still unclear whether this sense of "goût" belongs to the spiritual "goût" of conventional meaning. Isn't it, so to speak, a kind of 'objective palate', a judgment in a direct sense?

Brillat-Savarin developed a kind of test, named "méthode des éprouvettes gastronomiques", in order to rate the guests' capacity to understand the flavor of food<sup>1</sup>. The *éprouvettes* (test tubes, or test-pieces) would be several dishes of well-known taste and so undisputably good, that just the sight of them must impact upon the palate of anyone with a healthy disposition: "des mets d'une saveur reconnue et d'une excellence tellement

<sup>1</sup> PhG 163-166.

indisputable, que leur apparition seule doit émouvoir, chez un homme bien organisé, toutes les puissances dégustatrices”. There are three ranks of these “épreuves”, proportional to the financial income of those who would be tested; the effect is relative to the level of meal that one is usually accustomed to eat. If the testers are not seduced by the appearance of the delicious meal, they are set down as unworthy of the honor of the party and its enjoyment (“peuvent justement être notés comme indignes des honneurs de la séance et des plaisirs qui y sont attachés”). What is interesting here is that Brillat-Savarin maintains that sensual taste can be measured by an objective criterion. In the article “Goût” of the *Encyclopédie*, Voltaire wrote that the proverb “il ne faut point disputer des goûts” (‘there is no accounting for taste’) can be applied only to the sensual taste, because such inclinations come from a physical singularity and “one cannot correct a defect in the organs”<sup>2</sup>. Brillat-Savarin follows this line of reasoning, in that he thinks that an individual of healthy disposition (“bien organisé”) never fails to appreciate the value of a good dish. But he also maintains that “goût” must be measured in proportion to the income, that is to say, one can be ‘educated’ by one’s daily surroundings. With this he suggests that the *goût* has an objective criterion: hence the distance between ‘sensual’ and ‘intellectual’ taste (“goût intellectuel”) is closer. And since *goût* has a certain degree of objectivity, *gourmandise* can be regarded as a pivot of good sociability. The attempt is thus made to define the idea of a *gourmandise sociale*, where one would participate with a *goût* that has been informed by certain knowledge and experience, and where people that have in common the same *goûts* to some extent can partake in communication:

J’ai parcouru les dictionnaires au mot Gourmandise, et je n’ai point été satisfait de ce que j’y ai trouvé. Ce n’est qu’une confusion perpétuelle de la gourmandise proprement dite avec la gloutonnerie et la voracité : (...) Ils [les lexicographes] ont

<sup>2</sup> “Goût”, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1757), t. VII, 751: “On dit qu’il ne faut point disputer des goûts, et on a raison quand il n’est question que du goût sensuel, de la répugnance que l’on a pour une certaine nourriture, de la préférence qu’on donne à une autre ; on n’en dispute point, parce qu’on ne peut corriger un défaut d’organes”.

oublié, complètement oublié la gourmandise sociale, qui réunit l'élégance athénienne, le luxe romain et la délicatesse française, qui dispose avec sagacité, fait exécuter sagement, savoure avec énergie, et juge avec profondeur : qualité précieuse, qui pourrait bien être une vertu et qui est du moins bien certainement la source de nos plus pures jouissances. (PhG 141)

He also says the following regarding the gourmandise:

La gourmandise est un des principaux liens de la société ; c'est elle qui étend graduellement cet esprit de *convivialité* qui réunit chaque jour les divers états, les fond en un seul tout, anime la conversation, et adoucit les angles de l'inégalité conventionnelle. (PhG 147)

The word “convivialité” appeared in French in the account of a travel to England published in 1816<sup>1</sup>. The *Dictionnaire Littré* asserts that this word is Brillat-Savarin's creation. A few dictionaries today use citations from Brillat-Savarin's work to elucidate the more and more positive definition of *gourmandise* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. The idea of “convivialité” is an important part of the gastronomic notions that surface at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the *Physiologie du goût* played an important role in the formation of this redefined *gourmandise*.

In connection with his analysis of *goût*, Brillat-Savarin develops a theory of the influence of eating on the individuals' bodily and spiritual complexion, and even on society. What is the significance of the fact that this work was written under the influence of the *Idéologues*, even in an abstract sense? It is important to observe that this book was not written in the golden age of the *Idéologues*, but at the time of the Restoration. At this time, after a series of upheavals caused by the Revolution, authors were yearning for nostalgia of the good sociability associated with the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There was an acute sense of the loss of a pleasant relation that had been inherent also in eating, something to which French society

<sup>1</sup> Louis Simond, *Voyage d'un Français en Angleterre pendant les années 1810 et 1811* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1816), 512. The author notes that this word is translated from an English word “conviviality”.

<sup>2</sup> See *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie classique Larousse et Boyer, 1866-1878); *Trésor de la langue française*; *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2001).

had become accustomed. Brillat-Savarin shares this nostalgia and he explains in detail principles that ought to be respected in salons. This, on the one hand, marks a longing for pre-revolutionary manners, in contrast to the “egoistic” tendency of those going to restaurants alone; on the other hand, he developed as an answer to this state of things his idea of a ‘social gourmandise’.

Today, while ‘gourmets’ are proud of their deep knowledge of wines or food, they are sometimes criticized as indulging in a kind of ‘snobbery’: we understand by *gourmand* someone who doesn’t cling to excessive details, but enjoys the sociable pleasure garnered from joining others at the dining table. One may suggest that it was Brillat-Savarin’s work that helped to foster such a sociable connotation of the word ‘gourmand’.



Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, *Café de Paris* (1885).