

# **Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics**

Volume 8, 2016

Edited by Fabian Dorsch and Dan-Eugen Ratiu

Published by the European Society for Aesthetics

**esa**

## **Proceedings of the European Society of Aesthetics**

Founded in 2009 by Fabian Dorsch

Internet: <http://proceedings.eurosa.org>

Email: [proceedings@eurosa.org](mailto:proceedings@eurosa.org)

ISSN: 1664 – 5278

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The European Society for Aesthetics

Department of Philosophy

University of Fribourg

Avenue de l'Europe 20

1700 Fribourg

Switzerland

Internet: <http://www.eurosa.org>

Email: [secretary@eurosa.org](mailto:secretary@eurosa.org)

# ***A Philosophical Reading of Brillat–Savarin’s ‘The Physiology of Taste’\****

Jèssica Jaques<sup>†</sup>

*Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

ABSTRACT. The objective of this paper is to propose a philosophical reading of Brillat–Savarin’s *The Physiology of Taste* (1825) as the originary text of the contemporary gustatory aesthetics. I use the term “originary” here not only in the archaeological sense, but also to designate the foundational conceptual apparatus of a given discourse. Roland Barthes (in his 1975 introduction to the *Physiologie du goût*), Michel Onfray (in his 1995 *La raison gourmande*) and Carolyn Korsmeyer (in her 1999 *Making Sense of Taste*), all already claimed an originary status for Brillat–Savarin’s text, and in the current constitutive and expansive moment of the gustatory aesthetics, it is necessary to recontextualize and redefine the reasons for this identification. To this end, I will adduce ten arguments and a guide reading of this text.

## **I. Introduction**

In the last decade, gustatory aesthetics has emerged as a rapidly expanding philosophical territory and academic discipline. The bibliography dedicated to the subject comprises dozens of titles that are giving substance to this hybrid territory at the intersection of philosophy, gastronomy, aesthetics, and political and practical approaches. These texts, which have notably been proliferating since 2005, take Carolyn Korsmeyer’s 1999 book, *Making Sense of Taste*, as their originary point of reference. The main thesis of Korsmeyer’s book is that taste is a way of world making and serves a powerful symbolic function. In terms of current discussions, it is worth

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\* This article was made possible thanks to the support of the *Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad* to the research project HAR2015-64758-P: *Los escritos de Picasso: Textos Teatrales*, led by the author.

<sup>†</sup> Email: Jessica.Jaques@uab.cat

underlining the role being played by Nicolla Perullo's text *Taste as Experience. The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Food* (2016) as primary reference work. Perullo's text dialogues with the whole philosophical tradition from an expanded version of Korsmeyer's arguments to contemporary gustatory aesthetics. As explained on the back cover, Perullo's last book:

puts the pleasure of food at the center of human experience. It shows how the sense of taste informs our preferences for and relationship to nature, pushes us toward ethical practices of consumption, and impresses upon us the importance of aesthetics. Eating is often dismissed as a necessary aspect of survival, and our personal enjoyment of food is considered a quirk. Nicola Perullo sees food as the only portion of the world we take in on a daily basis, constituting our first and most significant encounter with the earth. For Perullo, taste is value and wisdom. It cannot be reduced to mere chemical or cultural factors but embodies the quality and quantity of our earthly experience.

But Perullo does not recognize that the powerful philosophical and aesthetic true origin of all these questions is to be found in Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *The Physiology of Taste (Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de Gastronomie Transcendante; ouvrage théorique, historique et à l'ordre du jour, dédié aux Gastronomes parisiens, par un professeur, membre de plusieurs sociétés littéraires et savants*, 1825), and in my view this is the originary text of contemporary gustatory aesthetics. Obviously, Perullo recognizes Brillat-Savarin's work as being the "first" one dedicated to a kind of *gustatory aesthetics* "avant la lettre", but he underestimates his contributions due to what is, in my view, an over-emphasis on a few arguments with respect to which Brillat-Savarin remained bound by his time and place (post-revolutionary, Napoleonic Paris), as well as by his social class, which was at the time a kind of "socially guiltless" bourgeoisie, as Roland Barthes has put it (Barthes 1975, p. 8). Barthes was an inveterate reader of Savarin, and wrote an Introduction in the form of a glossary to the 1975 edition of *The Physiology of Taste*.

In the same way as, even while recognizing it, we do not judge Hegel's aesthetics because of its Eurocentrism or its Germanophilia, we need to liberate Brillat-Savarin from the burden of his epoch and re-establish the

place of his contributions in the history of aesthetics. Thus, in claiming that *The Physiology of Taste* is the originary text of gustatory aesthetics, I am using the term “origin” not only in the archaeological sense, but also to designate the foundational conceptual apparatus of gustatory aesthetic discourse. In this sense, I will propose a philosophical vindication of Brillat-Savarin’s text, in the way that Michel Onfray (in his 1995 *La raison gourmande*, Carolyn Korsmeyer (in her above mentioned *Making Sense of Taste*) and especially Roland Barthes (in the also above mentioned Introduction) have already done. To the contributions that they recognize in Brillat-Savarin’s work, I will add ten issues that, in my view, underlie not only gustatory aesthetics, but aesthetics in the largest sense of the term and even philosophy in general.

## 2. The Use of Sub-Genres in Philosophical Writing

If we consider philosophical writing as a genre, we can say that Brillat-Savarin uses sub-genres proper to the philosophical tradition: aphorisms, a dialogue, and meditations.

Certainly, *The Physiology of Taste* opens with a list of thirty aphorisms (Brillat-Savarin 2009 [1825], pp. 15-16), written in the manner of the philosophical tradition of the Pre-Socratics and Voltaire (whom Brillat-Savarin greatly admired) and anticipating what Nietzsche would do a short time later. Some of these aphorisms have enjoyed particular fame, such as:

I. The Universe is nothing without the things that live in it, and everything that lives, eats. (L’Univers n’est rien que par la vie, et tout ce qui vit se nourrit.)

Animals feed themselves; men eat; but only wise men know the art of eating. (Les animaux se repaissent; l’homme mange; l’homme d’esprit seul sait manger.)

[The well-known] Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are. (Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai qui tu es.)

Good living (*gourmandise*) is an act of intelligence, by which we choose things which have an agreeable taste rather than those which do not. (La gourmandise est un acte de notre jugement, par lequel nous accordons la préférence aux choses qui sont agréables au goût sur celles qui n’ont pas cette qualité.)

These aphorisms are followed by a brief dialogue between Brillat-Savarin and a friend, which is devoted to the need for developing a discourse about gastronomy and the possible objections that such a project could provoke. Thereafter, the text is constructed around thirty *meditations*, whose order I array into four groups, it being understood that there are intersections among them:

1. Meditations on the aesthetics on nonmetaphorical use of taste, among which *Meditation* I: «On the Senses » («Des sens») and *Meditation* II: «On Taste» («Du goût»), are particularly notable.
2. Meditations on aesthetics of gastronomy. Particularly notable are *Meditation* III : «On Gastronomy » («De la gastronomie»), *Meditation* XII: «On Gourmands » («Des gourmands») and *Meditation* XI: «On the Pleasures of the Table» («Du plaisir à table»)
3. Meditations on the physiology of taste. Particularly notable are *Meditation* XX: «On the Influence of Diet» («De la influence de la diète sur le repos, le sommeil et les songes») and *Meditation* XXVI: «On Death» («De la mort»)
4. Meditations devoted to cooking, among which *Meditation* XXVII: «Philosophical History of Cooking» («Histoire philosophique de la cuisine») is particularly notable.

In what follows, I provide a list that shows the distribution of the meditations into the four groups and that can serve as reading guide.

### ***Distribution of the Meditations in The Physiology of Taste***

1. *Aesthetics on nonmetaphorical use of taste*
  - Meditation I «On the Senses» («Des sens»), pp. 31-43
  - Meditation II «On Taste» («Du goût»), pp. 44-58
  - Meditation X «The End of the World» («Sur la fin du monde»), pp. 152-154
2. *Aesthetics of gastronomy*
  - Meditation III «On Gastronomy» («De la gastronomie»), pp. 59-65

- Meditation IV «On Appetite» («De l'appétit»), pp. 67-73
- Meditation V (Section I) «On Food in General» («Des aliments en général»), pp. 74-83
- Meditation XI «On Gourmandism» («De la gourmandise»), pp. 155-164
- Meditation XII «On Gourmands» («Des gourmands»), pp. 167-178
- Meditation XIII «On Gastronomical Tests» («Éprouvettes gastronomiques»), pp. 182-186
- Meditation XIV «On the Pleasures of the Table» («Du plaisir à table»), pp. 188-193
- Meditation XV «On Hunting-Lucheons» («Des haltes de chasse»), pp. 203-207
- Meditation XXIX «Classical Gourmandism in Action» («La gourmandise classique mise en action»), pp. 223-234
- Meditation XXX «Bouquet» («Bouquet»), pp. 337-343

### 3. *Aesthetics on the physiology of taste*

- Meditation VIII «On Thirst» («De la soif»), pp. 142-147
- Meditation XVI «On Digestion» («De la digestion»), pp. 208-215
- Meditation XVII «On Rest» («Du repos»), pp. 283-306
- Meditation XVIII «On Sleep» («Du sommeil»), pp. 220-222
- Meditation XIX «On Dreams» («Des rêves»), pp. 223-232
- Meditation XX «On the Influence of Diet» («De la influence de la diète sur le repos, le sommeil et les songes»), pp. 235-239
- Meditation XXI «On Obesity» («De l'obésité»), pp. 241-250
- Meditation XXII «On the Treatment of Obesity» («Traitement préservatif ou curatif de l'obésité»), pp. 252-261
- Meditation XXIII «On Thinness» («De la maigreur»), pp. 264-268
- Meditation XXIV «On Fasting» («Du jeûne»), pp. 269-274
- Meditation XXV «On Exhaustion» («De l'épuisement»), pp. 275-277
- Meditation XXVI «On Death» («De la mort»), pp. 279-282

### 4. *Cooking*

- Meditation VI «On Food in General: Special Foods» («Spécialités»), p. 84

- Meditation VII «Theory of Frying» («Théorie de la friture»), pp. 136-140
- Meditation IX «On Drinks» («Des boissons»), pp. 148-151
- Meditation XXVII «Philosophical History of Cooking» («Histoire philosophique de la cuisine»), pp. 283-306
- Meditation XXVIII «On Restaurateurs», pp. 313-321

The book ends with thirty short texts called *varieties* (*variétés*, Brillat-Savarin 2009 [1825], pp. 350-420) on highly diverse subjects related to recipes or gastronomic reflections. In my view, it is likely that Brillat-Savarin's use of this designation is an allusion to Paris's *Théâtre des Variétés*, which was founded by Marguerite Brunet, known as Mademoiselle Montansier, and which was much in vogue at the time when *The Physiology of Taste* was being written.

### 3. References to Key Philosophical Concepts

Brillat-Savarin makes regular reference to traditional philosophical concepts. At times, he does so ironically; at times, in an appropriative or anticipatory manner.

#### 3.1. ***Ironic references***

- As we have seen, Brillat-Savarin places the central part of his text under the heading “Meditations” (*Méditations*) in an ironic reference to Descartes. In my view, the question that underlies this (in the manner of a Copernican turn), is the following: “If Descartes – who is said to have initiated reflection on the modern subject in philosophy – meditated on what is most strictly divine, devoting his meditations to trying to demonstrate the existence of God and the soul, then why not meditate on what is the most strictly human?”
- Brillat-Savarin used the Kantian term *transcendent* in the work's subtitle, which is, it will be recalled, “*ou Méditations de Gastronomie Transcendante*”. For unknown reasons, the first English edition (1859, translated by Fayette Robinson) already changed “transcendent” into “transcendental”, thus removing some of the irony, which –as I see it–



signaled that the discourse of gastronomy would transcend the avatars of the time.

- Finally, Brillat-Savarin also used the Kantian term “Prolegomena” with a certain sarcasm: namely, in the sub-title to the aphorisms, which runs: “To serve as Prolegomena to his work and eternal basis to the science” (“Pour servir de prolegomènes à son ouvrage et de base éternelle à la science.”). It should be recalled that the title of Kant’s work is *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that Can Present Itself as a Science*.

### **3.2. Appropriative or Anticipatory References**

These occur in the following ways.

- Philosophical attention to taste in its nonmetaphorical use, following Voltaire in the part [written by him] of the entry “Goût” in Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. It should be noted that the part written by Voltaire dates from 1757. Two parts of the article were previously written by, respectively, Louis de Jaucourt –who provided the text a physiological perspective– and Montesquieu, who died before finishing his part. It is useful to recall once more that Brillat-Savarin was a fervent admirer of Voltaire and that the four authors tried to salvage taste from the tongue, the palate and the other senses considered by the philosophical tradition as “lower” senses: which include also the olfactory and the tactile.
- The positivist dimension of the physiology of taste, following Jaucourt and anticipating the scientific account of certain aesthetic phenomena. It should be noted that, as part of the reaction against Romanticism, physiology was greatly in vogue in the culture of the time. Thus, it is certainly no accident that Balzac, a great admirer of Brillat-Savarin, would write his *The Physiology of Marriage* (*Physiologie du mariage*) in 1829 and would provide it as an appendix to the third edition of *The Physiology of Taste*, just as he had done already the previous year with respect to his *Treaty of Exciting Modern* (*Traité des excitants modernes*) and the second (1839) edition of Brillat-Savarin’s work.

- The treatment of taste as faculty of discernment and reflection. In its nonmetaphorical use, as already noted, following Voltaire; in its metaphorical use, following Hume and Kant. It should be noted that Brillat-Savarin read English and German (as well as Italian and Spanish) with ease, and that, as can be seen in the text, he knew well and appreciated both *Of the Standart of Taste* and the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, and, as far as possible, he appropriated them with respect to the nonmetaphorical use of taste.
- The defence of sentient perspicacity as a social and philosophical virtue, following Hume.
- The identification of disinterestedness as a fundamental aesthetic category, following Kant. This is the deep sense of the context that Brillat-Savarin gives to the term *esprit* in the above-cited *Aphorism II*: “Animals feed themselves; men eat; but only wise men know the art of eating” (“Les animaux se repaissent; l’homme mange; l’homme d’esprit seul sait manger”). Thus “knowing how to eat” –which is the faculty at which the innovative term *gourmandise* aims– “is an act of intelligence, by which we choose things which have an agreeable taste rather than those which do not” (“Est un acte de notre jugement, par lequel nous accordons la préférence aux choses qui sont agréables au goût sur celles qui n’ont pas cette qualité”) and goes beyond the mere necessity of nutrition. As an act of *esprit* that is comprehensible from the point of view of disinterestedness, *gourmandise* is distinguished from voracity and gluttony and becomes a social quality (see *Meditation III*).

Of course, it is far more complicated to establish aesthetic disinterestedness with respect to a gastronomic object than with respect to the aesthetic references of Kant’s reflections, but Brillat-Savarin did not shun the challenge, illuminating it in an attempt to maintain a balance between an Aristotelian functionalism of a pre-Darwinian stripe and an autonomism of a Kantian stripe. Thus, he argued that the two functions necessary for the continuation of the individual and the species –namely, eating and sexual reproduction– can be overcome from the point of view of *esprit* and open up a domain

of freedom going from the real to the possible. Thus, reproductive copulation is not the same thing as sex between two free and equal persons, just as eating to survive is not the same thing as eating to realize an exercise of judgment, of spiritual pleasure and conviviality, even if inevitably, at least in the second case, there is a continuum between the biological function and the aesthetic disinterestedness: a continuum that is converted into a tension of maximum philosophical interest by Brillat-Savarin. Pleasure occupies a privileged place in this tension in the *Aphorism V*:

V. The Creator, while forcing men to eat in order to live, tempts him to do so with appetite and then rewards him with pleasure.  
(Le créateur, en obligeant l'homme à manger pour vivre, l'y invite par l'appétit, et l'en récompense par le plaisir)

It must be said that the author is far more explicit about disinterestedness referring to the sense of taste than about that which refers to the *genetic sense* or the sixth sense, the term that he uses to designate the erotic sense, even if mentioning it is surprising in the context of his time and perhaps represents one of the reasons why the text was published anonymously.

- The anticipation of the Hegelian understanding of aesthetics as philosophy of art, given that Brillat-Savarin does aesthetics as philosophy of gastronomy. In the same way, he anticipates the Hegelian understanding of the philosophy of art as a science.
- The appropriation of conviviality as a constituent of the political and public sphere, following the utopian socialist François Marie Charles Fourier (who was Brillat-Savarin's brother-in-law). For Brillat-Savarin, of course, the table was an ideal place for conviviality as the pleasure of eating well together and practicing the communal exercise of conversation (see Barthes 1975, p. 30). In fact, for Brillat-Savarin the conviviality that comes into being at the table is a symptom of the passage from the *Ancien Régime* to the *Nouveau Régime*:

Gourmandise is one of the principle bonds of society. It gradually extends that spirit of conviviality, which every day unites

different professions, mingles them together, and diminishes the angles of conviviality. (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 fonde en un seul tout, anime la conversation, et adoucit les angles de la inégalité conventionnelle). (*Meditation XI*, p.160)

- To conclude with the non-ironic references, it could be said that the claim of conviviality constitutes a variation of “fraternité” and of the Kantian *sensus communis*; disinterestedness, a variation of “liberté”; and the ethological dimension of nutrition, a variation of “égalité”.

#### **4. The Creation of a Philosophical Field**

*Meditation III* is titled “On Gastronomy” (“De la gastronomie”) and, in my view, should be considered the most fundamental text of *The Physiology of Taste*, given that it is the place where Brillat-Savarin establishes the discipline of gastronomy. Even if he does so by using the habitual procedure of recuperating ancient nomenclature,

The use of the Greek Word *gastronomy* has been revived: it sounded sweetly in our French ears, and although barely understood it is but necessary to pronounce it to bring a smile of good fellowship to every face. (On a ressuscité du grec le mot de *gastronomie* ; il a paru doux aux oreilles françaises. Et, quoiqu'à peine compris, il a suffi de le prononcer pour porter sur toutes les physionomies le sourire de l'hilarité). (*Meditation XXVII*, p. 305)

he does it in a completely innovative and even undisciplined way by the standards of the traditional protocols of the disciplinary establishment, to use Rancière's terms. For Brillat-Savarin, gastronomy is an “undisciplined” field, which is proper to philosophy and especially to aesthetics. Thus, as Roland Barthes notes, Brillat-Savarin creates the field of gastronomy with a hybrid, encyclopaedic spirit combining science, philosophy and aesthetics. Still more decisively: Brillat-Savarin generates a vocabulary and an ensemble of arguments that is fruitful for the future of taste, not only (or even fundamentally) in its metaphorical sense, but also in this sense.

Barthes's reflections are highly pertinent and give renewed significance to the definition of gastronomy that Brillat-Savarin proposes:

BS perfectly understood that as a subject of discourse, food was a sort of grid (or topic, in the words of classical rhetoric), through which one could successfully pass all the sciences that we today call social and human. His book tends toward the encyclopaedic, even if he only outlined it vaguely. In other words, discourse is empowered to attack food from several angles: it is, in short, a total social fact around which a variety of metalanguages can be gathered: physiology, chemistry, geography, history, economics, sociology, and politics (today, we could add symbolism). For BS, it is this encyclopaedism – this “humanism” – which covers the term gastronomy: “Gastronomy is the knowledge of everything related to man in so far as he nourishes himself”. This scientific opening clearly corresponds to what BS himself was, in his own life: an essentially polymorphous subject – jurist, diplomat, musician, man of the world, well known both abroad and in the provinces; food was not a mania for him, but rather a sort of universal operator of discourse. (Barthes 1975, p. 32)

Still quoting Barthes, we could say that Brillat-Savarin analyzes cooking, a “universal operator of discourse” (“opérateur universel du discours”), “as a phonetician would do with vocality”, this is to say, “he acts as a linguist”, and he does this with a “neologistic discourse” (Barthes 1975, p. 18), generating a new vocabulary and argumentation. In fact, Brillat-Savarin “desires the words, in their materiality itself,” and his French language – or tongue (*langue*) – “is written with gourmand writing: gourmand of the words that it handles and of the food to which it refers” (Barthes 1975, p. 18).

## **5. The Claim for a Link between Desire, Absence and Writing**

Roland Barthes begins his text by saying that “the taste implies philosophy of nothing”, (Barthes 1975, p. 7). But further on he will say that this has to do, more precisely, with desire:

Whenever I speak of food, I am sending linguistics signs which refer to a particular aliment or to an alimentary quality. The implications

of this common situation are poorly understood when the intended object of my utterance is a desirable object. This is clearly the case with the *Physiology of Taste*. BS speaks and I desire that about which he speaks (especially if I have an appetite). Because the desire it arouses is an apparently simple one, the gastronomic utterance presents the power of language in all its ambiguity: the sign calls forth the delights of its referent at the very moment it traces its absence. Language creates and excludes. Hence, the gastronomic style raises for us a whole series of questions: what does it mean to represent? To figure? To project? To say something? What does it mean to desire? What does it mean to desire and to speak at the same time? (Barthes 1975, pp. 24-5)

Whatever the response to these questions will be, and still speaking with Barthes,

BS's book is, from beginning to end, a book about what is properly human, because it is desire (in so far as it is spoken) which distinguishes man. (Barthes 1975, p. 9)

Gastronomic discourse, and with it gastronomic criticism, was born as writing that connotes desire and absence and thereby refers to what is strictly human. We would have to wait for the texts on photography of Barthes himself for discourse on visual arts to do the same.

## **6. The Claim of Philosophical Proximity between the Physical Tongue, the Palate and Language**

In French, *palais* signifies both *palate* and *palace*, thus creating a suggestive continuum between the private and the public, between the recondite and the sumptuous. But this is just a play on words, since the etymologies of the two significations are different: *palatum* in the first case, *palatium* in the second.

From the philosophical standpoint, it does indeed turn out to be extremely compromising – and this is what Barthes found so seductive in his reading of Savarin – to attend to the fact that the *tongue* (la *langue*) is at once the organ of sensing taste and that of articulating sounds for the purposes of speech, just as, by extension, a tongue is a language, i.e. a system

of oral or written expression used by a group of people that is designated as a linguistic community. Along with Barthes, I regard as indispensable Brillat-Savarin's vindication of physicality, orality and the reviled senses for the philosophical tradition, as well as of the aesthetic synesthesia that can be produced from the palate: the concavity of ingestion and, at the same time, the articulator of the sounds of thought.

## **7. The Claim for the Centrality of the Body in Philosophical Accounts**

In claiming for gastronomy, tongue and palate the status of a new focus of philosophical interest, Brillat-Savarin gave voice to the body in this scene. The latter had been rendered mute since the first emergence of Neo-Platonic philosophy, remaining so in Christian philosophy and the Cartesian derivatives of both. It took Foucault tremendous labors and efforts to salvage the body as the “other” of philosophy. For Brillat-Savarin, it appears to have been easy, although no one paid any attention to him, and well more than a century would pass before Maurice Merleau-Ponty would open the Pandora's box that has led to the centrality of the body in contemporary philosophy. Despite Brillat-Savarin's extremely interesting proposal concerning the link between the sense of taste and the genetic-sexual sense, about which we have already spoken in section 2.2, the work achieved by Brillat-Savarin does not appear in Foucault's genealogies. Barthes understood that this link-heightened taste not only as *inner sense*, but also as the privileged locus for the generation of synesthesia, an aspect that has been widely treated by contemporary philosophy and psychologies based on the centrality of the body (recently pointed as *embodiment*), especially those of an Enactivist stripe (see Noë and Hurley 2003; Noë 2016).

## **8. The Recuperation of the Platonic Link between Desire, the Philosophical Symposium, Eros and Pleasure**

As already indicated, *The Physiology of Taste* brought about a resolute recuperation of hedonism, which had been absent from Neo-Platonic, Christian and Cartesian philosophy, and was first salvaged by British aesthetic

empiricism.

Brillat-Savarin took up this work of recuperation again and focused it upon gastronomy, choosing as the culminating moment *le plaisir à table*, which features in *Meditation* XIV and which adduces a highly sophisticated correlate to pleasure: boredom. Thus, according to *Aphorism* VIII: “The table is the only place where a man is never bored for the first our” (“La table est le seul endroit où l’on ne s’ennuie jamais pendant la première heure”), since this has to do with the surprise produced as much by the food as by the novelty of the conversation, which is the opposite of boredom. As in Plato’s *Symposium*, the banquet is the place for something that appears all of a sudden, it is the locus of taste, a faculty that is, according to Barthes, “Oral as language, libidinal as Eros” (Barthes 1975, p. 19).

## 9. Anonymity

Brillat-Savarin did not sign his text. As indicated above, this could be due to the fact that –in an extraordinary move for his times– he placed the *genetic sense* in the foreground of what is human and connected it to pleasure. But, in my view, there is also a second reason that is equally groundbreaking. This anonymity could indicate an ironic taking-of-distance with respect to the ideas of genius and of authorship that were so hegemonic in the late Romanticism by which the author was surrounded and that he combatted with his scientist, materialistic and hedonistic approach to the aesthetics of gastronomy.

## 10. The Identification of the Diner’s Role as a Constitutive Element of Gastronomic Creativity

*The Physiology of Taste* greatly foreshadows a philosophy of creativity that will not be developed until the last decades of the 20th century; namely, that which attributes a role as creative agent to the audience and gives this as much emphasis as the creative role of the producer. It is certain that for Brillat-Savarin gastronomic practice merely begins in the kitchen, since it is only fully realized in tasting and in conversation. The author thus democratizes the notion of creativity –which was current both at the time and much later– since, by virtue of this role attributed to the diner,



we can all be creative. With this perspective, the author thus anticipated the aesthetics of reception and relational artistic practices, and also, for the first time, related performative and ephemeral practices.

## **II. The First Story of the Restaurant as Gastronomic Institution: A Place of Democratization of an Aesthetic Practice**

In keeping with the foregoing, Brillat-Savarin also develops reflections on the institution proper to gastronomy. During the revolutionary era in Paris, cooks left the palace and opened urban places where the bourgeoisie –from the highest to the most modes – could eat in the same way as until then only royals could have done. The restaurant was born in the shadow of the museum and the zoo, and the three institutions responded to a spirit of democratization: a scientific and –especially in the last two cases– encyclopaedic spirit, which was not without traces of the Eurocentrism that was proper to the epoch. Thus, Brillat-Savarin comments:

The encouragement of this new profession, which spread from France all over Europe, is extremely advantageous to everyone, and of great scientific importance. (L'adoption des restaurateurs, qui de France a fait le tour de l'Europe, est d'un avantage extrême pour tous les citoyens, et d'une grande importance pour la science). (*Meditation XVIII*, p. 154)

For the first time, the author of *The Physiology of Taste* produced reflections on the restaurant as an institution (to which he devoted all of *Meditation XVIII: Des restaurateurs*), and he was thus a pioneer in the field of sociological and political reflection on artistic institutions and what has since given rise to institutional criticism.

## **12. Conclusion**

Brillat-Savarin was a contemporary of Hegel and Goethe. His book *The Physiology of Taste* shares certain topics with both of the latter and, as displayed in the ten preceding points, it represents a philosophical account

worthy of consideration alongside them in histories of aesthetics. This paper calls for such an inclusion of Brillat-Savarin, as well as for the contemporary recuperation of these points, which prove to be especially fruitful, in a general sense, in light of current debates about Enactivism, about the cognitive dimension of sentient thinking, about the bounds between arts and sciences, about the reflection on creativity and their institutions, and the relation between the aesthetic, the construction of the public sphere and politics. In a more specific sense, the questions broached prove to be indispensable to the founding of gustatory aesthetics as an undisciplined discipline (see Rancière 2008).

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