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Science without scientists: modern cooking in the eighteenth century

UNTIL the middle of the eighteenth century, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* defined cooking as primarily an action: 'faire la cuisine' meant 'Apprester à manger'.¹ But in 1740 the dictionary offered a secondary definition for 'la cuisine': 'signifie aussi l'art d'appreter les viandes, et de faire la cuisine'.² This revision was significant for two reasons. First, 'la cuisine' itself now directly signified cooking without the addition of the action verb 'faire', indicating that cuisine was no longer simply one act among many but a distinct process in its own right. Second, by labelling 'la cuisine' an art, the dictionary revealed that cooking involved some degree of order, since according to contemporary definition, arts required both 'rules' and 'method'.³ But the most telling change came with the addition of new usage examples for 'la cuisine': 'Il apprend la cuisine. Il sait bien la cuisine'.⁴ Cooking had gone from something one did to something one knew.

Why did the dictionary begin to characterise cooking as not just an action but as an art, even an intellectual process? Beginning in the 1730s, cooks published cookbooks promoting a new type of cooking, *la cuisine moderne*, which they promised would revitalise the style that had prevailed since the end of the seventeenth century, now labelled *la cuisine ancienne*.⁵ According to its proponents *la cuisine moderne* not only offered refinement and simplicity, it effectively provided the scientific theory necessary to master the existing empirical practices of *la cuisine ancienne*. In contrast, I would argue that prior to the introduction of *la cuisine moderne*, a theoretical knowledge of the kitchen quite simply had not been possible, since earlier French cookbooks had operated only on the level of instrumental knowledge.⁶ In them, cooks had discovered which dishes

1. *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, dédié au Roy* (Paris, Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1694), s.v. 'Cuisine'; *Le Nouveau Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, dédié au Roy* (Paris, Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1718), s.v. 'Cuisine'.

2. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (Paris, Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1740), s.v. 'Cuisine'.

3. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, s.v. 'Art'.

4. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, s.v. 'Cuisine'.

5. 'La cuisine moderne' also went by the name of 'la nouvelle cuisine'. Both terms were used interchangeably by advocates and detractors alike.

6. In the formulation of the possibility of a knowledge, I follow Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris 1966), English translation *The Order of things: an archeology of the human sciences* (New York 1970), p.xxi.

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were served in certain elite households and learned to duplicate them through following recipes; however, no system of order governed this information, and no mastery of cooking was acquired. Thus before the arrival of *la cuisine moderne* one could not really have been said to ‘know cooking well’, just how to cook certain dishes.

The self-styled ‘modern cook’ did not sally forth unchallenged. As early as 1694 the Academy’s dictionary had painted the picture of a decidedly less intellectual cook: ‘latin de cuisine’, for example, signified a ‘a fort meschant Latin’.⁷ But faced with the pretensions of *la cuisine moderne*, criticism of cooks assumed new energy. An unholy alliance of physicians, *philosophes* and philistines argued that *la cuisine moderne* represented a mortal threat to the health of France. Doctors suggested that cooks practising the new style corrupted diners’ bodies in short order. Voltaire derided *la cuisine moderne* in a play, with a character remarking:

J’entends parler de nouvelle cuisine,
de nouveaux goûts; on crève, on se ruine.⁸

The self-styled ‘pâtissier anglois’ railed in a pamphlet against the cultural pretensions of *la cuisine moderne*, arguing that cooks had overstepped the role allotted to them in their effort to civilise and perfect diners.⁹ These detractors of *la cuisine moderne* rarely attacked the new style of cooking itself, but rather its practitioners. Cooks, they argued, possessed neither the moral nor social authority to exercise responsibly the knowledge of the kitchen.

I would propose that the form of this criticism – attacking cooks as opposed to cooking – suggests a disjuncture between the theory and practice of cooking. On the one hand, cooks successfully convinced outsiders that cooking constituted a science, in particular a form of chemistry. Their cookbooks articulated a theory of cuisine that effectively organised cooking into something recognisable as a science, in particular by appealing to contemporary popular and medical understanding of the relationship between dining and health. On the other hand, cooks themselves were never received as scientists. While cooking in principle might be likened to a form of chemistry, cooks lacked the moral and social authority to practise the science that they had themselves invented. The science of *la*

7. *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, s.v. ‘Latin’. With the dictionary’s second (1718) and subsequent editions, this phrase migrated to the entry for ‘Cuisine’ suggesting that the term said more about kitchens than it did about Latin.

8. Voltaire, *Nanine, ou l’Homme sans préjugé, comédie en trois actes*, in *Complete works of Voltaire* (Geneva, Banbury, Oxford 1968-), vol.31B (Oxford 1994), ed. Marie-Rose de Labriolle and Colin Duckworth, p.143, II.xii.389-90.

9. The *Lettre d’un pâtissier anglois au cuisinier français* first appeared as a pamphlet in 1739. It was later reprinted as an appendix to the cookbook *Le Cuisinier gascon* (Amsterdam, n.p., 1747), p.196-231.

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cuisine moderne consequently backfired, casting further doubt on cooks' ability to operate scientifically.

Historians have certainly not ignored *la cuisine moderne*, but to date they have tended to focus only on the cooking, not the cooks. As a result, they have been unable to evaluate *la cuisine moderne* as a project conceived by cooks for their own professional development. Emma Spary, for example, analyses a nineteenth-century 'science of taste' that emanated from gourmands and doctors, not cooks.¹⁰ Yet dozens of cookbooks penned by cooks during the eighteenth century articulated just such a science. In her recent study of the restaurant, Rebecca Spang has also largely neglected cooks, preferring to focus exclusively on the 'practices and institutions' of restaurants, not the cooks who created them.¹¹ Yet Spang does rely heavily on cooks' writings in an effort to conflate this discourse of *la cuisine moderne* with the rise of the restaurant.¹²

This reluctance to engage with cooks themselves likely stems from the particularly untidy circumstances of the occupation of cooking. During the eighteenth century, the vast majority of cooks were employed as domestic servants in private households. Although Spang has declared that domestic servants might 'conceivably be loyal and trustworthy', representations of servants during the eighteenth century present just the opposite picture.¹³ Cooks in particular were depicted as morally suspect: when they were not cheating and thieving, they were believed to be poisoning their masters through negligence.¹⁴ Operating without the guilds that governed most urban trades, cooks have left us with no formal institutional records that might facilitate a comprehensive study. Yet it is from among these cooks, not public *traiteurs* or *restaurateurs* that the eighteenth century's great culinary treatises emerged. Cooks (like other servants) worked essentially as *gens de bras*, labourers who relied on their hands rather than their minds to earn a living. According to William Sewell, this division was

10. Emma Spary, 'Making a science of taste: the Revolution, the learned life and the invention of "gastronomie"', in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (ed.), *Consumers and luxury: consumer culture in Europe 1650-1850* (Manchester 1999), p.177-80.

11. Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the restaurant: Paris and modern gastronomic culture* (Cambridge, MA 2000), p.6.

12. Spang implicitly relies on host of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cookbooks, since it is from these works that definitions of 'restaurant' first arise (*The Invention of the restaurant*, p.247-48, n.3).

13. Spang, *The Invention of the restaurant*, p.29.

14. See, for example, *La Maltôte des cuisinières, ou la Manière de bien ferrer la mule: dialogue entre une vieille cuisinière et une jeune servante* (Riom, G. Valleyre, 1724). Spang discusses the accidental poisoning, but only in the context of public cooks. One observer lamented the carelessness of 'servants and cooks' that led to such poisonings. Joseph Amy, 'Si on doit rejeter entièrement l'usage des vaisseaux de cuivre dans la préparation des aliments', in *Nouvelles Fontaines domestiques approuvées par l'Académie royale des sciences*, ed. Joseph Amy (Paris, J. B. Coignard, A. Boudet, 1750), p.36.

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‘fundamental’, denoting ‘a boundary between order and disorder’.¹⁵ Any historian studying cooks faces the challenge of reconciling this disorderly and unruly occupation with the erudite and sophisticated discourse of *la cuisine moderne*.

When scholars have studied cooks, they have often relied on the well-worn stereotypes of ‘professional’ and ‘domestic’ cooks.¹⁶ This opposition is nearly always gendered: male professional chefs vie with female domestic cooks. In the case of French cooks working abroad in England, historians have further complicated the binary to include a national element: French male professional chefs lorded over English female domestic cooks.¹⁷ Sometimes the formula injects the somewhat anachronistic ‘chef’ into the equation, with male chefs and female cooks.¹⁸ At least for the eighteenth century, such a division of labour is untenable. Unlike other occupational groups which were generally divided along gender lines, cooks included both men and women among their ranks, eliminating even this most basic ordering of Old Regime occupations. Even among servants, such diversity was unusual, since male and female domestics typically filled gendered positions: male porters, female chambermaids, etc.

In this paper I seek to analyse cooks both as the architects and practitioners of *la cuisine moderne*. Along the way, I hope to shed some light on the constitution of scientific authority during the eighteenth century. I begin with a study of the genesis of a new science of the kitchen. I propose that cooks were largely successful in their articulation of a culinary theory that governed cooking practices: a chemistry of the kitchen. Next I explore how cooks sought to put this science into practice. The new theory of *la cuisine moderne* in effect only acted as the edifice of a science, since cooks themselves could never practise it.

15. William H. Sewell, *Work and revolution in France: the language of labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge 1980), p.24.

16. Stephen Mennell, *All manners of food: eating and taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the present* (Oxford 1985), p.202; Londa L. Schiebinger, *The Mind has no sex? Women in the origins of modern science* (Cambridge, MA 1989), p.116; Nancy Jocelyn Edwards, ‘Patriotism à table: cookbooks, textbooks, and national identity in fin-de-siècle France’, *Proceedings of the annual meeting of the Western society for French history* 24 (1997), p.245-54 (p.246); Janet Theophano, *Eat my words: reading women’s lives through the cookbooks they wrote* (New York 2002), p.172. With the exception of Stephen Mennell, these scholars have sought to oppose ‘professional’ with ‘domestic’ cooking, an opposition which impairs insight into the gender distinction which is essentially under investigation in their works. They seek to differentiate between male and female cooks, a distinction which I agree is important, but not necessarily for the same reasons as the above scholars. In her study of servants, Cissie Fairchild identifies cooks’ claim to professionalism as just that: a claim which was at the time largely unsubstantiated (*Domestic enemies: servants and their masters in Old Regime France*, Baltimore, MD 1984, p.116).

17. Gilly Lehmann, ‘Politics in the kitchen’, *Eighteenth-century life* 23:2 (1999), p.71-83.

18. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Accounting for taste: the triumph of French cuisine* (Chicago, IL 2004), p.21. During the eighteenth century, ‘chef’ implied merely the presence of subordinate kitchen staff. To be sure, most men preparing food were not known as chefs.

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i. Creating a science of taste

La cuisine moderne was as much a literary phenomenon as culinary: over a quarter of a million cookbooks were printed during the years 1700 to 1789, with the vast majority of new titles appearing only after 1730, when cookbooks featuring *la cuisine moderne* first appeared.¹⁹ Cooks produced as many new titles during the 1730s as they had in the previous thirty years, and the pace only continued to accelerate through the middle of the century.²⁰ The production of new titles was further magnified by a rapid rate of re-edition, both legitimate and counterfeit. Thirty-two editions of Menon's *La Cuisinière bourgeoise*, for example, appeared between 1746 and 1789, and new versions continued to appear into the nineteenth century.²¹ From the perspective of the second half of the eighteenth century, the pace of cookbook publication had become overwhelming: the *Encyclopédie*'s article 'Cuisine' lamented the appearance 'sans cesse de nouveaux traités sous les noms de *Cuisinier François*, *Cuisinier royal*, *Cuisinier moderne*, *Dons de Comus*, *Ecole des officiers de bouche*, & beaucoup d'autres qui changeant perpétuellement de méthode'.²² Cooks regularly made references to each other's cookbooks (and promoted their own). *Les Dons de Comus* noted that on both the old and new style of cooking, 'nous avons [...] plusieurs Ouvrages qu'on peut consulter'.²³

These cookbooks were indisputably written by practising servant cooks. In his study of eighteenth-century cookbook publication, Alain Girard concludes that 'The cookbook, when its author is identified, is the work of a cook or a *maître-d'hôtel*.'²⁴ Cooks François de La Varenne, Pierre de Lune, and Vincent La Chapelle all indicated their positions and employers in the title pages of their cookbooks.²⁵ François Massialot, author of

19. In contrast, just 90,000 cookbooks were printed during the second half of the seventeenth century. This figure, moreover, obscures the relative paucity of new titles during the seventeenth century, since many early cookbooks enjoyed remarkably long lives: La Varenne's *Le Cuisinier françois* (1651) and Massialot's *Le Cuisinier roïal et bourgeois* (1691) remained in print well into the eighteenth century. Alain Girard, 'Le triomphe de *La Cuisinière bourgeoise*: livres culinaires, cuisine et société en France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 24 (1977), p.497-523 (p.500-503).

20. Girard, 'Le triomphe de *La Cuisinière bourgeoise*', p.503.

21. Girard, 'Le triomphe de *La Cuisinière bourgeoise*', p.504.

22. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres* (Paris, Briasson, David, Le Breton, 1751-1772), s.v. 'Cuisine'.

23. François Marin, *Les Dons de Comus, ou les Délices de la table: ouvrage non-seulement utile aux officiers de bouche pour ce qui concerne leur art, mais principalement à l'usage des personnes qui sont curieuses de savoir donner à manger, et d'être servies délicatement, tant en gras qu'en maigre, suivant les saisons, et dans le goût le plus nouveau* (Paris, Prault fils, 1739), p.xxvii.

24. Girard, 'Le triomphe de *La Cuisinière bourgeoise*', p.510.

25. François-Pierre de La Varenne, *Le Cuisinier françois, enseignant la maniere de bien apprester, et assaisonner toutes sortes de viandes, grasses et maigres, legumes, patisseries, etc. Reveu, corrigé, et augmenté d'un traité de confitures seiches et liquides, et autres delicatesses de bouche. Ensemble d'une table alphabetique des matieres qui sont traitées dans tout le livre* (Paris, Pierre David, 1652);

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Le Cuisinier royal et bourgeois (1691), served the dukes of Chartres, Orléans, Aumont and Louvois.²⁶ François Marin, author of both *Les Dons de Comus* and *La Suite des Dons de Comus* (1742), worked for the maréchal de Soubise. The compiler of the *Dictionnaire des alimens* (1750) was somewhat oblique about his employer – preferring only to specify his position as ‘chef de cuisine’ to the ‘Prince de *****’ – but he nonetheless indicated that he served as a cook.²⁷ It is generally agreed that Menon was a cook, but, oddly, little is known about this most prolific of eighteenth-century cookbook authors.²⁸ Nearly every cookbook can be positively linked to a cook, and just one has been attributed to a non-servant author.²⁹ In rare cases, an author might avail himself of outside literary assistance in the preparation of a cookbook. The bulk of the preface of *Les Dons de Comus*, for example, has typically been attributed to two Jesuits, Pierre Brumoy and Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant.³⁰ Such ghost-authorship hardly amounted to subterfuge: when *Les Dons de Comus* first appeared, readers quickly guessed that it owed its preface to someone other than Marin: according to one contemporary reader, this section was quite simply too ‘pleine d’érudition’ for a work on cooking.³¹ Stephen Mennell, who has studied this particular preface closely, concludes that the discussion of *la cuisine moderne* had simply spilled over into ever more public discourse, reflecting ‘the keen interest in matters gastronomic taken by the fashionable world’.³²

Pierre de Lune, *Le Nouveau Cuisinier, ou il est traité de la véritable méthode pour apprêter toutes sortes de viandes, gibier, volailles, poissons, tant de mer que d’eau douce: suivant les quatre saisons de l’année. Ensemble la manière de faire toutes sortes de pâtisseries, tant froides que chaudes, en perfection* (Paris, Pierre David, 1660); Vincent La Chapelle, *Le Cuisinier moderne, qui apprend à donner toutes sortes de repas, en gras et en maigre, d’une manière plus délicate que ce qui en été écrit jusqu’à présent* (La Haye, l’auteur, 1742).

26. Jean-François Revel, *Un Festin en paroles: histoire littéraire de la sensibilité gastronomique, de l’Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris 1979), translated by Helen R. Lane, *Culture and cuisine: a journey through the history of food* (Garden City, NY 1982), p.155.

27. M. C. D., *Dictionnaire des alimens, vins et liqueurs, leurs qualités, leurs effets, relativement aux différens âges, et aux différens tempéramens; avec la manière de les apprêter, ancienne et moderne, suivant la méthode des plus habiles chefs d’office et chefs de cuisine, de la cour, et de la ville. Ouvrage très-utile dans toutes les familles* (Paris, Gissey, 1750).

28. Fairchild, *Domestic enemies*, p.19. Stephen Mennell (*All Manners of food*, p.143) attributes Menon’s anonymity to the ‘low status of cooks’, but given the prominent display of other cookbook authors’ credentials, this assertion is not convincing.

29. In this case, the author was the Prince de Dombes, a practising amateur cook who wrote *Le Cuisinier gascon* (Amsterdam 1740). Even so, he participated in a medium dominated by those who cooked for a living.

30. The preface of Marin’s next cookbook, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, has likewise been attributed elsewhere, in this case to Anne-Gabriel Meusnier de Querlon. Stephen Mennell (ed.), *Lettre d’un pâtissier anglois et autres contributions à une polémique gastronomique du XVIII^e siècle* (Exeter 1981), p.xx, xxii.

31. Jacques-Elie Gastelier, *Lettres sur les affaires du temps* (Paris 1993), p.341. The letters date from the period 1738-1741.

32. Mennell, *All manners of food*, p.81.

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We can date *la cuisine moderne* to at least as early as the 1733 arrival of Vincent La Chapelle's *The Modern cook*.³³ Oddly enough, this adamantly French programme made its first appearance in print in the form of an English-language cookbook, reflecting the already international reach of French cooks. La Chapelle painted the necessity of adopting his 'modern' cuisine in stark terms: 'For should the Table of a great Man be serv'd in the Taste that prevail'd twenty Years ago, it would not please the Guests, how strictly soever he might conform to the Rules laid down at that Time.'³⁴ In 1739 the cookbook *Les Dons de Comus* offered a more extensive definition, claiming that *la cuisine moderne* largely sought to simplify and correct *la cuisine ancienne*, which had been 'fort compliquée, et d'un détail extraordinaire'. In contrast 'La Cuisine moderne établie sur les fondemens de l'ancienne, avec moins d'embarras, moins d'appareil, et avec autant de variété, est plus simple, plus propre, et peut-être encore plus sçavante.'³⁵ The cookbook author Menon likewise agreed that the new style of cooking owed its origins to its predecessor, *la cuisine ancienne*, 'qui est la base de la nouvelle'.³⁶ Old and new cuisine could even coexist in time and space. According to one cook, 'Il y en a parmi nous qui préfèrent la Cuisine Ancienne à la Moderne; l'un et l'autre a ses Partisans.'³⁷ According to *Les Dons de Comus*, cooks could avail themselves of older cookbooks which only treated *la cuisine ancienne* – provided, of course, that they knew how to adapt the techniques to conform 'au goût nouveau'.³⁸ Nonetheless, cooks hardly rushed to support *la cuisine ancienne* with a similar flood of cookbooks – in fact none of this sort ever appeared. The new style, though building on the old, had made its predecessor (and by extension its practitioners) obsolete. A 1757 play went so far as to anthropomorphise this tension between old and new: a technically skilled but bitter older woman played the part of 'l'ancienne', while a brash and innovative young man played 'la moderne'.³⁹

Yet despite the sudden obsolescence of *la cuisine ancienne*, *la cuisine moderne* was meant to be evolutionary, not revolutionary, since it

33. Owing to the rarity of the 1733 edition, I was able only to consult the third edition, which appeared in 1736. Vincent La Chapelle, *The Modern cook: containing instructions for preparing and ordering publick entertainments for the tables of princes, ambassadors, noblemen, and magistrates. As also the least expensive methods of providing for private families, in a very elegant manner. New receipts for dressing of meat, fowl, and fish, and making ragoûts, fricassées, and pastry of all sorts, in a method never before publish'd. Adorn'd with copper-plates, exhibiting the order of placing the different dishes, etc. on the table, in the most polite way* (London, Thomas Osbourne, 1736). By the time La Chapelle's work appeared in French in 1742, works by François Marin and Menon had already introduced French readers to *la cuisine moderne*.

34. La Chapelle, *The Modern cook*, p.i.

35. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p.xix-xx.

36. Menon, *Les Soupers de la cour, ou l'Art de travailler toutes sortes d'aliments, pour servir les meilleures tables, suivant les quatre saisons* (Paris, Guillyn, 1755; reprint Paris 1978), p.x.

37. M. C. D., *Dictionnaire des alimens*, p.xiii.

38. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p.xxvii-xxviii.

39. Anonymous, 'L'ancienne et nouvelle cuisine', Paris, BnF, n.a.fr. 2862.

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encompassed and ordered the practices of its predecessor rather than simply replacing them. According to La Chapelle, the interaction of theory and practice formed the core of modern cooking: ‘There are Rules in all Arts; and such as desire to become Masters of them, must conform to those Rules, which however is not alone sufficient; Experience and a continual Practice being required, in order to attain Perfection.’⁴⁰ Menon likewise seized on this formula for culinary perfection, declaring, ‘L’Art de la Cuisine a, comme tous les autres, ses règles, ses principes, et si la pratique a ses avantages, la théorie a aussi les siens. Il n’y a que l’union des deux qui puisse porter à la perfection.’⁴¹ Indeed, this focus on rules finds its basis in the very definition of ‘art’: ‘La règle et la méthode de bien faire un ouvrage.’⁴² It was this interaction between the infinitely malleable ‘rules’ of cooking and its concrete practices that fuelled *la cuisine moderne’s* vitality. In his 1749 cookbook *La Science du maître-d’hôtel cuisinier*, Menon further expounded on the relationship between the practices of the past and the new theory, writing:

On convient que l’adresse des mains, un jugement sain, un palais délicat, un goût sûr et fin, sont des qualités absolument nécessaires à un bon Cuisinier. J’ose dire que cela ne suffit pas encore. Tel possédera tous ces talents, qui, en fait de Cuisine, ne sera jamais qu’un Manoeuvre guidé par la seule routine, ou ce qu’est en Médecine un Empirique. Esclave servile de l’usage, un Artiste de ce caractère, ou ne s’avisera pas d’imaginer quelque nouveau ragoût, ou de rien changer à la pratique qu’il aura apprise; ou s’il le fait, ce ne sera qu’après plusieurs tentatives, et beaucoup de dépense, qu’il pourra espérer quelque succès. Donnez-lui la connaissance des qualités et des propriétés des alimens qu’il travaille, des sucs dont il veut former un mélange agréable, vous lui épargnez son tems, son travail, et sa bourse.⁴³

Practical experience coupled with theoretical knowledge of cooking thus became the essential new standard to judge cooks. Cooks who lacked this knowledge – however skilled they might be – would now be disdained. By continuously stressing the need to apply theory to practice, each cook’s own training ontologically recapitulated the history of cuisine, with *la cuisine ancienne* subsumed into *la cuisine moderne*. Such cooks would always be ‘Sûrs des résultats de leurs opérations’ sparing both expense and danger.⁴⁴ The promise of certain results brought cooking into the realm of science, which involved ‘Connaissance certaine et évident des choses par

40. La Chapelle, *The Modern cook*, p.i.

41. Menon, *Les Soupers de la cour*, p.vi.

42. *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, s.v. ‘Art’. In later editions, the definition shifted slightly to ‘method of executing a work well according to certain rules’, highlighting the relationship between more theoretical rules and more practical method.

43. Menon, *La Science du maître d’hôtel cuisinier, avec des observations sur la connoissance et propriétés des alimens* (Paris, Paulus-du-Mesnil, 1749), p.xxv-xxvi.

44. [Menon], *Cuisine et office de santé propre à ceux qui vivent avec économie et régime* (Paris, Le Clerc, 1758), p.7-8.

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leurs causes.⁴⁵ Like a scientist, a cook could guarantee the uniformity of his results, even when attempting to create a dish that had never before existed. Knowledge led to certainty and certainty to success.

What exactly did the new knowledge entail? One common strategy sought to classify cuisine according to nature. By viewing the human art of cooking – an essentially cultural construction – through the lens of nature, cooks sought the surety of an immutable system. François Marin described his particular system as follows:

Pour revenir à mon Ouvrage, après une liste des potages gras et maigres, je fais l'anatomie des grosses viandes ou de la viande de boucherie; j'indique les differens usages que l'on en fait à la cuisine, et leurs divers degrés de bonté. Ce détail comprend l'histoire du Boeuf, du Veau, du Mouton, et de l'Agneau que je n'ai point séparé du Mouton: le Cochon qui est d'une si grade ressource, suit naturellement, et fait la matiere d'un article particulier: après cela je passe à la volaille, et de suite à la venaison et au gibier, et je suis la même methodes qu'à viande de boucherie. Le poisson de Mer et d'eau douce, les légumes et les herbes font autant d'articles séparés, et terminent la premiere partie.⁴⁶

Note that Marin proposed 'methods' that could be applied in a variety of contexts, not just to butcher meat but also to poultry and game. The language of a rationalised nature pervaded the cookbook's entire text. Pork 'naturally' followed other butcher meats; lamb appeared along with mutton (in contrast, other cookbook authors frequently discussed young and old sheep separately and likewise divided veal from beef).⁴⁷ Marin claimed that 'l'ordre naturel' dictated that fowl follow butcher's meat. He discussed the 'orders' and 'classes' of domestic and wild animals.⁴⁸ After covering the various forms of meat, he asserted that 'l'ordre veut' a discussion of fish. Likewise, 'Les légumes et les racines doivent suivre naturellement après les œufs.'⁴⁹ Other cookbook authors also imagined a 'natural' ordering of cuisine, with cooks arbitrating between nature and the table.⁵⁰ Menon urged diners to place themselves in the hands of cooks knowledgeable enough to exploit nature, writing: 'La nature qui le guide dans son travail, lorsqu'il sçait la consulter, se fût prêtée à ses désirs: un mélange judicieux et éclairé des saveurs naturelles, vous eût offert un mets aussi sain qu'agréable.'⁵¹

45. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, s.v. 'Science'.

46. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p.xxix.

47. For example in Menon's *La Cuisinière bourgeoise*, the order goes beef, mutton, veal, pork, lamb. Menon, *La Nouvelle Cuisinière bourgeoise, suivie de l'office à l'usage [usage] de tous ceux qui se mêlent des dépenses de maison* (Paris, Guillyn, 1746).

48. Butcher's meat and fowl comprised the first and second orders of domestic animals respectively. Venison (which included boar as well as deer) formed the first class of wild animals, while game constituted the second.

49. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p.59, 77.

50. Menon, *La Science du maître d'hôtel cuisinier*, p.iv.

51. Menon, *La Science du maître d'hôtel cuisinier*, p.xi.

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Despite the growing emphasis on cooking's scientific aspects, cook-books continued to stress cooks' role as artists as well, eliding the distinction between art and science. *Les Dons de Comus* claimed that 'Cette espece d'Analyse chymique est en effet tout l'objet de notre art.'⁵² The text of Menon's *La Science du maître d'hôtel cuisinier* referred to cooking almost exclusively as an 'art'. The *Encyclopédie* recognised this elision by classifying cooking as a mechanical art while also labelling it a 'science', albeit 'la science de la gueule'.⁵³ In fact, from nearly the beginning, cooks had characterised *la cuisine moderne* as 'une espece de Chymie', a proposition first set forth in the cookbook *Les Dons de Comus*.⁵⁴ For example, Diderot remarked in his article 'Encyclopédie', 'quant à notre cuisine, [...] on ne peut lui dispute d'être une branche importante de la Chimie'.⁵⁵ In his *Tableau de Paris* Louis-Sébastien Mercier frequently invoked the scientific aspects of modern cooking, noting, for example, that the 'art est une chimie agréable et savante'.⁵⁶ A 1771 book sale likewise classified cooking as a form of chemistry by cataloguing four recent cookbooks under the heading 'Sciences et Arts. – Medecine. – Chymie'.⁵⁷ Even scientific journals lent credence to such beliefs by publishing serious reviews of cookbooks like Menon's *La Science du maître d'hôtel cuisinier*.⁵⁸ By the end of the century the notion of cooking as chemical science had become a commonplace.⁵⁹

ii. The scientific and cultural authority of the cook

Sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson has suggested that the esoteric knowledge associated with expertise confers power on its possessors only when it concerns 'matters that their society considers important'.⁶⁰ Did anyone other than cooks consider *la cuisine moderne* and its new expertise

52. François Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, (Paris, Veuve Pissot, 1742), p.xix.

53. *Encyclopédie*, s.v. 'Cuisine'. This phrase in turn comes from Montaigne's essay 'On the vanity of words'; *The Complete essays of Montaigne*, translated by Donald M. Frame (Stanford, CA 2000), p.222. Frame translates 'science de gueule' as 'science of guzzling'. I prefer the more literal translation 'gullet'.

54. Marin, *Les Dons de Comus*, p.xx.

55. *Encyclopédie*, s.v. 'Encyclopédie'.

56. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (Amsterdam 1788; reprint Geneva 1979), xi.229.

57. *Catalogue des livres de feu M. Crosat, baron de Thiers, brigadier des armées du roi, lieutenant général pour Sa Majesté de la province de Champagne au département de Reims, et commandant en ladite province* (Paris, Saillant et Nyon, 1771). Listed were the *Dictionnaire domestique portatif*, *Les Dons de Comus*, *La Cuisinière bourgeoise* and the *Dictionnaire portatif de cuisine et d'office*.

58. *Journal de Trévoux, ou Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des sciences et des arts*, vol.xlix (1749).

59. This distinction persists today in the organisation of the Bibliothèque nationale de France: 'Gastronomie' is catalogued in the department of 'Sciences et techniques' along with chemistry, physics and medical sciences.

60. Magali Sarfatti Larson, 'The production of expertise and the constitution of expert power', in Thomas L. Haskell (ed.), *The Authority of experts: studies in history and theory* (Bloomington, IN 1984), p.28.

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to be important? I would argue that cooks formulated *la cuisine moderne* to exploit existing medical and popular belief that cooks in fact did wield immense power over the human body. Then – as now – food was linked closely to health. During the eighteenth century, however, diners worried about virtually every aspect of their eating experience. A meal's time of day, its quantity and quality of ingredients, and the diner's own present state of health all resonated with physiological import. Our own dining obsessions *du jour* – whole grains, trans-fats and carbohydrates, to name just a few – pale in comparison.

The fears about seasoning perfectly illustrate the power – real or imaginary – wielded by cooks. Louis Lémery, physician of the faculty of Paris and member of the Académie royale des sciences, maintained that seasonings held medical utility since they were 'quelquefois nécessaires pour aider à la digestion des aliments, et à leur distribution'.⁶¹ But their value in such applications was a double-edged sword, since according to Lémery cooks could easily use seasoning to stimulate the appetite at inappropriate times, with invariably deleterious effects. According to Lémery, such overuse 'excite chez nous de fermentation extraordinaires, qui donnent à nos humeurs une fort grande acreté, et qui les corrompent en peu de temps'. Responding to the supposed reforms of *la cuisine moderne*, the physician Jourdan Lecointe was considerably less circumspect in his criticism of seasoning, declaring that overly spiced dishes contained an 'âcreté corrosive, [qui] seche brûle et calcine nos fibres, notre estomac, nos entrailles, et répand dans le sang cette inflammation dévorante qui consume en peu de tems les tempéramens les plus vigoureux'.⁶² Despite these risks, seasoning was of course central to the activities of cooks. As the frontispiece to *La Suite des Dons de Comus* put it:

Qu'à Palès, à Diane, à Cerès, à Bacchus
Se joignent Glaucus et Pomone:
Tous leurs dons nous sont superflus,
Si Comus ne les assaisone.⁶³

This contradiction between the culinary and medical assessments of seasoning fuelled the notion that cooks represented a mortal threat to society. The *Dictionnaire critique, pittoresque, et sentencieux*, for example, quipped that a ragoût was a 'Mets qui par son assaisonnement, doit réveiller l'appétit et qui nuit autant à la santé, qu'il peut plaire au goût'.⁶⁴ Late in the century one amateur reformer of the kitchen went so far as to suggest

61. Louis Lémery, *Traité des aliments* (Paris, J. B. Cusson et P. Witte, 1702), 'Préface'.

62. Jourdan Lecointe, *La Cuisine de santé ou Moyens faciles et économiques de préparer toutes nos productions alimentaires de la manière la plus délicate et la plus sanitaire d'après les nouvelles découvertes de la cuisine françoise et italienne* (Paris, Briand, 1790), p.18.

63. Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*. The Greek gods in question represent cattle, game, grain, wine, fish, and fruit, respectively. The eponymous Comus was the god of revelry.

64. Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli, *Dictionnaire critique, pittoresque et sentencieux* (Lyon, Benoît Duplain, 1768), vol.ii, s.v. 'Ragout'.

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abandoning cooks' practice of seasoning altogether, instead substituting tasty pork for 'les assaisonnemens empoisonneurs que les cuisiniers ont la mauvaise habitude de mettre en abondance'.⁶⁵

If the case of seasoning indicates cooks' potential power, it also reveals something of the danger associated with cooks. Thus though cooks were regarded as capable of acting upon the body, it was not at all clear whether they could practise this influence responsibly. Although in principle Diderot viewed cooking as a chemistry, cooks themselves could scarcely act as chemists: his fellow encyclopédiste de Jaucourt savaged cooks as those who produced 'plûtôt des especes de poisons, que des alimens utiles et propres à la conservation de la santé'.⁶⁶

The distillation manual *La Chimie du goût et de l'odorat* (1755) proposed a 'un instrument harmonieux des saveurs', based on an order of tastes analogous to the notes on a musical scale.⁶⁷ Yet according to the manual, such an instrument's operator needed to play it with 'intelligence'. According to the physician Lecointe, only doctors could shoulder the responsibility of managing food consumption. In his 1790 *La Cuisine de santé*, he asserted that cooks were 'des gens qui n'ont souvent ni principes, ni vrais talens' and that they judged food only by its taste, not by its scientific properties.⁶⁸ Cooks inevitably defended themselves against these charges, but they were careful not to deny them outright. Cooks *had* poisoned diners, they acknowledged. Food *did* affect health, they agreed. But, as Menon artfully noted, should the entire occupation be blamed for the mistakes of a few, poorly trained cooks?⁶⁹ Another cookbook recognised the difficulty of seasoning, noting that when practised improperly, it could produce 'purs corrosifs', which would destroy the diner's health. According to *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, seasoning 'est d'ordinaire l'écuël des plus habiles gens, et la partie de notre travail qui demande le plus d'attention'.⁷⁰ By acknowledging the past failures of individual cooks, *la cuisine moderne* preserved the belief that cooks could influence the human body.

In a few rare examples, cooks were indeed depicted as chemists. A 1760 almanac illustrated a cook in her kitchen with the accompanying verse:

Tous les ans nouvelle cuisine,
Car tous les ans changent les goûts;
Et tous les jours nouveaux ragoûts:
Soyez donc chimiste, Justine.⁷¹

65. François Cointeraux, *La Cuisine renversée, ou le Nouveau Ménage par la famille du professeur d'architecture rurale, par la famille Cointeraux* (Lyon, Ballance et Barret, [1796]).

66. *Encyclopédie*, s.v. 'Cuisine'.

67. *Chimie du goût et de l'odorat* (Paris, P. G. Le Mercier, 1755), p.xxiv-xxv.

68. Lecointe, *La Cuisine de santé*, p.14.

69. Menon, *La Science du maître d'hôtel cuisinier*, p.x-xi.

70. Marin, *La Suite des Dons de Comus*, p.xxi-xxii.

71. *Almanach utile et agréable de la loterie de l'Ecole royale militaire, pour l'année 1760* (Paris, Prault père, 1760), planche 84.

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In one of his many riffs on cooking, Mercier also claimed that ‘Le cuisinier est un chimiste qui opere des métamorphoses; il change, il corrige la Nature.’⁷² Despite these odd cases, however, the overwhelming majority of commentators declined to endorse the notion that cooks could act as chemists. The persistence of derogatory expressions such as ‘latin de cuisine’ suggests considerable unease about cooks’ exercise of formal knowledge.

We can explain this distrust of cooks in part as stemming from contemporary understanding of the practice of science. According to Diderot, it was not just knowledge but also its dissemination that defined scientists. Unlike artists, who were ‘ignorés, obscurs, isolés’, scientists wrote about and debated their discoveries. In contrast, artists did ‘presque rien pour leur gloire’.⁷³ Cooks arrived at the same conclusion. Menon, for example, equated dissemination with glory, writing of other authors, ‘je veux les suivre, et louer mon art autant qu’ils ont loué le leur’.⁷⁴ The writing and reading of cookbooks promised moreover to clad cooking in the trappings of the liberal professions. Menon claimed that by the 1750s only bad cooks ‘affectent de mépriser des ouvrages propres à les instruire’. Such cooks ‘rougiraient d’être surpris lisant quelque Livre qui traite de leur Art’. Menon urged his fellow cooks to emulate the liberal professionals who needed to read to remain current in their fields, asking them, ‘Voit-on un Médecin, un Juriconsulte, un Architecte, rougir de lire des Ouvrages qui concernent sa Profession?’⁷⁵ Menon could hardly have been more audacious in his linking of domestic servant cooks to those perched at the occupational apex of the Third Estate.⁷⁶ For him, reading and authoring constituted the *sine qua non* of professional activity.

Yet if cooks believed that publishing cookbooks validated them as scientists, others did not agree. The physician Lecointe offered scathing criticism of their efforts to create a body of culinary knowledge:

Tout ce qu’on nous a publié jusqu’à ce jour, ne nous offre que beaucoup de compilations mal digérées, ou les débris épars de quelques mémoires obscurs ou infidèles, que les bons Cuisiniers ne communiquent qu’à regret, parce que la crainte de perdre leur réputation, ou de nuire à leur fortune, leur impose la loi de ne

72. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, xii.317-18.

73. *Encyclopédie*, s.v. ‘Encyclopédie’.

74. *Traité historique et pratique de la cuisine, ou le Cuisinier instruit, de la connoissance des animaux, tant volatiles, que terrestres, aquatiques et amphibies; de la façon, de préparer les divers alimens, et de les servir. Suivi d’un petit abrégé. Sur la maniere de faire les Confitures liquides et autres Desserts de toute espèce. Ouvrage très-utile, non-seulement pour les maîtres d’hôtel et officiers de cuisine; mais encore pour toutes les communautés religieuses, les grandes familles, et tous ceux qui veulent donner à manger honnêtement* (Paris, Cl. J. B. Bauche, 1758), p.i.

75. Menon, *Les Soupers de la cour*, p.v-vi.

76. The cook L. S. R. used the term ‘profession’ to describe the occupation as early as 1674, but without the same explicit attempt to advance the status of cooking. L. S. R., *L’Art de bien traiter, divisé en trois parties: ouvrage nouveau, curieux, et fort galant, utile à toutes personnes, et conditions* (Paris, Jean Du Puis, 1674), p.4. Jean-François Revel suggests that L. S. R. likely worked for court nobles (*Culture and cuisine*, p.154-55).

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déclarer que les choses connues de tout le monde, et de taire ou déguiser toutes les compositions essentielles sans lesquelles on ne peut réussir.⁷⁷

Lecointe believed that cooks under the proper circumstances could be controlled: he admitted to working ‘sous un bon Cuisinier qui dirigea [ses] premiers essais’.⁷⁸ But in Lecointe’s estimation, most cooks preferred to lie rather than to share their knowledge. Unlike scientists, who shared and validated knowledge, cooks instead disguised the truth to serve their own selfish aims. The majority of cooks were not ‘good’ like Lecointe’s, and these women and men quite simply could not be trusted. Just to make sure his readers got the point, Lecointe went on to lament the fate of the poor creatures of the street that unscrupulous cooks slipped into their creations. ‘Combien de chats, etc.’, he mused, ‘ont trouvé leur tombeau dans le sein d’un pâté?’⁷⁹

Cooks thus lacked the ‘moral and epistemic capacity’ identified by Steven Shapin as essential to the creation and validation of scientific knowledge.⁸⁰ I would further suggest that their claim of cooking’s perfectibility likewise backfired. By seeking to capitalise on cooking’s association with the practices of sociability – agreed by all to have reached unparalleled perfection in France – cooks portrayed themselves as arbiters of culture. Such promises of refinement and civility were far from unusual during the eighteenth century, but as lowly domestic servants, cooks were hardly equipped to deliver them.

One historian has recently remarked, ‘By now it is commonplace to say that the *Encyclopédie*, by so thoroughly describing and illustrating the mechanical arts, bestowed a new dignity on craft and technology in the eighteenth century.’⁸¹ Yet as I have suggested, this dignity never applied to cooking, despite cooks’ own efforts to describe and to illustrate their practices. Although cooks fashioned a theoretical knowledge and even wielded a certain amount of authority over the human body, their project failed because they could not guarantee to transmit their expertise authentically. Cooks ultimately lacked the authority to represent themselves, their knowledge, and their practices honestly and transparently.

77. Lecointe, *La Cuisine de santé*, p.22.

78. Lecointe, *La Cuisine de santé*, p.8. On the lack of epistemological capacity of servants in general, see Steven Shapin, *A Social history of truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England* (Chicago, IL 1994), p.91-93.

79. Lecointe, *La Cuisine de santé*, p.25.

80. Shapin, *A Social history of truth*, p.397. Shapin’s chapter 8, ‘Invisible technicians: masters, servants, and the making of experimental knowledge’, explores the broad limitations of servants as knowledge producers.

81. Cynthia J. Koeppe, ‘Making money: artisans and entrepreneurs in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*’, in Daniel Brewer and Julie Candler Hayes (ed.), *Using the Encyclopédie: ways of knowing, ways of reading*, SVEC 2002:05, p.119.