1. Aphorisms of the Child

1. The introduction of a new dish does more to promote children’s misery than the necessity of a bath.
2. The pleasures of the table are better enjoyed under the table, with only a comic book for company.
3. We can learn to feed ourselves, but if we never learn we shall always be fed.
4. He who eats a vegetable without first striking an advantageous deal with the parent is a fool.
5. Animals feed themselves; men eat; but only children can spatter food on the walls.
6. Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you whether you are a weirdo.
7. If eating from the dog dish is fit for man’s best friend, it is fit for man’s progeny.
8. A meal not served on one’s favorite plate is like a birthday cake without frosting.

III. The Aesthetics of Presentation

1. It must be well understood that foods must never intermingle or otherwise come into contact with other foods on the plate. Such contact results in cross-contamination severely detrimental to the enjoyment of any of the foods.
2. A piece of food is always inferior to the whole. It is not gluttony to demand the entire bagel, apple, sticky bun, or cookie a foot in diameter; generally one wishes to take only one bite and throw the rest on the sidewalk.
3. Small foods are desirable when they are miniature, and therefore cute, versions of other foods; consider tiny cupcakes or cocktail wieners. (A broken-off piece of bagel is not cute. The difference here should be clear.) Small, discrete foods, such as Goldfish, Teddi-Grahams, and the like, are also acceptable. Individual packages, bowls, or Tupperware containers will prevent unfortunate mixing.
4. Sprinkles, chocolate syrup, whipped cream, and the like are to be considered an essential component of the dish they adorn. Ideally these should be applied until the shape and color of the underlying food are thoroughly obscured.
5. It is advisable to exercise caution with representational foods, like ants-on-a-log or Mickey Mouse-shaped pancakes. These can be desirable, reinforcing as they do the sense of food as entertainment. But consider the case of broccoli set on end to resemble tiny trees; such a presentation may be no more than a stealthy way to introduce healthy foods into a meal, thus violating the integrity of the diet.
iv. The Methods of Consumption

1. Enjoyment of many foods is heightened if they are first remade according to the eater’s vision, in a triumph of culture over nature. Thus peas may be arranged into long lines much as a gardener’s labor orders a patch of wilderness into a personal Eden. Formless mashed potatoes and gravy can become a mountain crossed with rivulets, or a Power Ranger, much as Michaelangelo’s David materialized from a block of marble. An irregular ice cream cone can be licked smooth and pointy; the supple plasticity of American cheese can be folded and broken into innumerable triangles. Once these and other creations bear the civilizing stamp of the maker, they can be demolished with the greatest satisfaction.

2. Reorganization and relocation of the food may be required. It is pleasing to arrange M&Ms by color, and to remove all McDonald’s fries from their paper sleeve before any are eaten—particularly when traveling by automobile. Reorganization can also be an end in itself. For example, Cheerios may be placed at one-foot intervals over the entire surface of a rug. Experimenting with more random arrangements is also to be encouraged.

3. Food does not need to be eaten if the television program is particularly absorbing; it may instead be pushed around on the plate, reduced to smaller pieces, or transferred to other locations, as above. As long as the plate assumes a different aspect than when it was presented, a meal can be said to have taken place.

4. It is kind to allow the parents to offer vegetables in order to assuage their consciences, but it is not necessary to go so far as to eat them.

5. Any food particularly beloved by one’s parents as children, and thus invested with nostalgia, should be scorned and either left untouched or brutally chopped up.

6. The dog is always hungry and needs just a little extra something, which the adults are too hard-hearted to provide.

v. Different Ways of Preparing a Proper Sandwich

There is essentially only one way to prepare a sandwich. The bread must be white, and the crusts removed with care, or the sandwich will be less flavorsome. The result can be cut into squares or triangles, but if the adult fails to perform this act according to the preferences of the child, the whole process must begin anew. Fillings may include cheese (orange, pre-sliced, and yielding in texture), bologna (pink, pre-sliced, and yielding in texture), or peanut butter and jelly. The last, however, is fraught with dangers: one must consider the relative merits of creamy and crunchy, the proportions of ingredients, their relationship to the margins of the bread, and the variety of preserves.

It has been suggested that foreign substances, such as lettuce, tomatoes, or other vegetables, or pickles, mustard, or other condiments, may be introduced into sandwiches. These have been proven unsatisfactory.

A night’s rest under a couch will often improve a sandwich’s flavor by allowing it to season properly.

Here the child lets her pen drop, and goes to harangue her mother for a hot dog.

--Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin published *The Physiology of Taste* in 1825. Long considered a classic of food writing, it is available in translation by M. F. K. Fisher.