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Stylish, snobbish, aseptic and well-mannered: Culinary art on the French TV show *Dim Dam Dom*

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A dead fish is wedged in a porcelain sculpture of a Mamluk and a horse. The sound of plates being thrown to the ground, an elegant middle-aged woman wearing boxing gloves yells "Recipe for strawberry tart!", then adds in a calm voice "This one is specially dedicated to Marshal MacMahon." Animated cutlery on a black background demonstrate how to properly peel fruit. The profile of a young woman, whose hand covers the bottom of her face, shows how to "spit out a stone, the hand forming a cone." Trays filled with cream puffs and chocolate cakes are displayed in a large shop lined with columns, wood-panelled walls covered with spherical mirrors and a ceiling embellished with moulding, to which a narrator pronounces: "in a Louis XVI decor the cult of cake usually flourishes." Such curious yet sophisticated scenes are not uncommon in 1960s French television programmes, but they particularly characterise *Dim Dam Dom*'s approach to the culinary theme. *Dim Dam Dom* was a programme aimed at women that was launched in 1965 on France's 2nd television channel, *2ème chaîne de Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française (OTRF)*, and ran monthly until 1970. The programme's original and provocative approach, marked by snobbish content and formal style, was in sharp contrast to other culinary programmes that prevailed at the time. Although it shook up the audience with audacious performances, it did not aim at gratuitous provocation. Rather, the intention was to offer the audience a poetic, whimsical and sensual way of looking at their surroundings. Far from concentrating only on culinary topics, *Dim Dam Dom* was also interested in matters related to fashion, sport, and art to present the spirit of the times and new lifestyles. Each episode consisted in a sequence of short reports or segments and over the course of its productions, the programme covered a variety of topics: the French Riviera as the place to be, the boom of youth culture, the opposition of Parisian versus provincial way of life, the rise of robots in everyday life, a portrait of the bodybuilder and the yogi, to name a few. Although the breadth of topics was wide, the programme dealt with the theme of cooking regularly; 15 of the episodes include a culinary feature, with a sub-series of 9 parts dedicated to recipes. As it stems from both art and necessity, cooking seems particularly well suited to the editorial line of *Dim Dam Dom*, which involved taking grasp of the human body, its animal desires and needs, and covering them with a refined and distant look. The resulting productions attest to the ability to stylise life down to its most primary needs. Here, in the context of a wider reflection on the ways in which cooking has been shown on television,

it seems important to take into account this original and provocative approach. Further, analysing its biases will lead us to understand that it does not emanate from unbridled imagination, but from a critical state of mind in reaction to the choices of ordinary or more common representations.

Cooking shows were broadcast very early on French television – from 1953 – following the initiative of the *Radiodiffusion-télévision française (RTF)*¹ programme director Jean d'Arcy, who had been inspired by English and German examples (Roger, 2016, p. 18). Cooking shows held a constant place in French television programming. A standardized formula of the cooking shows was established early on and was long maintained, although the shows regularly changed names and slightly varied in their editorial emphases. The programmes were set in a domestic kitchen setting with easy to follow recipes, chosen because they were accessible and affordable. The shows presupposed an element of interactivity, expecting the viewer to be willing to reproduce the demonstration gestures made in front of them (or her, as it was the housewife who was targeted). Not only was the formula standardized, but there was also little change in those working behind the scenes. The director of the early French shows was Hubert Knapp (for *Les recettes du chef* [The Chef's Recipes] and *Art et magie de la cuisine* [Art and Magic of Cooking]) until 1961, followed by Gilbert Pineau (Roger, 2014, p. 69). From 1954 to 1967, the hosts were chef Raymond Oliver and hostess Catherine Langeais. This complementary duo embodied the show's family and cultural vocation. While Raymond Oliver, who came from a prestigious restaurant background, was mobilized as a reference in the culinary arts, Catherine Langeais, nicknamed by her biographer Jean-Marc Terrasse "the fiancée of the French" for the intimacy she established with her audience (2003), embodied the ordinary television viewer able to do the dishes without having any particular qualification or professional equipment. The succession of broadcasts on the culinary theme on French television set a standard of representation from which the concurrent editions of *Dim Dam Dom* resolutely and systematically stand out. The latter do not take place in the kitchen and do not feature a chef; rather, they show a woman of distinguished appearance, filmed in either anonymous studio settings or rich, old parlours, literally shouting her recipes at the viewer. In contrast to the warm conviviality and domestic settings that characterize classic cooking shows, *Dim Dam Dom* flaunts the exuberance of its hostess and the artificial nature of its scenography; placid good humour is replaced with sharp humour and disconcerting aggressiveness. It is interesting to note that Hubert Knapp, mentioned above, joined the *Dim Dam Dom* directors from the very beginning of the programme. That is, he not only set up

¹ RTF was the French national public broadcasting organization established in 1949. This was replaced in 1964, by the less-strictly government controlled ORTF, which itself lasted until the end of 1974.

the early standard code of French culinary shows, but subsequently contributed to subverting them with *Dim Dam Dom*.

However, the programme's intention was not to counter prevalent performances in a spirit of nihilism or gratuitous provocation. According to the show's creator, Daisy de Galard, *Dim Dam Dom* responded to the expectations of public service media, and strived to adapt to its most recent developments, albeit in its own way. In a television interview she gave on *Micros et caméras* [Microphones and Cameras] directed by Jacques Locquin on 2 April 1966, she challenged the term "revolutionary" that the interviewer used to describe *Dim Dam Dom*. She stated that, like an ordinary news magazine, she wanted to "make as many people as possible aware of the problems that surround and concern them." However, she added, she wanted to do this "with the highest quality of images" (*Micros et caméras*, 1966). In this affirmation, she distanced herself from the trend defended by Igor Barrère or Pierre Desgraupes, who both promoted field reporting and favoured live coverage in the aim of preventing television from becoming "the cinema of the poor" through excessive artifice (Barrère, Desgraupes and Lalou, 1976, p. 15). Daisy de Galard went beyond this, adding a conceptual approach to a concern for formality. "To look smart," she added, "a problem should not be dealt with in a crude way," but by "an association of ideas." This expression refers to the psychic automatism used by the Surrealist poets of the 1920s. However, the journalist was aware that her programme would reach a large and diverse audience. She was not satisfied to have her programme praised only by "a certain category of people who say: 'it's quality, it's well-researched, it's intelligent, it's sharp'" (*Micros et caméras*, 1966). She wanted to reach beyond this first circle. While she agreed that the result might "seem absurd to someone who hadn't watched it, who hadn't understood it," she wanted that reluctant viewer to just "try, turn the knob." Herein, she had a somewhat particular relation with the show's reception: it was up to the audience to adapt to her view, not the other way around. Just as André Malraux, *Secrétaire d'Etat à la culture* [French Secretary of State for Culture], who promoted a policy to broadcast productions that combined accessibility and elitism, Daisy de Galard was not willing to compromise on artistic and experimental ambition, or to weigh it down with explanations, even although her programme fed mass media. It must be acknowledged that at that time she benefited from a media environment that was particularly favourable to personal writing and essays. Television, just barely out of the pioneering age, was a medium that was not yet fully defined. Further, when not forced to relay official government speeches, television executives were open to formal innovation and originality of tone. Examples of this include the variety show *Les raisins verts* [Green Grapes], which presented a series of unusual and cruel sketches directed by Jean-Christophe Averty (1963-1964) or the animated television series *Les shadoks* [The Shadoks], an absurd tale with of bird-like creatures in somewhat

recurring situations directed by cartoonist Jacques Rouxel (1968-1973). Further, the 2nd channel launched in 1964 had a somewhat confidential character making it open to "possible experiments for programmers, different political colours" (Veyrat-Masson and Sauvage, 2012, p. 83), like *Dim Dam Dom*. Finally, funding through advertising had not yet begun, thus programmes were not yet required to attract the largest possible audiences, as they would be in subsequent years (Veyrat-Masson and Sauvage, 2012, p. 91). In this context, Daisy de Galard was free to pursue her editorial objective and to call on talented television directors such as: Hubert Knapp who evolved under the influence of the American school of the "subjective" documentary, Michel Polac who combined extensive literary knowledge with a subversive outlook, and Jean-Christophe Averty technical innovator inspired by Dadaism and pataphysics.² Her recruitment policy was daring as it blurred the then increasingly marked boundaries between cinema and television. She herein managed to enlist such leading directors as Roger Vadim, who contributed to the myth of Brigitte Bardot by directing *Et Dieu créa la femme* (1956) [...And God Created Woman], Agnès Varda, who had already made a name for herself with the feminist drama *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) [Cléo from 5 to 7], and Guy Gilles, who embodied contemporary youth with poetry and melancholy in *Au pan coupé* (1967).

The editorial line that Daisy de Galard had defined for *Dim Dam Dom* was the same as that of the prestigious magazine *Elle*, for which she had previously worked. *Elle* and *Dim Dam Dom* both targeted modern, urban women interested in the trends of their time, but felt free to follow them or not, and curious about the norms of social distinction in order to adopt proper behaviour in all circumstances. It is not surprising then that the culinary segments included table manners. It was the image of oneself preparing or consuming food that was important, not the basic pleasure of preparing or consuming. In his book on the history of French cooking shows, Olivier Roger has drawn attention to the issue of self-image: "The action of a cook always constitutes a representation of the self in the sense that the decor, props or posture he adopts, in addition to the food he chooses to cook, define a situation that assigns him a determined role" (2016, p. 13). In most cooking shows, the television performer enhanced his image by competently and charismatically conforming to the audience's expectations (or to what the expectations were projected to be). It was a question of executing a recipe adapted to the domestic setting with professional brilliance. In *Dim Dam Dom*, the culinary act also involved self-image, but it places it in a broader field. The show was based on the constant representation of whimsical and sophisticated lifestyles, even behind the scenes of

² Pataphysics is a term and philosophical concept coined by French writer Alfred Jarry, which uses absurd irony and imaginary phenomena to portray symbolic truths.

everyday life.³ It therefore takes the productions away from the kitchen and does not limit them to the preparation of the meal. Since the woman of taste must be guided through the current of worldly life, and since "culturally, eating is eating together" (Masson, 2004, p. 115), it additionally takes on the task of advising on ways to order the service and to behave during the meal.

With a study of these culinary themed sequences, we propose to ask how the treatment of cooking and eating in *Dim Dam Dom* contributed to the promotion of an elitist vision of society through popular media. In the first section, I will show how the choices of staging were operational in transmitting an aesthetic and dilettante vision of the subject: by stylizing gestures and spaces the labour involved in culinary activity was ignored—and the triviality of the result was highlighted. The second section will examine the foundation of the messages of *savoir vivre* and *savoir être* conveyed through content that aimed to re-codify the "imaginary table" (Boutaud, 2004), and through a transgressive staging of food preparation. Lastly, the third section will show how the programme took on an ironic view of popular practices of cooking and culinary consumption. Through implicit judgments, *Dim Dam Dom* invested the culinary theme in a new way and herein promoted a culture of distinction.

Sophisticated and challenging food preparation aesthetics

In the 1950s and 1960s, the culinary programmes broadcast on television in France focused on the character of the chef, dressed in white and wearing an iconic chef's hat. The set depicted a typical family kitchen and the chef adopted a "didactic attitude", adapting his actions "so that they were clearly visible to the public" (Roger, 2016, p.86). The recipes were recorded in school note-books and the prepared dishes were displayed on checker tablecloths. This staging follows rustic codes and a concern for domestic proximity. In contrast, *Dim Dam Dom*'s culinary sequences take the opposite approach: no specialist, no kitchen decor, and no didactic effort. Above all, the resulting films display an unusual and provocative style that challenged the convention. But far from being gratuitous, this position aimed to raise awareness of contemporary trends in the relationship with food and its preparation.

Absurd staging of the recipe

³ On the notion of stage and backstage in everyday social spaces, see Goffmann, 1959.

It is impossible not to see the series of recipes presented by Marie-Pierre de Toulouse-Lautrec (known by her nickname Mapie) as a feat of staging. Seven of them, conceptualized and directed between 1965 and 1968 by Jean-Christophe Averty, entirely centred on Mapie's hair-raising and zany character, methodically deconstructed the typical narration of a recipe. In these short films we see a woman of distinguished appearance, in her sixties, carefully made up, wearing pearls around her neck and always wearing a strikingly elegant hat, filmed close-up, her piercing gaze penetrating the camera lens, sometimes screaming, sometimes whispering, sometimes grumbling her words, without ever yielding a smile. The set is most often either a neutral black or white background, which notably serves her staidly composed gestures, or richly decorated parlours. In any case, we never see her in a kitchen or working at a kitchen counter. The *mise en scène* might have risen from Mapie herself, and her noteworthy social identity. Sister of the writer Louise de Vilmorin, Marie-Pierre de Vilmorin married a cousin of the painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and into a family of French nobility. Even if the television spectator might not know this, her social standing is evident in her attitude and her majestic air, as if the casting of Mapie authenticated the distinction that the programme aimed for.



Illustration 1. *Dim Dam Dom* – ‘Recette de la tarte aux fraises’ – Dir. Jean-Christophe Averty – 1967 – 34:45

If in *'Le soufflé aux violettes'* (1965) [Violet soufflé] she was shown crushing violet sweets, it was with a pestle in hand and a mortar on a small table (shown close-up) and, further, in front of an old master painting (shown in the overview shot, hands and utensils no longer in the shot). Her actions were not limited to preparing the dish: sometimes she rings a bell, sometimes she blows into a kazoo, sometimes she wields a megaphone, sometimes she throws boxing punches. At times, her actions had absolutely nothing to do with preparing the recipe or even the imagery it could evoke; costumes or traditions of its country of origin, for example. Another means of interfering with the recipe involved Mapie repeating sentences at regular intervals, such as "*Soufflé n'est pas joué*" [*"Soufflé is not playing"*] (a play on words in French: *soufflé* is a dish, also means to bluff), or "This noise annoys me" (*'Le duel de fromage blanc'*, 1967) like slogans without a commercial, verses without a poem. These absurd intrusions could be seen as a touch of humour to animate the cooking lesson. But the montage itself gives them a greater importance, and they compete with the main subject. Here, the hierarchy usually established in the narrative between the main purpose (showing how to prepare a dish) and secondary elements (usually used as recreational pauses) are reversed. The fanciful shots and artefacts (the bell, the kazoo) that break the rhythm of the culinary narrative are so frequent that the shots actually dedicated to this narrative (instructions, gestures of preparation) seem reduced to the status of cut shots, and finally, lose their meaning. Similarly, when it comes to giving the recipe for *'Recette de la tarte aux fraises'* (1967) [Recipe for strawberry tart], Mapie repeats screaming, some of the terms of her explanation: "A crust!", or "You poke it with 550,000 stabs of a fork! ", or even "Crème patissière!" These isolated and striking phrases make us lose the thread, and deprived of their meaning, they fall into the absurd. Similarly, with Mapie's impeccably manicured hands filmed very close-up and in real time on a black background, the ordinary and necessary gesture of breaking eggs to prepare a soufflé is adorned with fleeting eroticism: everything is apparently used to shift from the film's initial register and to draw attention to suggestions unrelated to its subject. The excessive use of montage cuts wreaks havoc in the lesson, causing clashes that destabilize the gaze and undermine the content of the shots.

A programme that announces a new culinary culture

The curious staging of the food preparation scenes, described above, can be attributed largely to Jean Christophe Averty's art of directing. Elsewhere, and particularly in other *Dim Dam Dom* episodes on which he collaborated, he used the same neutral background to fully focus attention on the subject of the shot and to incite the eye to make "a synthesis of the image" (Jousse, 2007, p. 92). Similarly, Mapie's recipe scenes included her original "electronic layout" process, which focused on

careful image compositions and reduced, or even deny, depth of field. Finally, Mapie's provocations were undoubtedly encouraged by Averty himself. As a literary director, Averty regularly sought to infuse television content with a theatrical subversion inspired by the avant-garde Dada movement performances of the beginning of the twentieth century (Duguet, 2019, p. 100).⁴ Nevertheless, Averty's style perfectly coincided with the programme's vocation as a seismograph of modern life. The stripped-down frame corresponds to the tendency for households to seek "lightness, transparency" in the arrangements of domestic space, including and especially the kitchen. Jean-Paul Aron pointed this out, deploring "the general asepsis of the food space" that increasingly prevailed in homes in France, "which is a testimony of this [cultural] glaciation" (Aron, 1987, cited in Corbeau, 2004, p. 239). Further, we can see in the abrupt montages, as well as in the predilection for successions of short shots, a portrayal of the overall reduction in the time spent preparing food to about thirty minutes per meal in the late 1960s (Drouard, 2005, p. 145). Further, Mapie was not only trying to satisfy her own fantasy when she prepared Tahitian fish (*'Poisson à la tahitienne'*, 1965), recommended adding walnuts to noodles (*'Recette de nouilles aux noix'*, 1967) or adding corn to salad to make it "sweet as the Americans say" (*'La bonne salade de Mapie'*, 1965). These reflected the growing interest in the diversity of culinary trends and cultures and in risking exoticism and unexpected food combinations shown by contemporary consumers (Corbeau, 2004, p. 237). Mapie's choice of dishes, although quite simple to make, invite the spectator to discover unknown flavours. As Alain Drouard noted, "The French were learning more and more about cooking and doing less and less of it" (2005, p. 145). Emancipated from the actual need to carry it out, Mapie's cooking lessons aimed to develop gustatory curiosity rather than to assist in meal preparation. Since *Dim Dam Dom* was scheduled at 9:00 p.m., Mapie's recipes were not based on meal preparation time, like other cooking shows that were broadcast between 6:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. The usual duration of a cooking show was 20 to 25 minutes, which is close to the time required for preparation, while a Mapie segment never lasts more than 5 minutes. The transmission of recipes served to convey knowledge and not culinary practice.

Meals as an expression of *savoir vivre*

⁴ From 1916 to 1923, the Dada movement federated artists throughout Europe who wanted to put Western culture on trial through scandalous public performances. Averty's television productions echo the Dadaist art of shocking spectators with a clinical exposure of situations and plastic compositions that diverge from good taste and morality.

In *Dim Dam Dom*, meal preparation is featured, as well as mealtime; cooking and eating. The collective moments when food was consumed were seen less as recreation and part of egalitarian sociability, and more as competition, in which the eating space was an arena where it was necessary to deploy one's mastery of the codes of *savoir vivre* to preserve one's place. However, unlike other programmes that deal with *savoir vivre* and "ways of the world", *Dim Dam Dom* did not claim any moral motivation. Knowing good table manners ensured that you were not caught lacking in elegance and education when eating with others.

Updating table manners

On several occasions, the programme treats table behaviour as an issue of socialization. One of the subjects of the programme broadcast on 28 July 1965, suggestively titled '*Savoir vivre*', taught the proper way to peel fruit. This was not practical advice on how to remove the peel before eating fruit, but recommendations on how to perform this operation according to the conventions of social conduct. The production using real shots and stop motion animation techniques, signed anonymously by the *Service animation de l'ORTF* [ORTF animation service], is similar to those of Jean-Christophe Averty: a plain background (here it is black) on which cutlery stands out and moves, without anyone holding it, around a plate where different fruits are exhibited.



Illustrationl 2. *Dim Dam Dom* – '*Savoir vivre*' – Dir. Service animation de l'ORTF / comment: Ghislaine Davezac – 1965 – 33:01

As with the segments directed by Averty, the processes specific to avant-garde artists were mobilized, such as artist-photographer Man Ray's rayographs (created by placing objects directly on a sheet of photosensitized paper and exposing it to light). But unlike the *Mapie* series that eludes practical gestures, the '*Savoir vivre*' segment scrupulously reproduces the gestures involved in peeling fruit, without rushing or interrupting them in the final editing. When demonstrating how to peel an orange, a knife sliced both ends of the fruit held in place with a fork. For the banana, a knife cut each end, split the skin and a fork removed it. With grapefruit, a spoon was used to eat the flesh. Against a background of sirtaki music (a modern adaptation of traditional Greek music) that suggests the atmosphere of a chic restaurant, a woman's voice concluded with an indifferent tone: "It is a rule of living. At the table, nothing should be touched with your fingers. A rule that can become a stylistic exercise when it comes to peeling a fruit." There is no specification that the rule in question had also been stated in 1889 by Baronne Staffe in her treatise *Usages of the World*: "All fruits are peeled and eaten with the knife and dessert fork: the apple, peach or pear quarter, etc. is pricked with the fork held in the left hand, the knife in the right hand" ([1889] 2008, p. 162). The commentary in the film uses the same term "*piqué*" [prick] to describe what the fork does, which leads us to deduce that the author may have been familiar with Baronne's publication, or others like it.

Four months earlier, '*Des mains très bien élevées*' (1965) [Well-mannered hands], featuring the same journalist as '*Savoir vivre*', Ghislaine Davezac and also using stop motion animation, detailed a series of social situations involving hands to explain the right position to adopt in certain circumstances. A Letkis tune played in the soundtrack, this Lappish dance music popularized in France in the sixties by Eddie Barclay evokes the atmosphere of worldly parties of the time. Among the various codes to be respected, one concerns table manners. We see, in a high-angle shot, a woman standing in front of a table set for a reception.



Illustration 3. *Dim Dam Dom* – ‘Des mains très bien élevées’ – Dir. Service animation de l’ORTF – 1965 – 40:43

One of her hands grabs a spoon to draw the soup from the soup plate in front of her, her other hand remaining flat on her thigh. To denounce this "bad habit", a male voice, bursting into the soundtrack, shouts out: "Oh no!" in a categorical tone. Immediately, a gloved hand appears from the top frame edge and raises the free hand onto the table. "Mandatory, both hands on the table!", sanctions the commentators voice, a female voice this time.

An identifying code

In its own way, *Dim Dam Dom* refers to the long "civilizing process" described by Norbert Elias (1969). An evolution in the methodical transformation of table manners: "Nothing in table manners", writes Elias, "'goes without saying', nothing can be considered as the result of a natural 'feeling of embarrassment'. (...) Each gesture, the way to hold and handle the knife, spoon or fork is subject to standards developed step by step" (1969, p. 231). Elias goes on to explain that this normalization is the result of a social mechanism that consisted in the diffusion of "models from the upper class" throughout society (1969, p. 232). He situated the moment when these modes were established and

diffused at the end of the eighteenth century. For Daniel Roche, with regard to clothing culture, it was at the same time that the women's press took up fashion to overturn the "social logics" and promote "the female perception of the world" (1989, pp. 468-469). However, in the episodes '*Poisson à la tahitienne*' [Tahitian fish] broadcast in 1965 and '*Le punch de Mapie*' [Mapie's punch] broadcast in 1968, Mapie was filmed in a richly furnished and decorated eighteenth century parlor, as a tribute to this feminist and civilizing moment in history.



Illustration 4. *Dim Dam Dom* – '*Poisson à la tahitienne*' – Dir. Jean-Christophe Averty – 1965 – 36:13

Dim Dam Dom emphasizes the manner that it is done; it reflected a state of mind that became second nature. "A rule can become an exercise of style" affirms the commentary in "*Savoir vivre*". It is precisely the "rule" that becomes the "exercise of style" which motivated the programme: such knowledge required not just discourse, but gestural mastery to express it. In this, *Dim Dam Dom* pursued a strategy of distinction that elevated its statements above the conformism to which it could have surrendered. When the theme of good manners was addressed, television programmes contemporary to those of *Dim Dam Dom* stressed their moral foundation. An episode of *La page de la femme* broadcast in November 1964, including a lesson in table manners given to a little boy,

concluded with this comment: "table etiquette, an essential lesson for your children." A news feature, '*Ecole de charme*' [Finishing school], broadcast in 1965, reported on the *savoir vivre* lessons that Marquis Di Favero gave to young men, in which it is explained that etiquette training could serve their professional ambitions. Another example is '*Les hôtesse de courtoisie*' [Courtesy ambassadors] broadcast in 1966.⁵ When questioned in a park where she was demonstrating her mastery of courteous relations, Chantal d'Astarac, the captain of an association whose mission was to spread politeness in the public space, justified her aim with these words: "Courtesy is a way to make life in society pleasant, to establish cordial relationships between people." In *Dim Dam Dom*, the importance of good manners was neither for education, nor for professional success, nor for civil peace, but the necessity to achieve or to maintain the rank to which we belong. Table manners were less a code of good conduct than an identifying code. The laws were given without the "essence" being explained: for the informed viewer to whom the programme was addressed, it went without saying that it was less a question of morality than of style, a notion that relates to the elevation of art of which Oscar Wilde, figure of the aesthete par excellence, defended the useless.⁶

Dim Dam Dom ignored the moral charge of good manners associated with food, and the show was even emancipated from it. The "decent" does not necessarily suit the codes set out. In '*Poisson à la tahitienne*' (1965) [Tahitian fish], an astonishing shot shows Mapie's two hands kneading a bowl of fish flesh and lemon, filmed very close-up. The shot was a long one, as if to insist at leisure on the spectacle of her impeccably manicured hands (able to show "refinement to the very end of the nails" like the hands shown in the programme '*Savoir vivre*') as they crumble and blend the animal flesh. The subsequent sequence was Mapie's hand pushing – alternatively the fish preparation and a baby toy – into the funnel of a grinder.

⁵ This association, *La Courtoisie Française*, continues to exist today: <http://courtoisie-francaise.com/>.

⁶ "All art is quite useless" (Wilde, 1890, Preface).



Illustration 5. *Dim Dam Dom* – ‘Poisson à la tahitienne’ – Dir. Jean-Christophe Averty – 1965 – 35:31

Illustration 6. *Dim Dam Dom* – ‘Des mains très bien élevées’ – Dir. Service animation de l’ORTF – 1965 – 41:20

In this passage, a casual and transgressive relationship to food is displayed: it is taken up with full hands, then disembodied. Like any provocation, it is done with full knowledge of the facts, in the same way that a libertine must be a fine connoisseur of the morality he or she is violating.

"Them and us": The sanction of "*franc-manger*" and consumerist conformity⁷

As we have stated, an ideal social type is portrayed in the mise-en-scène of *Dim Dam Dom* of which it's audience was assumed to be. This included men and women, especially women, of all ages but always of modern allure with cultivated casual elegance. These cultured citizens, who were aware of the challenges of behaviour in the social sphere, were no less receptive to new ways of living together. This is not shown to be a seductive lifestyle choice, but rather a model to be defended when opposed with an everyday life where conformism and lack of taste prevail. As such, it kicked out of the club "those who are not", allowing the spectators to situate themselves. Here too, this discourse is developed on the subject of cooking and eating, no longer in the mode of the lesson (this is what you must do), but that of observation (look at how they are).

Sunday picnics and cakes: Conforming habits and fads

With '*Un dimanche chez le pâtissier*' [Sunday at the pastry shop], broadcast in 1965, *Dim Dam Dom* aimed to depict "the France of strawberry tarts", i.e. the provincial middle class that was accustomed to eating pastries every Sunday. In this segment, the commentary written by Jean Dutourd, a writer who built his reputation on his ability to take an informed and uncompromising look at contemporary bourgeois customs, uses a strong tone, enhanced by pleasant turns of phrase. The narrator depicted the ritual of going to the pastry shop "after mass before midday dinner with the family", a ritual that suited the bourgeoisie's taste for stability, and the pleasure taken in this stability: "years go by without changing its window displays, its ecstatic customers, its undecided customers." In the shots filmed by Nestor Almendros, the chain handbags, pleated skirts and Claudine collars, elements of good families' dress mix alternatively with the carefully displayed pastries. Young girls are filmed, with an indifferent look, trying to handle the cakes without clumsiness. The commentary mocked: "Look at the future besiegers of buffets, the ravenous of cocktails, the devourers of receptions. This is the most primitive form of social food gluttony, it is recommended to act early." But to see these young women clumsily seeking contentment, the time

⁷ Bourdieu, 1979, p. 230.

for worldliness seems far away. In this respect, the film resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's observations: "the petty-bourgeois experience of the social world is first of all timidity, embarrassment of the one who feels uncomfortable in his body and in his language, who, instead of being one with them, observes them in a way from outside, with the eyes of others, monitoring and correcting himself" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 229). Here, the camera was the "eyes of others", and the look on the young girls' faces betrays their self-conscious worry of being viewed with severity.

Another satirical film, another target category: directed in 1966 by Jacques Brissot, "*Les pique-niqueurs*" [The picnickers] deals with the popular enthusiasm for roadside picnics. The episode alternates views of traffic with those of a couple lying on the grass taking a nap and a family gathered around a picnic table. The commentary is composed of satisfied testimonies given by picnickers: "It's a small snack that hits the spot", "We're outdoors, we're alone." Their voices, marked by their peasant origins, roll the "r's" and are sometimes difficult to understand. Further on, the film inserted into this are images of an overturned car lying on the side of the road: the sequences of a festive meal and of a fatal accident fight for the same space. The final shot focused on the proliferation of rubbish in the grass while an operetta aria is heard: "We are happy! We're happy! We're happy!" The irony of the subject was less about the food itself than about the conditions under which it was eaten. Here too, the staging resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's observations: "The popular and bourgeois way of treating food, serving it, presenting it, offering it, which is infinitely more revealing than the very nature of the products concerned, should be subjected to a systematic comparison" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 217).

Other people's recipes: Insufficient cooking

The central observation of Bourdieu's book *La distinction* (1979) is directly relevant to the *Dim Dam Dom* 'Eux aussi ont leurs recettes' (1965) [They have their recipes too] segments. The title of this sub-series of three films, broadcast in 1965 in three successive episodes of *Dim Dam Dom*, certainly referred to *La recette du spectateur*, [The spectator's recipe] a culinary programme launched four years earlier by RTF. In principle, *La recette du spectateur* reacted to previous cooking programmes, which had provided gastronomy cooking lessons applied to home economics and involving the intervention of a great chef. Driven by a concern for "closeness to the public" in Olivier Roger's words, this new programme was based on "a new form of transmission of culinary knowledge as an exchange between peers and not based on the chef's position of superiority over the public" (2016, p. 43). It was the same in *Dim Dam Dom* with the series 'Eux aussi ont leurs recettes' which featured a fishmonger, a candy man, and an optician delivering, in turn, their favourite recipe. Here, contrary

to *La recette du spectateur*, the recipe was given as a verbal explanation from their workplace (the shop or the kiosk), without any demonstration. *Dim Dam Dom*'s logic is maintained, that is, of not providing the means to follow the recipe but describing it in broad strokes as in a conversation. In addition, the host of '*Eux aussi ont leurs recettes*' was none other than Mapie de Toulouse-Lautrec, more hair-raising than ever. Admittedly not aligning with the programme's usual ploy, Mapie adopted a posture like that of the great chef Raymond Oliver when he hosted *La recette du spectateur*: just as Oliver, called upon to "interpret" the spectator's recipe, to appropriate it, giving a "the demonstration of his know-how" (Roger, 2016, p. 44), Mapie did not hesitate to challenge her interviewee and criticize his choice of ingredients and his food preparation methods.

However, there was also an additional dimension: an implicit commentary, suggested in Mapie's actions, on the diversity of cuisine according to the milieu in which it is prepared. For the "duck à l'orange" it is a question of adding zest or not ('*Eux aussi ont leurs recettes - un poissonnier*', 1965), and the "sautéed kidneys" of favouring champagne over white wine for basting ('*Eux aussi ont leurs recettes - un opticien*', 1965). The difference in milieu is visible in the image itself with Mapie's inimitable appearance, as she does not remove her elegant coat or bell hat, in stark contrast to that of her interviewee in his work clothes. Moreover, the very content of Mapie's remarks are intended to impose preferences that are specific to her milieu. Adding zest enhanced subtle bitter notes. Her recommendation to use champagne for cooking prompted the optician to state: "It's much more chic with champagne...". His remark, and the amused smile that accompanied it, suggest that this "ingredient" was not necessarily available in all homes. Even if she did not take notice of this insinuation, Mapie agreed, however, that "it ends up having more or less the same taste": therefore, what was at stake was the cuisine's image, which designates a distinguished way of life.

Conclusion

Dim Dam Dom continues to hold up well as a bold and demanding programme that identified and exalted the most stimulating cultural trends of the times in which it was broadcast.⁸ This was largely a result of the editorial line that was maintained from one episode to the next by its creator, Daisy de

⁸ This may be witnessed in the retrospective honouring of the show in television shows that focused on archival clips, for example *C'était Dim Dam Dom* (1988), *Une visite dans les archives de la télé* (2004 and 2005), and *Télescope* (2009).

Galard. She highlighted that quality was a priority, even if it meant shaking up the viewer's habits or expectations:

"A problem must not be handled in a crude manner, it must be thought out and developed. We will obtain an image that may seem absurd to someone who has not understood it, but they are drawn in by this attention to quality" (*Micros et caméras*, 1966).

However, this approach was not based solely on the interest in applying art and sociology to television. It expressed a vision of the world. *Dim Dam Dom* played with public space as if it was a theatre of distinction. In this way, viewers were inconspicuously invited to situate themselves, whether they identified with the character who acted in this theatre with refined extravagant behaviour, or with the crowd that made up its disconcerted and entranced audience. The spectator was either someone who was "drawn in" or someone who "did not understand". It is remarkable that *Dim Dam Dom* invested specifically in culinary culture to promulgate this endeavour. The programme identified cuisine, food that was made and consumed, as the place where the evolution of customs is determined and where belonging is affirmed. Television, as a medium that had become popular, had amplified public space to some extent and its programmes conveying common representations to the greatest number of people. Did *Dim Dam Dom*'s productions not aim to introduce gestures that allowed its targeted audience to project themselves and appropriate them according to their own priorities of taste and use? In this, *Dim Dam Dom* foreshadowed the programme *Sexy Folies*, also created by a woman producer Pascale Breugnot, broadcast on the same 2nd channel from 1986 to 1987. Once again episodes were framed as happenings or *micro-trottoirs* produced in the metro or on the street, once again a concern with evoking innovative lifestyles in real time, capable of subverting norms. It seems that *Sexy Folies* takes up where *Dim Dam Dom* left off twenty years earlier: in the city of the 1980s, and through the prism of eroticism, the show aimed to promote a new chic and feminine order within the public space, at the risk of creating a divide with those who were "drawn in", i.e., those who "did not understand", the emancipated public and the rest of the audience.

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Abbreviations

RTF: Radiodiffusion-télévision française [French Radio and Television Broadcasting]

ORTF: Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française television [Office of French Radio and Television Broadcasting]

INA: Institut National de l'Audiovisuel [National Audiovisual Institute]