

## Eating in the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

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Since the belated publication in English of Jürgen Habermas's book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989 [orig. 1962]), there has been a considerable preoccupation among sociologists and political scientists with the notions of 'the public sphere' and 'civil society'. Much of the interest in Habermas's book arose from the collapse of communism in Europe in 1990, and from the need of the former Soviet satellite countries to establish stable democratic institutions and independent organs of public opinion. The invitation to write this chapter prompted me to reflections of less political moment on the book: to re-examine the material on the history of gastronomy which I originally gathered principally for my study of the development of taste in food and eating in France and England.<sup>1</sup> The bourgeois gastronome – not himself a cook, but an expert in the art of eating and a leader of public opinion in matters of culinary taste – is a minor but interesting figure in the sequence of development described by Habermas. The emergence of gastronomes, gastronomy, a dining public and a public sphere of gastronomic discourse is a footnote to the overall process, and in a modest way may raise some questions about Habermas's thesis.

In *Strukturwandel des Öffentlichkeits*, Jürgen Habermas presents an historical sociology of the 'bourgeois' public sphere. This emerged in Western Europe, he argues, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in close connection with the development of a market economy, standing structurally between the state and civil society but belonging to the latter. It was a sphere in which the critical public discussion of matters political, social and cultural was institutionally guaranteed. In so far as a public sphere had existed previously within the absolutist state, it had, according to Habermas, been one in which the ruler's power was merely *represented* before the people. In the *bourgeois* public sphere, in contrast, state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse

among the people. Since the late nineteenth century, however, the bourgeois public sphere has declined. As Thomas McCarthy succinctly summarizes Habermas's argument:<sup>2</sup>

with the further development of capitalism, the public body expanded beyond the bourgeoisie to include groups that were systematically disadvantaged by the workings of the free market and sought state regulation and compensation. The consequent intertwining of state and society in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries meant the end of the liberal public sphere. The public sphere of social-welfare-state democracies is rather a field of competition among conflicting interests, in which organizations representing diverse constituencies negotiate and compromise among themselves and with government officials while excluding the public from their proceedings.<sup>2</sup>

Has a parallel process occurred in the rise and fall of a public sphere of eating?

### **An Autonomous Sphere of 'Taste'?**

'The *publicum*', writes Habermas, 'developed into the public, the *sub-jectum* into the [reasoning] subject, the receiver of regulations from above into the adversary of the ruling authorities'.<sup>3</sup> While Habermas is here thinking mainly of political issues, he shows clearly how the pattern of development was also evident in the sphere of what came to be called 'culture'. Music, for instance, until the end of the eighteenth century, 'remained bound to the functions of the kind of public-ness involved in representation – what today we call occasional music'. Only then, with the development of public concert societies, did there arise 'something like music not tied to a purpose' and 'an audience gathered to listen to music as such'. What was true of music was applicable to art more generally: 'Released from its functions in the service of social representation, art became an object of free choice and of changing preference. The 'taste' to which art was orientated from then on became manifest in the assessments of lay people who claimed no prerogative, since within a public everyone was entitled to judge.'<sup>4</sup>

Something similar began to happen about the same time in the domain of food and eating, with the burgeoning of the first great restaurants in Paris. But I shall argue that what was novel in the Paris of the Directory and the Empire was not the restaurant as a place where one could buy a meal outside one's own home, but rather its connection in an emergent social figuration with the gastronome as a recognizable figure, with gastronomic writing as a distinct genre, and with a public opinion informed

by both. For in few fields of culture was the judgement of lay members of a broad public accepted uncritically and without debate. Habermas points to painting as the area in which the conflict about lay judgement as a critical authority was most severe, precisely a field hitherto dominated by a small circle of connoisseurs. One thinks of the *salon des refusés* and the Impressionists as late as the 1860s and 1870s. In the course of the eighteenth century, there emerged the art critic, who ‘assumed a peculiarly dialectical task: he viewed himself at the same time as the representative and as the educator of the public’. Gastronomes too have functioned both as spokesmen for and leaders of the dining public – and consciously so at first, for the experience of *haute cuisine* had been as narrowly confined socially as had that of music or painting.

Gastronomy has generally been seen one-sidedly as the preserve of an elite, laying down canons of ‘correct’ taste for those wealthy enough to afford them. I want to argue that, whether they intended to or not, gastronomes have also performed a democratizing function in the shaping of taste. Gastronomic writings, in common with manners books, perform this function because the moment they are printed they disseminate knowledge of elite standards beyond the elite – and, of course, authors and publishers seek the financial rewards of sales outside the most exclusive circles. Both functions – of articulating elite standards and of democratizing taste – always co-exist in gastronomy, though the balance between the two has tilted during the last two centuries. That tilting can be traced through a continuous line of development linking Grimod de la Reynière’s *Almanach des gourmands* (1803–12) to the restaurant guides of today.

## **Forerunners of the Gastronomer**

The word ‘gastronomy’, learnedly derived from Greek, seems to have been invented by Joseph Berchoux in 1801, who used it as the title of a poem.<sup>5</sup> The term was rapidly adopted both in France and England to designate ‘the art and science of delicate eating’. ‘Gastronome’ was a back-formation from ‘gastronomy’, to designate ‘a judge of good eating’.<sup>6</sup> The invention of new words proves nothing in itself of course, and, as Norbert Elias warned, ‘nothing is more fruitless, when dealing with long-term social processes, than to attempt to locate an absolute beginning’.<sup>7</sup> But Habermas’s account of the structural development of the public sphere does help us to understand the context in which the terms appeared at the turn of the nineteenth century, and the ways in which gastronomes at that time differed from their various precursors.

As early as the sixteenth century, Montaigne describes a conversation with the Italian chef of Cardinal Caraffa, who spoke pretentiously about his art, 'bloated with grand and magnificent words, such as one might use in describing the government of an empire.'<sup>8</sup> The chef was clearly skilled at making fine distinctions in the judgement of taste, but that did not make him what would later be called a gastronome. He was not addressing a public, but working for a single patron and essentially using his skills to *represent* the power and prestige of the patron – the quality of whose table no doubt sustained his claim to membership of a limited circle of connoisseurs in this as in other areas of taste. That inference is supported by the cringing tone in which seventeenth-century cookery books were dedicated to prominent courtiers by their often anonymous authors, as well as the explicit representation of particular meals or dishes as having been served in such and such a noble household on a particular occasion.<sup>9</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, however, something resembling a public gastronomic controversy was taking place in Paris.<sup>10</sup> That it happened then and there is consonant both with Habermas's account of the emergence of a 'bourgeois' public sphere during that century and with his stress on its more restricted growth in France than in England. The occasion of the controversy was the publication in 1739 of the book *Les Dons de Comus*, attributed to Marin, who is thought to have been cook to the Duchesse de Gesvres and then to the Maréchal de Soubise.<sup>11</sup> The book itself was less a recipe book than a manual on the rules governing the composition and serving of meals, listing possible dishes rather than explaining how to cook them; it is addressed not only to cooks but 'mainly to people who are curious to know how to give a dinner, and to be served delicately [. . .] according to the latest taste'. It was by clear inference addressed to the upwardly mobile rich bourgeois who wished to know how things were done in the best courtly circles.

What caused the controversy, however, was less the book itself than its long and erudite prefatory *Avertissement*, attributed to two Jesuits, PP. Pierre Brumoy (1688–1742) and Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant (1690–1743). They discoursed learnedly on the anthropology and history of the human diet, and went on to theorize about the superiority of what was in the 1730s and 1740s called the *nouvelle cuisine* compared with the older French cuisine as it had developed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It provoked an immediate response, the pamphlet *Lettre d'un pâtissier anglois* (1739) attributed to the Comte Desalleurs, a minor courtier, who satirized the pretentiousness of the *Avertissement* and the preciousness of the *nouvelle cuisine*.<sup>12</sup> This defence of the view that in food as in other things old ways are best called forth in turn the *Apologie*

*des modernes* (1740), in which the *littérateur* Meusnier de Querlon made it plain that the parties to this superficially gastronomic squabble recognized its links with battles between the old and the new in other cultural spheres. Not only is this reminiscent of Dryden's participation in London half a century earlier in the battle of the 'ancients and moderns' to which Habermas refers,<sup>13</sup> but it also demonstrates the displacement of latent political controversies into the cultural arena in the more censored life of Ancien Régime Paris. Indeed the *Lettre d'un pâtissier anglois* contains a long reference to *The Craftsman*, one of the key periodicals in Habermas's account of the development of the public sphere in England.

### **What the Revolution Did for Gastronomy**

'The Revolution', writes Habermas, 'created in France overnight, although with less stability, what in Great Britain had taken more than a century of steady evolution: the institutions, which until then had been lacking, for critical public debate of political matters.'<sup>14</sup> The same impression of an abrupt rupture also dominates the popular account of the origins of the restaurant. The story goes that the skilled professional cooks hitherto employed in the kitchens of aristocrats who had fled abroad or perished in the Terror, finding themselves without work, were obliged to open restaurants and cook for whoever was able to pay and chose to enter. There is a grain, but only a grain, of truth in that. There was certainly nothing new in being able to purchase professionally cooked food and eat it outside the home, at least in the towns. Apart from the ancient inns and cookshops, from the seventeenth century there were the coffee-houses or *cafés* as popular meeting places in most of the important cities of Europe,<sup>15</sup> the importance of which in the social development of the public sphere Habermas emphasizes, since they served as centres of political intrigue and commercial intelligence. Closest approximations to the later restaurants, however, both in their social functions and in the food they served, were the taverns of eighteenth-century England. By the mid-eighteenth century many taverns in London were noted eating places and social centres, some large enough to cater for vast municipal banquets, and patronized by the aristocracy and gentry as well as merchants and intellectuals. Contrary to the later pattern, eating out was better established among the English upper classes than among the French. This too was probably related to political patterns: the annual meeting of Parliament in the winter and spring of each year was associated from the seventeenth century with the annual migration of the leading families from their

country homes to London for the 'Season', and apart from the grandest, who had their own large London houses, many would stay in lodgings and often 'eat out'.

There was no exact counterpart to this in France until after the Revolution. All the same, the first restaurants did begin to appear in Paris *before* the Revolution. The highly restrictive monopoly of the Paris guild of *traiteurs* was breached, and several subsequently famous restaurants opened their doors in the 1780s, which suggests that a market for eating out was developing in elite circles in France as well as in England. What the Revolution did was to forge in Paris a counterpart to the connection which had long existed in London between parliamentary life and the life of the taverns and coffee-houses. As a newly powerful group, the deputies were well placed to set a fashion which others would follow. It was under the Directory and the Empire especially that the great restaurants of Paris began to set an international model. Competition among them fostered innovation, above all new dishes and an increasingly *haute*, labour-intensive and therefore expensive, *cuisine* with 'artistic' pretensions both visual and gustatory. But, from a sociological point of view, at least as significant in the process of competition was the formation of a well-informed and knowledgeable eating public. The cook's patrons were now many, not few. The relationship was by now a market relationship. The market was fostered and enlarged by what, rather than the restaurant *per se*, was arguably the decisive French contribution to eating as a social activity: the invention of gastronomic literature as a genre, and of the social role of the gastronome.

## The Social Role of the Gastronomer

Grimod de la Reynière (1758–1838) was the most important of the founding fathers of literate gastronomy – not only in the *Almanach des Gourmands* (published annually from 1803 to 1812, except in 1809 and 1811), but also in the *Manuel des Amphitryons* (1808) and the monthly *Journal des Gourmands et des Belles* (1806–8).<sup>16</sup> The first edition of the *Almanach* contained an 'Itinéraire nutritif, ou promenade d'un gourmand dans divers quartiers de Paris', which was to be the centrepiece of successive issues. It came to cover not only restaurants and cafés but also *rôtisseurs* and *traiteurs*, grocers, greengrocers and florists, butchers and *tripeuses* – food suppliers of every kind in Paris. Grimod was a *flâneur* half a century before Baudelaire and a whole century before Georg Simmel celebrated the social type.

Grimod and his imitators played a significant part in the growth of a public for the burgeoning trade of restaurateur. Who most needed whom is, however, debatable. The rise of the restaurant had begun before 1789, and it had become part of the fashionable scene in Paris during the decade before Grimod published the first issue of the *Almanach*. Nevertheless, when the number of participants – in this case both restaurateurs and diners – is large and continually growing, it is arguable that an informed and coherent public opinion generally necessitates more open and formal media of communication to supplement informal networks of gossip.<sup>17</sup> Inevitably this brings about a differentiation within the dining public between the relatively more powerful leaders of opinion who write the gastronomic criticism and the relatively less powerful who merely read it.

Whatever influence gastronomes had in shaping taste was exerted in a consistent direction – towards discrimination, choice and delicacy in matters of eating, which are the kernel of the gastronomic message. The social role of the gastronome is essentially urban in character because it is at the opposite pole from the principle of traditional rural self-sufficiency: eating the product of one's own land and taking it as it comes. More self-evidently, the gastronomic spirit is rare among those whose poverty allows them little choice. There must be food in abundance and variety, and of course variety and subtlety in cookery to permit gastronomes to select some things and reject others. Yet a wealthy stratum and town life are probably not sufficient conditions for the emergence of the gastronome and gastronomy: there is little sign of them in, for instance, Amsterdam at the height of its wealth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The original locus of refinement in eating appears to have been court society. Why, then, did the gastronome as a distinct figure appear in France *after* the Revolution? Possibly a comparison with dandyism is revealing. A dandy, 'one who studies above everything to dress elegantly and fashionably; a beau, fop, "exquisite"', is a figure more native to England than is the gastronome, and the word came into vogue about 1813–19 for the 'swells' of the Regency period. The dandy is to matters of dress what the gastronome is to matters of eating. In his biography of Benjamin Disraeli, Robert Blake remarks of dandyism:

It seems to be a characteristic of an era of social flux, when aristocracy is tottering or uncertain, but when radicalism has not yet replaced it with a new set of values. It flourishes in a period when manners are no longer rigidly fixed, but have not yet degenerated into mere anarchy, so that there is still a convention to rebel against, still a world to be shocked and amused by extravagance and eccentricity. The dandy must have a framework within which to operate.

The social grades must still exist, but it must be easy for those with sufficient courage, carelessness or sheer brazen determination to climb from one to another.<sup>18</sup>

This hypothesis seems to fit not only the 1830s and 1890s in England, when, as Blake observes, dandyism was prevalent there, but also the first decades of the nineteenth century in France, when the gastronomes first appeared. The provocative, somewhat exhibitionist lifestyle of Grimod and his circle in particular was strikingly parallel to dandyism, mainly differing in its use of food rather than dress as a means of display.

Of course it was not necessary that the precise social conditions which favoured the emergence of the gastronome endure for gastronomy as a literary genre to survive. Once the tradition had been created, it could persist, while changing its emphases and functions according to changing circumstances.

At first the elite-defining function is more evident than the democratizing one. It is apparent in the display of expertise. The gastronomes encouraged talk about food; without talk, critical appreciation of the cooks' achievements would be impossible, and only critical appreciation would give the cooks an incentive to compete with each other for the patronage of an informed public. The fashion no doubt took a long time to become universal. Curnonsky, while noting that in his youth it had not been the done thing to talk about what one ate, remarks that after World War I things progressed to the point that in France it was acceptable even to discuss how much it had cost.<sup>19</sup>

Gastronomes and gastronomy had, however, also played a democratizing role from the earliest stages. It has to be remembered that as a distinct figure, the gastronome appeared on the scene in the course of a general widening of the market for sophisticated cooking. When appearing to be at their most elitist, effete and exclusive, gastronomes and gastronomy were also helping to widen the circle for good eating. In a more egalitarian period, their activities in making known the pleasures of the table, and encouraging more cooks and diners to share their own interest in them, have become more evident; and in the process the gastronomic tradition has itself evolved.

## **The Decline of the Public Sphere and of the Autonomy of Taste?**

From the late nineteenth century, Habermas, as we have seen, traces an apparent decline of the 'bourgeois' public sphere through its widening to

include many more competing interest groups, resulting in an interpenetration of the state and civil society and a loss of autonomy in the public sphere. These developments in political economy are also reflected in a transition ‘from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public’.<sup>20</sup> He stresses in particular the decline of gentlemen’s clubs and societies as a forum for discussion,

Put bluntly: you had to pay for books, theatre, concert, and museum, but not for the conversation about what you had read, heard and seen and what you might completely absorb only through this conversation. Today this conversation itself is administered. Professional dialogues from the podium, panel discussions, and round table shows – the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars in radio and television, a saleable package ready for the box office. [ . . . ] Discussion, now a ‘business’, becomes formalized.<sup>21</sup>

Here the influence on Habermas of the ideas of the first generation of the Frankfurt School about the ‘culture industry’ and the manipulated quality of opinion and taste in contemporary capitalist society is very evident. He also cites English-language writers influential in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Whyte (1956) and Riesman (1950), who depicted trends in American society towards a privatized way of life and pressures to conform, and Kornhauser’s *The Politics of Mass Society* (1960), which summed up social scientists’ thinking in the Cold War decades after the defeat of Hitler about the undermining of free public opinion in the origins of totalitarianism. But he also drew on Galbraith’s (1952) notion of ‘countervailing power’, which to some extent runs in the opposite direction and seems applicable to the more recent history of gastronomy.

An image of the world of the contemporary restaurant very much in line with Habermas’s is found in the work of Joanne Finkelstein. She views dining out ‘as a means by which personal desires find their shape and satisfaction through the prescribed forms of social conduct’ and thus as an example of ‘how human emotions become commodified’.<sup>22</sup> Even a family visit to McDonald’s is promoted as offering the experience of ‘a sense of occasion’, while at more exclusive venues, ‘pleasure may accrue from the diner’s use of the event to suggest the personal possession of culturally valued characteristics such as wealth, fine taste and *savoir faire*’. Choice of a restaurant and choice of what one eats there are commonly seen as expressions of an individual’s own particular tastes, yet, argues Finkelstein, ‘the styles of interaction encouraged in the restaurant produce an uncivilized sociality [ . . . ] The artifice of the restaurant makes [ . . . ] us [ . . . ] act in imitation of others, in response to fashions, out of habit,

without need for thought and self-scrutiny.<sup>23</sup> This represents the continuation of a long line of social theorists' thinking about the 'unauthentic' experience of self in modern society from Simmel through Marcuse and Habermas to the more frivolous Baudrillard. But some aspects of the contemporary gastronomic scene suggest at least the presence of counter-currents.

## Gastronomy and Democratization

In France, the activities of Curnonsky and his circle marked an important development in the gastronomic tradition. Curnonsky was the pseudonym of Maurice-Edmond Sailland (1872–1956). In 1928 he founded the Académie des Gastronomes, modelled on the Académie Française – only one of many such new organizations in the twentieth century, which at least serves as a reminder that there are counter-currents to the decline of clubs and associations depicted by Habermas. The real significance of Curnonsky and his friends was that they seized the opportunity of linking gastronomy and tourism, and thus initiated a great interest in and vogue for French regional cookery. The alliance of tourism and gastronomy was particularly to the advantage of tyre companies like Michelin and Kléber-Colombes, who began to publish their celebrated guides to the restaurants and hotels of France. 'The motor-car', wrote Curnonsky, 'allowed the French to discover the cuisine of each province, and created the breed of what I have called "gastro-nomads".'<sup>24</sup>

A parallel development in England was the foundation of the Wine and Food Society by André L. Simon in October 1933. As an organization the Society marked an interesting transition between the small, exclusive gastronomic dining clubs of the past and mass-readership campaigning publications like the *Good Food Guide*. The Society's quarterly journal, *Wine and Food*, soon excited hostility from the hotel trade. A comprehensive paper on 'The Present State of Gastronomy in England, with Some Suggestions for its Amendment' presented at a meeting of the Society surveyed the scene in some detail, spoke of 'a pretentious dullness' as the chief characteristic of food in English hotels and restaurants, and finally blamed the apathy and indifference of English diners for the indifference and laziness of its cooks. The paper provoked a hostile letter from Sir Henry Dixon Kimber on behalf of the Hotels and Restaurants Association of Great Britain: he threatened to withdraw support from the Society if this sort of thing continued (both the paper and the letter were printed in *Wine and Food*, Winter 1934). While this did not gag the Society completely, it

did perhaps make it wary of indulging in blanket condemnation; and, pursuing a transparent strategy of co-option, it invited Kimber to address its Annual General Meeting the following year.

## **Guides to Eating**

Tourist guides to hotels and restaurants are an old-established institution, and the idea of grading establishments in terms of comfort, facilities, service and cuisine was familiar long before World War II. Guides like Michelin, however, made – and still make – their judgements without publicly discussing the grounds for reaching them in particular cases. Even the greatest eating places simply receive their two- or three-star listings with at most a laconic line or so mentioning a few of the *specialités de la maison*. The more ‘talkative’ kind of guidebook, which describes each restaurant and comments critically on its strengths and weaknesses, its particular style and the personality of its chef, is a post-war development in both England and France. In England the *Good Food Guide* and Egon Ronay’s annual guides, and in France the Gault–Millau guide, have all appeared on the scene since World War II. Gault–Millau and Ronay are rather similar, in having been initially the work of campaigning individuals, but gradually growing into large organizations with trained and paid inspectors to visit and judge hotels and restaurants. The *Good Food Guide* is rather different in that it involves many hundreds of the dining public in making reports on their own experiences. Both of the British guides have often been highly critical of mass catering, and seem on occasion to have achieved some improvements,<sup>25</sup> though equally often they seem to have been swimming against the tide.<sup>26</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This excursion into gastronomic history can scarcely be claimed as *test of* Habermas’s model of the development of the public sphere – his theory is too wide in scope for a discussion confined to the domain of eating to be adequate to that task. Nevertheless, Habermas’s work seems to me to help make sense of the main stages of gastronomy, and at the same time this gastronomic material can perhaps be used to air a few reservations about the theory.

Montaigne’s Italian chef neatly illustrates a stage of development when ‘public-ness’ (to use an awkward translation of *Öffentlichkeit*) took the form of representation: this chef simply displayed the arcane standards

developed among a very restricted social elite. The *Pâtissier anglois* controversy nicely illustrated the limited development of the public sphere in France, with participants conscious of the wider political significance of a discussion about taste. The emergence of Grimod, Brillat-Savarin and their many imitators after the French Revolution, on the other hand, is clearly one facet of a true 'bourgeois public sphere' in Habermas's sense. Later still, the development in the twentieth century of gastronomic pressure groups and campaigning guides illustrates much of what Habermas has to say about the decline of the bourgeois public sphere. We can see their battles with the food industry and demands upon government as the product of the interpenetration of state, economy and civil society, and of the commercial shaping of taste. They are also a manifestation of the principle of countervailing power.

As to reservations, a minor one concerns the question of whether clubs and associations have been on the decline in twentieth-century society. As the exclusive preserve of 'gentlemen' they perhaps have, but it is questionable whether the sheer propensity to form associations has declined. The history of gastronomy is full of new foundations. Empirical sociological research suggests that membership of 'secondary groups' is still disproportionately middle-class, and it tends to be the supposed instability and manipulability of opinion among an 'available', unrooted, lower class that is – or was in the 1950s when Habermas was writing – most feared by culture critics of the left and the right. More recently, Robert Putnam has produced a mass of evidence to demonstrate that in the USA the stock of 'social capital' – meaning the participation by individuals in the whole range of collective activities that Alexis de Tocqueville celebrated in *Democracy in America* in the 1830s – has declined very markedly since the 1950s, and he predicts that similar paths will be followed in other Western countries.<sup>27</sup>

My main doubts about Habermas's thesis concern his assumptions about bourgeois public opinion as the outcome of rational discussion between free, equal and independent citizens. This was certainly how early theorists saw it, but whether we should take their word for it is another question. This model plays a part in Habermas's thought – in the 'ideal speech situation' of his later theory of communicative action (1984–7 [orig. 1981]) as much as the early work we have been considering – equivalent to the economists' model of perfect competition, and indeed it is largely derived from that. Like perfect competition, it is rarely met with in the real world, because opinions are always formed within figurations of many interdependent – and unequally interdependent – people. Taste and opinion are always shaped within changing power balances, and to

recognize that *ab initio* leads to a somewhat less apocalyptic vision of contemporary trends than Habermas's. I have hinted at how such shifting power balances can be studied in the context of the history of gastronomy.

Finally, I have some difficulty with any notion of 'authenticity' in taste and culture. During the crisis of confidence following the *événements de mai* in 1968, it was common for cultural policy-makers, on the one hand, to deny any intention of imposing 'high culture' on people from above, while, on the other hand, deploring (after the fashion of the cultural elitists of the Frankfurt School) the effect of the culture industries in debauching mass tastes. These two views were typically reconciled through the hope that if people's tastes were manipulated neither by the proponents of high culture nor by big business, with only the neutral help of cultural midwives called *animateurs*, there would be a spontaneous blooming of a rich and diverse culture.<sup>28</sup> These dilemmas are neatly reflected in the history of gastronomy. In order to have any chance of successes in their trials of strength with the mass producers, the leaders of any consumer movement have to ensure that they are seen as the delegates or spokesmen for substantial numbers of followers. Thus, like the leaders of political parties, the editors of the guides have to pay as much attention to persuading their followers as persuading the caterers that their tastes are right. For the editors of the *Good Food Guide*, which at least pretends to be the democratic expression of its readers' taste, this causes some qualms. Christopher Driver reflected on the problem in the 1980 edition. Given that many, probably most, people were perfectly content with mass-produced food, by what right did the *Guide* rate more highly the preferences of those who were not so content? The *Guide* itself, he admitted, had done at least its share in persuading the British bourgeoisie into eating more garlic per capita than the northern French did, and into eating its lamb and duck as pink as its sirloin. Most of those who made reports for the *Guide* liked their food that way – in part because the *Guide* had told them it should – but was it *objectively* better? Grimod de la Reynière would not have been troubled by such self-doubt – Montaigne's Italian still less. One reason for the doubt is that no matter that large numbers of the 'bourgeoisie' have come to share such tastes, they are manifestly a small minority of the people at large and of the market. In consequence, the outcome of trials of strength on the upper level between self-appointed leaders of culinary public opinion and the mass producers of food depends not only on the leaders carrying their followers with them, but also on the balances of power on the lower level between groups bringing to the market very different likes and dislikes. Taste and opinion always have been, and always will be, produced in *imperfect* markets in that way.

## Notes

1. Mennell, 1985.
2. McCarthy, 1989, xii.
3. Habermas, 1989, 26. I have made minor changes to the published translation of Habermas's book.
4. Habermas, 1989, 39–40.
5. Berchoux, 1801.
6. For a more detailed exploration of this semantic field, see Mennell, 1985, 266–7.
7. Elias, 1983, 232.
8. Montaigne, 1962, 294.
9. See Mennell, 1985, 69–83.
10. Mennell, 1981. The texts of the main contributions to the controversy are reproduced in this publication.
11. Marin, 1739.
12. Desalleurs, 1739.
13. Habermas, 1989, 32–3.
14. Habermas, 1989, 69–70.
15. Ball, 1991.
16. See also Bonnet, 1986.
17. More exactly, this is a special case of the general exigency on growing and increasingly 'opaque' networks (Max Weber used the word *undurchsichtig*) to develop institutions capable of introducing at least the semblance of greater transparency; see Elias, 1978, 85ff. This usually involves some differentiation between 'leaders' and 'followers'. On the functions of gossip in power relations between 'established' and outsider groups, see Elias and Scotson, 1965.
18. Blake, 1966, 78.
19. Curnonsky, 1958, 241–2.
20. Habermas 1989, 159ff.
21. Habermas, 1989, 164.
22. Finkelstein, 1989, 4. See, too Finkelstein, 1985.
23. Finkelstein, 1989, 5.
24. Curnonsky, 1958, 53–4.
25. See Mennell, 1985.
26. My study of British food guides covers the story only to *circa* 1980; Alan Warde's chapter in this book updates the story for the 1980s and 1990s.
27. Putnam, 2000.
28. See Mennell, 1979, for a sceptical view of this.

## References

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