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The Auteur as Fool: Bakhtin, Barthes, and the Screen Performances of Woody Allen and Jean-Luc Godard

CECILIA SAYAD

ANY ASSOCIATION BETWEEN AUTEURS AND FOOLS in the cinema immediately brings to mind the clown-like figures played by Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Jerry Lewis, and Woody Allen, all of whom incarnate similar characters across a vast array of films and in addition direct all or many of the pictures in which they perform. Common to these “fools” is their recurring features and a certain foreignness that posits them as outsiders. In the words of Bakhtin, who theorized about the fool in literature, this figure is endowed with the “right to be ‘other,’” “the right not to understand, the right to confuse” (159, 163), thus becoming the mask that the author wears in order to freely question the world, to denaturalize it. This, after all, is the nature of all comedy.

But the fool’s inherent marginality goes beyond this figure’s subversive attitude, as I argue in this article. The fool’s “misplacement” or inappropriateness can be traced back to its origins in the performing arts—to the intermittent quality of the fool’s presence in some traditions in popular theater (its role limited to providing comic relief or commentary on the main action) or as the bridge between different numbers in the circus or in variety shows.¹ As thus, the fool often has been perceived as a temporary visitor, as an outsider to the dieg-

esis, existing between the “show” and the audience. Bakhtin’s study of the fool in the novel goes even further, claiming that this figure’s theatrical genesis (it originates in the public square) positions it as an intruder to the literary genre, thereby bridging also different media (as discussed later). Similarly, I argue that when read through the figure of the fool, the types of authorial self-inscription I analyze in cinematic works constitute the directors as external to the diegesis, crossing, in addition, the boundaries of genre and even the frame. I contrast the ways in which the fools played by Woody Allen and Jean-Luc Godard turn the author’s image into the textual manifestation of the problematic connection between their real existence and their screen personas. My goal is to explore how these directors achieve this effect with performances informed by both the fool and, in the works of the American filmmaker, the stand-up comedian. These two figures are somewhat external to the worlds they inhabit and comment on, refusing to fully merge with it. I look into the impact of this refusal on the film-author mixture, questioning whether it produces the chemical precipitation or dissolution of the author component.

The fool’s subversive nature carries a self-reflexive element that, though pertaining to all clown-like characters played by famous directors, varies in degree, obtaining different perceptions of narrative closure and the connections between the filmic and the extra-filmic. But it is particularly in the works by Allen that the fool’s foreignness has repercussion in the question of film authorship that I want to dis-

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cuss. The director promotes a self-reflexive meditation that dialogues with the challenges to the auteur brought about with the structuralist turn in film studies. In fact, I argue that the effects produced by Allen's screen performances make him comparable not so much with the usual suspects of slapstick and screwball comedy, but with none other than Godard, whose career parallels the theoretical underpinnings of film studies, from auteurism to its total dismissal, culminating with the film collectives of the late 1960s, and also the influence of semiotics, Marxism, feminism, and psychoanalysis. Here, however, the terms of comparison with Allen lie with Godard's appearances in some films of the 1980s—notably as the buffoonish characters of Uncle Jean/Monsieur Godard in *First Name: Carmen* (1983), the Prince/the Idiot in *Soigne ta droite* (1987), and Professor Pluggy/Monsieur Godard in *King Lear* (1987). I argue that these fools embody the director's understanding of his identity as an author.²

Whereas Godard's screen presence changes in quality and degree (from cameos to voice-over narration and from appearances as commentator or interviewer to the stylized performances of the 1980s), Allen always incarnates a fictional character. Still, even if the American director is more straightforwardly an actor than Godard, he nonetheless typecasts himself—his image brings to mind his inability to change, even if he plays characters bearing different names and existing in variable backdrops. What then exactly motivates this parallel between filmmakers who, though belonging to the same generation,³ do not operate in the same mode? First, though Godard's experiments with the medium are far more radical than Allen's self-reflexive narratives, both their forms of self-display produce a tension between a fixed identity and the playful crossing of the boundaries separating the diegetic from the non-diegetic, the fictional from the real, and the film from the extra-filmic. Second, the alien, foreign quality of the characters played by Allen and Godard has both a graphic and a narrative dimension—the former defined by the effects of

their emblematic figures and the latter by their position in relation to the diegesis. The two directors share a similar silhouette, defined by a balding and rather disheveled head. Interestingly, they also wear recognizable eyeglasses, which they carry on across diverse roles. Godard's 1986 video interview with Woody Allen, turned into the medium-length *Meetin' WA*, explores this similarity of contours—during the prologue to the interview, a dissolve fuses the outline of Godard's body into a portrait of Allen, in a graphic match that creates a mirroring effect, echoing Godard's desire, revealed in voice-over, to meet his long-missed "friend."⁴ These silhouettes, which reappear in many of their respective films, have the branding quality of a logo mark, not unlike that of Hitchcock's cameos, something that adds a non-diegetic dimension to the directors' outlines and in addition opens the films to the outside world.

In Allen's narratives the director's emblematic image merges his public persona with his screen roles. The inadequacy of his eyeglasses in scenarios such as the year 2173 in *Sleeper* (1973), nineteenth-century Russia in *Love and Death* (1975), or medieval England in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex . . . But Were Afraid to Ask* (1972) prevents the actor's complete fusion with his characters. Rather than be engulfed by his narratives, Allen's image refuses to be completely absorbed in the filmic text; it chemically precipitates, evoking both the real man and his other pictures. The same holds true for Godard: his eyeglasses, disheveled hair, and cigarette (later replaced by a cigar) attach an emblematic dimension to his screen persona—one that extends to the fools he interprets in his 1980s films.

On the narrative level, the persistence of Allen's visual style attests to his incapacity to be other than the one character he incessantly incarnates: the nervous middle-class Jewish man from Brooklyn with a strong artistic vein and a domineering mother; hopelessly urban; a film and jazz lover; skeptical about religion and psychoanalysis; and fearful of diseases, death, nature, and California. All such traits have their



Photos 1 and 2: Godard's silhouette dissolves into Woody Allen's portrait in *Meetin' WA* (1986).



Photos 3 and 4: Allen's eyeglasses prevent him from completely disappearing into the characters he plays in *Sleeper* (1973) and *Love and Death* (1975).



Photo 5: Godard's silhouette in *Carmen* (1983) acquires an emblematic quality.

share of biographical truth, however variable. For our purposes, they associate Allen with the parts he has played throughout his career. Although obviously not identical to the real man, Allen's characters function as reminders of his biographical self and, consequently, of Allen as the author of films in which he appears.

Likewise, Godard's fools either refer to the director's autobiography or become vehicles for meditations on the medium and on the commerce of cinema. But most importantly, as with his American counterpart, Godard's fools constitute "licensed destroyer[s] of convention and ceremony," as Colin MacCabe pertinently observes (256), traits that do not really contrast with his other, restless, questioning, devil's-advocate-like appearances as Jean-Luc Godard, the auteur, both on- and offscreen. It is as an outsider that the fool becomes the author's mask, constituting what Bakhtin defined as "the mode of existence of a man who is in life, but not of it, life's perpetual spy and reflector" (161). Says Bakhtin, "At last specific forms had been found to reflect private life and make it public" (161). Following along these lines, Godard also refuses to fully merge with the films; in their own ways, the images of Allen and Godard evoke the outside world, often through biographical references. The filmmakers then act as elements of disruption, both on the level of plot and on the level of the viewer's engagement with individual works, for the author's presence establishes the film as artifice. However, in the films of Godard, this presence has greater impact on narrative closure than in those of Allen, as my study shows.

Woody Allen's Border Crossings: The Author as Trespasser

The aforementioned emblematic quality of Allen and Godard's silhouettes inevitably brings to mind Hitchcock's cameos. The quick appearances by the British director in his works also produce a momentary alienation; they are a textual reminder of the real human being behind the film, but one who soon withdraws from the frame and allows for the viewer's full submersion in the world of the story. Likewise, the appearances by Woody Allen and Godard brand the films they direct with their signature. In the case of Allen, his body and his physical traits are as constitutive of an authorial mark as his films' recognizable plots, character types, and visual design. The auteur's recurring physical presence impersonates his style—the emblematic body links author and aesthetics. Yet, if in the case of Hitchcock we are only momentarily cued to the auteur existing outside of the film, Allen's presence is a constant reminder of the biographical artist. And whereas Godard's fools are peripheral to the narrative, Allen is for the most part the very star of his movies—which leads me to question whether his image is, like that of Hitchcock, perceived as foreign to the diegesis, producing alienation, or whether, on the contrary, when he plays a character in the story, the author's image is inevitably swallowed by text, reduced to an effect, thereby losing its indexical property.

The latter may be true for other actors-directors—Clint Eastwood, for example, whose performances do not evoke his authorial function.

But Allen belongs to a much more self-reflexive universe, appearing in the guise of unreliable narrators, distancing us from the narrative by means of citations and parody, metalepses, direct address, jokes that evoke events external to the plot, and autobiographical references to his lower-middle-class background, his Jewishness, and his Brooklyn childhood. This combination of alienation and autobiography causes Allen to personify one of the films' elements of disruption. Movies such as *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex . . . But Were Afraid to Ask*, *Sleeper*, *Love and Death*, *Annie Hall* (1977), *Stardust Memories* (1980), and *Zelig* (1983), to name but a few, let themselves be contaminated by the outside world, opening the films up for dialogue with real-life events.

The medieval fool played by Allen in the first episode of *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex*, for example, simply does not fit into the story world. When seeking a sorcerer's advice on aphrodisiacs, Allen's fool declares his preference for anything he could get "without a prescription," eliciting a comic effect from an anachronism that is typical of both the avant-garde (for example, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*) and vaudeville acts.⁵ By invoking a current dynamics that reminds the spectator of the present and of "real life," Allen temporarily breaks with the fictional illusion, taking us away from the medieval tale. This anachronism configures an estrangement on the level of the plot that does not allow for the consolidation of the diegesis—it constitutes an instance of everyday life's invasion of the domain of fiction. Similar dynamics abound in Allen's filmography and are obviously found in period movies such as *Love and Death*, where

in nineteenth-century Russia his character mentions, for example, tips and extras as he confabulates on Napoleon's earnings, or in the time-travel plot of *Sleeper*, where after waking up some 200 years into the future, the protagonist makes references to Greenwich Village and vegetarian restaurants, perceived as just as alienating because they refer the viewer back to the everydayness of present time.

This sense of presentness, in turn, evokes the mode of stand-up comedy. It is this sense of not belonging, which lends an estranged, alien, and foreign quality to Allen's characters, that inspires my analogy with Bakhtin's theories—their otherness lies not only in their anarchic behavior but also in the invocation of the world that originated them, which in the case of Bakhtin's fools is the public square. The rogue, the clown, and the fool, Bakhtin says, "create around themselves their own special little world, their own chronotope" (159). Thus, where in Bakhtin the fool brings the theatricality of the public square into the novel, in Allen it is the stand-up performance that invades the fiction—the acting style that, as we know, is the genesis of the director's career as a comic artist. It follows that Allen's nearly immutable form of self-display and his incessant joke-telling evoke also his stand-up persona, further referring us to the author's biography. After all, for the most part, stand-up comics do not present themselves as fictional figures, appearing instead under their own identity. However performative, and however fictive their stories, such comedians do not usually incarnate characters in the strict sense; whether exaggerating real facts for comic purposes or describing imagined situations, their job is to tell jokes and



Photo 6: Allen's Fool cannot fit into the story in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex . . . But Were Afraid to Ask* (1972).

comment on current events, not to consolidate an altogether fictional world. On the contrary, they tell anecdotes *as if* they had happened in the real world—or at least in the world experienced by their audience—irrespective of how implausible their stories may be.⁶

In his book on stand-up comedy, Oliver Double calls attention to the importance of the present time of the performance, which Tony Allen defines as the “now” agenda, saying that “straight drama shows events from another place and another time, but with stand-up the events happen right here in the venue” (173). Needless to point out, Double is referring to live performance and to the importance of being attuned to the reactions of an audience in a theater. Yet this connection with the real world of the theater (the here and now for the audience) calls for an analogy with the anti-illusionistic dimension of Allen’s gags. Many of the comic lines in *Annie Hall*, for example, bring the viewer back to reality. Jokes about the assassination of JFK, Nazis, cultural magazines such as *Commentary*, or Poland (Allen being himself of Polish origin) break with the classical illusion of a self-enclosed fiction, reminding the audience of the here and now of their existence. The clearest example of this dynamics is the Marshall McLuhan scene, where Alvy Singer (Allen’s character in *Annie Hall*) turns to the camera to say, “If life were only like this,” after literally pulling the intellectual into the scene (and from outside of the narrative) only to support his argument against an arrogant professor pontificating in a movie theater.

For that matter, *Annie Hall* opens with a prologue structured as a stand-up routine—the first line delivered by Allen’s hero is a joke about elderly women at a Catskills resort that simply serves the purpose of analogy, furthering no narrative information. Soon Alvy becomes an on-screen, confiding narrator explaining his personal project—to examine his relationship with Annie. Set against a blank wall, the character-narrator’s first image isolates him from context—the neutrality of the set places him outside of a specified space. Indeed, this unanchored space evokes another domain

of the fool discussed by Bakhtin, namely the entr’acte, the intermission, the interval between two acts in a play.⁷ Allen having started as a stand-up comic, such a space also invites identification between author and character. Further linking the director and his protagonist is the recycling of jokes Allen used in his 1960s stand-up routines in Alvy’s own numbers and a Woody Allen appearance in *The Dick Cavett Show* standing in for his character in the film⁸—all of which color the fiction with biographical elements, rendering the diegesis vulnerable to the real. In what Nancy Pogel suggests is a postmodern impulse (12), the director also introduces real-life figures amid fictional ones (McLuhan in *Annie Hall*, American intellectuals in *Zelig*) and casts actors according to their past films or personal stories. Paul Simon plays a music producer in *Annie Hall*, Diane Keaton interprets a photographer/singer in the same film (activities she undertook in real life), and Mia Farrow was assigned the various roles of repressed Catholic (*Alice* [1990]), giving mother (*Alice, Hannah and Her Sisters* [1986]), and the daughter of famous and strong women (*Hannah, September* [1987], *Alice*), bringing to mind the actress’s own origins (she is of Irish ancestry) and family (Farrow is the mother of fifteen children and the daughter of actress Maureen O’Sullivan). Most significantly in the area of blending of fantasy and reality, *Zelig* portrays a fictional character in documentary style.

The interplay between fiction and real events has incidentally always provided material for Allen’s films, which often contemplate the relations between life and art. In *Annie Hall*, Alvy writes a play about his relationship with the title character, and the film was actually seen as a fictional account of Allen’s own relationship with Keaton. *Manhattan*’s Isaac is exposed to public scrutiny when his ex-wife publishes an autobiography about their disastrous marriage—prefiguring, as Peter J. Bailey suggests, Farrow’s memoir, *What Falls Away*, published after the couple’s breakup in real life (Bailey 185). *Stardust Memories* is about a director longing to have his films express the anguish he experiences in life and follows Allen’s first

dramatic film, *Interiors* (1978). In *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Holly finally launches her writing career with a script based on her sister's privacy. Alice sells autobiographical facts as ideas for television shows. In *September* the character played by Sam Waterston moves between the biographies of his father and his friend's mother. *Deconstructing Harry* (1997) punishes its protagonist (a writer played by Allen) for exposing the intimacy of friends, relatives, and lovers. Finally, David Denby's review of *Husbands and Wives* (1992) exemplifies how Allen's films are often perceived as autobiography—the critic confesses his embarrassment in the face of what he believed to be Allen's exposure of his relationship with Farrow (60).⁹ The very character played by the director in this film writes a novel that ridicules his first encounter with his wife. In the end, the films that focus on the connections between life and art constitute a statement about how Allen's works are perceived—as attest the biographies by John Baxter and Eric Lax,¹⁰ which draw comparisons between Allen's real life and fictional plots, and in a more critical fashion, the study of the director's oeuvre by Bailey, who analyzes those narratives discussing life as material for art.

Still, though in Allen's films self-reflexivity is translated into plot-driven narratives, the characters he plays do not really constitute psychological beings enclosed within the diegesis, but stand-up figures visiting scenarios they comment on by means of jokes. This characterization of Allen as alien to the plot is more evident in narratives bearing an ensemble structure (*Hannah and Her Sisters*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* [1989], *Shadows and Fog* [1991], *Husbands and Wives*, *Everyone Says I Love You* [1996]); when Allen shares the centrality of the narrative with female partners (*Love and Death*, *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan Murder Mystery* [1993], *Small Time Crooks* [2000], *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion* [2001]); or when he simply plays a secondary role (*Anything Else* [2003], *Scoop* [2006]). But even when incarnating the protagonist, Allen often bears an outsider's look, as we have seen. Incorporating the "right to confuse" and to parody (Bakhtin 163) charac-

teristic of both the fool and the stand-up comic, the director undertakes the role of a commentator who sometimes sets himself apart from the narrative—a trait that he shares with Godard, as the next section shows, but that causes the diegesis to constantly readapt to his "foreign" presence, as if wanting to assimilate the auteur to the point of dissolution—even though, as I stated earlier, Allen's image resists full immersion. However disturbing, Allen's disruptions are at the service more of comedy than of structural or political transgressions. Therein lies the main difference between the two directors.

What Allen does share with Godard is the taste for citations, which open the film to a dialogue with other works and other authors. In step with Roland Barthes's description of the author as orchestrator of preexisting discourses ("Death" 211), the citing director positions himself at the center not of production, but of reception. As we know, in "The Death of the Author," Barthes replaced the waning figure of a controlling, self-expressing writer with that of the "scriptor" who does not precede the writing, existing rather in the here and now of the enunciation (211). Citation thus defines the image of the author not as unified, but as dispersed. The resulting patchwork aesthetic echoes in the fool's theatrical rendition of a dissipated self. The characteristic lack of motor coordination in slapstick comedy, for example, points to an understanding of boundaries separating body from mind, movement from intention, thus constituting the individual not as unified, but as uncoordinated—the clown is constantly faced with the challenge of orchestrating his own body parts, as well as his movements. If in the works by Godard this sense of dissipation is magnified by the aesthetics of citation and extends to the film as a whole, Allen contains its destabilizing effect. However alienating the tributes he pays to directors such as Fellini, Eisenstein, Kubrick, and Bergman, the resulting distraction is only momentary because, unlike Godard, Allen does not allow for much digression. Still, his use of one-liners brings an element of fragmentation to his discourse that is transferred onto the films. Even

if the jokes are not always exclusive to the characters played by the director, when voiced by other actors, they come across as a ventriloquism of sorts, as if Allen sometimes chose to express himself through characters other than the ones he plays. In any case, though integrating the director's fools with other characters, thereby lending a degree of uniformity to the diegesis, the instances in which actors mimic the director's gag style do not undermine the author's impulse to supersede boundaries. On the contrary, it is as if Allen bled into other characters, refusing to stay within the boundaries of his own body.

Allen's similar refusal to stay within the confines of the diegesis and his need to constantly surpass, in addition, the borders of the frame and look at the extra-filmic also take the form of self-conscious references to the workings of the apparatus. Brecht, of course, is as important a link between Godard and Allen as the Bakhtinian fool—they both follow the teachings of the German dramatist through the use of the direct address and the deconstructionist approach to the medium. The two directors create as much tension as harmony between image and sound tracks—but whereas Godard proceeds by dissonance and asynchrony, Allen contrasts the contents of each track so as to create contradictions, irony, and unreliable narrations. Alvy's voice-over discourse at the opening of *Annie Hall* calls attention both to his account's untrustworthiness and to the support of visual and verbal material in the making of films. Alvy openly admits his "trouble between reality and fantasy" while also addressing the coexistence of image and sound tracks—"showing" us his father ("There he is, and there I am"), thus assuming our viewing of the image. By the same token, in *Radio Days* (1987), Allen's voice-over narration alerts us that Rockaway, which he also admits romanticizing, "wasn't always as stormy and rain-swept like *this*," confident that we see the neighborhood in the visual track.

This form of direct address typically adopted by voice-over narrators constitutes the cinematic version of what in literature Gérard Genette calls author's metalepsis, "which con-

sists of pretending that the poet [the narrator] 'himself brings about the effects he celebrates'" (234) through phrases indicating the author's control over the narrative.¹¹ In fact, the metalepsis grants such narrators the right to transition across diverse narrative levels. In the words of Genette, "any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse . . . produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical (when, as in Sterne or Diderot, it is presented in a joking tone) or fantastic" (235). It is through the comic use of such a device that Allen's fools are given free pass across the different spaces and the different temporalities separating the act of narrating from the narrative itself—as a result, the author's image crosses also the borders between narrative levels. For that matter, the conflation of temporalities in scenes depicting Alvy physically revisiting the space of his childhood at the opening of *Annie Hall* constitutes the visual rendition of metalepsis. It should be said, however, that despite Allen's refusal to stay within fixed territories, his creative processes are clearly placed in the realm of plot and do not completely obstruct narrative closure. In what follows I discuss how the foreignness embodied by Godard's fools constitutes a more radical break with the diegesis, to the extent that his characters render the frame malleable, expandable, and sometimes breakable.

"Where Am I?" Godard's Fools and the Space of the Author

In the works by Godard, the fools refer to the author's dispersed sense of self, as well as to his trajectory toward an increasingly marginal position in the film market. This dissipation of the self is partly the consequence of the director's aforementioned love of quoting, which often produces a collage effect manifested on the level of both the image (insert shots of paintings, photographs, or other films) and sound (dissonance, cacophony, juxtaposition of discourses and bits of music). As we know, Godard quotes indiscriminately, rarely dis-

tinguishing cited from original discourse and sometimes anarchically disposing of the works of others, as in the misattribution of Michel Mourlet's statement to Bazin at the beginning of *Contempt* (1963).¹² Following the lessons from "The Death of the Author," Godard's practices point not so much to the demise, but to the refashioning of authorship. Godard gives body to the "scriptor" by presenting himself as receiver—an idea brilliantly explored in Kaja Silverman's study of *JLG/JLG: Self-Portrait in December*. Silverman sees this 1995 film as the maturation of a Godardian movement toward authorial divestiture that can be traced back to his shift to collective authorship in the late 1960s. It is well known that Godard has frequently tried to disappear as one type of author so as to be reborn in a different guise. The famous title "End of Cinema," which closed *Weekend* in 1967, labeled the closing of a stage in the director's career. *Weekend* passed into history as Godard's first last film, announcing his move from cinephilia to political militancy, soon to be followed by the transition from auteurism to collective authorship in his collaborations with the Dziga Vertov group. On the other hand, Godard has a number of first films, including *Breathless*, *Tout va bien*, which in 1972 marked his failed attempt to come back to mainstream cinema after the Dziga Vertov enterprise, and then *Numéro Deux* (1975), deemed Godard's "second first film," and *Slow Motion* (1980), which marked his return to the cinema after the video and television experiments with Anne-Marie Miéville. One could see *Carmen* (1983) as Godard's second last film: the director's quarrels with the crew gave material for dramatic statements about his retirement from the world of cinema, which nonetheless did not happen (MacCabe 286). The director's trajectory is thus marked by departures and comebacks, and though the consistency of his pursuits and meditations makes him an auteur par excellence, Silverman is right in defining his constant questioning and reshaping of his practices as a form of dying, as an altruistic impulse to define the author as receptacle. But this authorial divestiture, in Silverman's words, "is

better understood as an ongoing process than as a realizable event." "The crucial question to ask Godard," she goes on to say, "is whether he is able to sustain himself there and elsewhere in the mode of dying" (34). The drama of authorial processes, the idea of the author as a principal actor in the battle for expression and communication, brings us back to "The Death of the Author." Writing, said Barthes, should be understood no longer as the "operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction,'" but as "a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content . . . than the act by which it is uttered" (211). It is this emphasis on process that endows authorship with a dramatic dimension, positing the author as central actor. It follows that Godard's fools caricature the director's conception of his authorial self as dispersed, as a patchwork of influences, rather than as a fixed identity. Godard's fools are hence the embodiment of this disjointed self. But like Allen's characters, this fragmented being assumes a recognizable appearance whose immutability contrasts with narrative progression, setting him apart from the filmic universe. It is as if the auteur's image coagulated, refusing to dissolve in the narrative flow.

Furthermore, Godard's fools embody the director's casting of himself as maverick: marginality defines not only his particular place in the world of cinema but also the necessary condition of a true artist. As we move between the concept of the author as receiver and Godard's buffoonish performances in *Carmen*, *Soigne ta droite*, and *King Lear*, we find a contrast between elusiveness and exaggeration, dis-embodiment and the bodily lower stratum (to use another Bakhtinian idea), sublimation and caricature, introspection and externalization. *Carmen*, for example, transfers to the plot one of Godard's main struggles—the one against the film system. This is mirrored in the filmmaker's relative foreignness to the story, which is far more radical than Allen's. The director appears in the guise of Carmen's Uncle Jean, also referred to as Monsieur Godard. His body bears

an aggressive quality resulting first from his grotesque behavior and vulgar language and second from his inability to fit in the narrative.¹³ Further setting Godard's character apart is the generational gap between the director and his young cast—the designations “Uncle” and “Monsieur” indeed accentuate Godard's relative seniority, forging (however prematurely) his character's senility and by extension his isolation. Uncle Jean confines himself in a hospital so as to avoid contact with the real world. Based on Prosper Merimée's novel about a Spanish soldier who embarks on a life of crime for the love of a young gypsy, *Carmen* is about deception. The film's heroine belongs to a criminal gang that “fools” the character of Godard into helping them shoot a documentary that is nothing but a ploy, their real intention being to rob the rich. The central plot involves Carmen's relationship with a policeman, Joseph, whom she seduces during a robbery.

Uncle Jean's foreignness to the plot comes as a result of his way of disrupting narrative progression in each of his appearances. Like the traditional fool, he behaves in unusual and often vulgar ways that caricature the director's otherness to real and fictional worlds alike. This disruptive quality is partly due to grotesqueries that bring comic relief to the drama between Carmen and Joseph. But this fool's inappropriateness, which renders him alien, can be attributed also to the fact that his marginality functions as a reminder of Godard's biography, or of the realm of the extra-filmic. In one of the sequences mostly charged with biographical references, Uncle Jean meets with the leader of Carmen's gang, who poses as a film producer trying to con Godard's character into helping them with what he believes is a documentary, but which is actually a plan to kidnap a big manufacturer. During this meeting, which takes place in a Parisian café, Uncle Jean and the “producer” carry a conversation marked by a lack of communication to be blamed on the old man's elusive and nonsensical discourse, as well as on his inability to engage with plot elements—the details about the supposed shoot and Monsieur Godard's official agreement.

Concurrently, the lack of chemistry between the characters echoes Godard's feelings of isolation in the world of cinema, the director's own battle to make himself understood. Uncle Jean's abrupt and unmotivated references to Van Gogh's search for the right tone of yellow, for example, and the insistence that one must always keep searching contribute nothing to the plot, but evoke Godard's own effort to find the “just image”—and are, of course, a reminder of the recurrence of Van Gogh's paintings in Godard's films. By the same token, the reference to Mao as a great cook (who “fed all of China”) brings to mind his flirtation with Maoism in 1968. There is also, of course, the questioning of the boundaries between documentary and fiction when Uncle Jean momentarily scares the gang leader by asking if the documentary is really “true,” indulging in a theoretical question (all documentaries are fiction) rather than suspecting the other's real intentions. Most importantly, Uncle Jean evokes Godard's directorial role when he provides us with scene and take numbers at the beginning of the sequence, as well as when he reprimands his actor for not finishing his dialogue, stopping him as he gets ready to leave the table. Finally, Godard's most clearly autobiographical statement is to explain, under the mask of his fool, that he has been “banished” from the “cinematographer” (in a typical tribute to Robert Bresson)—even though his temporary exile was voluntary.

Soigne ta droite shows Godard as equally foreign, this time as a character inspired by the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. Introduced by a voice-over narrator as the Idiot, but addressed as Prince by the film's characters, Godard's fool is assigned the absurd mission of writing, shooting, and releasing a film in one day in order to be “forgiven” for an unnamed sin. The Idiot's task, however, is not exactly central—though apparently setting a goal for the narrative, this mission is dislodged by the appearance of “the Man” (played by comic actor Jacques Villeret), who takes up more screen time than Godard's fool, and by scenes of the musical group Les Rita Mitsuko rehearsing and recording songs.

Much like Uncle Jean and Dostoevsky's hero, the Idiot is sometimes grotesque, yet he is also simple and innocent in an unjust world that condemns him to exclusion. Like Dostoevsky's Myshkin, the part played by Godard constitutes a positive "other," who in the film calls attention to complexities overlooked by the rather absurd figures that populate his universe. Citing Baudelaire, the Idiot theorizes, for example, on "the smiling regret" to an incredulous grandmother sitting next to him on a plane.¹⁴ Godard's character is also fond of wordplays, which the director has always deployed as an alienating device. In step with Godard's penchant for both puns and translation, the Idiot conflates, for example, an airline's "manager" (which the French designate by the English word) with the French *ménagère* (housewife). The generational gap addressed in *Carmen* is also hinted at in this sequence—after addressing the airline employee as "Mademoiselle," the Idiot is told that this title is no longer in use. Douglas Morrey reads this dialogue as a symptom of Godard's alleged remarks about the postfeminist "discomfiture of the male" (166), which again suggests the director's (and his character's) sense of exclusion. Most significantly to the feeling of estrangement, the Idiot also enacts slapstick routines, creating chaos from actions as simple as getting into a car, thereby giving life to the uncoordinated, dispersed body.

The same sense of alienation that involves Uncle Jean is manifested also in *Soigne ta droite*, this time through the use of titles and in the absence of proper names. The film's

opening credits give us only surnames and, in addition, group male and female crewmembers under the categories of "Messieurs" and "Mesdemoiselles," instituting a ceremonial, formal element to the credit sequences and perhaps unintentionally associating the director (singled out as "Monsieur Godard") with his homonymous roles in *Carmen* and *King Lear*. This humorous formality reverberates in the lack of character names in the narrative, where individuals are designated by generalizing labels such as the Man, the American, the Passenger, the Golfer. The emptying of identities that comes with this lack of individuation attests to the binary reasoning that opposes essence and surface, inner and outer selves, soul and body—the very same reasoning that is behind the challenges to self-expression and sincerity as the author's defining features. Referring to the Man, whose centrality to the narrative and sense of inadequacy turn him into the Idiot's double, the voice-over narrator describes this character's "last creative effort to get outside the dream, outside of fate, outside of chance, outside of form, outside of himself." This sense of imprisonment that calls for a desire to exceed one's body is what unites the Man and the Idiot—or, better still, what creates them as two manifestations of the same essence. Indeed, this yearning for extrapolating boundaries extends to the relationship between the character and the film; it brings together Godard's fools in *Carmen*, *Soigne ta droite*, and *King Lear*, all of whom exist in excess to the narrative, as if wanting to lie outside of it, or at least stand between the film and the real world. Not coinci-



Photo 7: Godard's grotesque and uncoordinated Prince/Idiot in *Soigne ta droite* (1987).

dentally, the main space occupied by the Idiot is the airplane he takes in order to deliver the finished film, which confines the fool to a site of transition—one that may be claustrophobic in its tightness, but which is nonetheless conveniently removed, unanchored, and unstable.

Like the Idiot, *King Lear*'s Professor Pluggy bears the burden of setting the goal for the film's narrative. But here Godard is turned into the object of desire for the real protagonist, Shakespeare the 5th (Peter Sellars), who while trying to write a new version of Shakespeare's play goes into a journey to find Pluggy, his purpose being to learn the secret of montage. But just as with the other Godardian fools, Pluggy takes up little screen time, remaining at the periphery. Further emphasizing his marginality is the fact that, as with Uncle Jean, Pluggy also has been locked away from the world, this time in an editing studio.

In *King Lear* the disjointed quality of Godard's fool is best epitomized by his character's untidy dreadlocks, made with wires and cables. In turn, Godard's authorial presence is felt in spite of his peripheral position and the lack of clarity about his narrative role; after all, the mad editing guru is a constant reminder of the director's existence. In fact, Godard evokes the author's separate identity when at the beginning of the film he gives away some production notes as a narrator named Godard, but who nonetheless speaks in the foolish, buffoon-like voice of Pluggy. Later in the film Godard and Pluggy are once again conflated by Shakespeare the 5th, who refers to him as a man named "Godard, Pluggy or something," at once equating artist and character and revealing the character as artifice. Finally, like Uncle Jean, Pluggy eventually voices Godard's famous takes on the cinema, such as the concern with the primacy of the image over the word and the meditations on the revelatory potential of film. Godard goes as far as to establish a connection between Pluggy and the revealing power that, in the director's view, constitutes the essence of cinema. At the end of the film, Godard sacrifices his fool, repeating another recurring aphorism, this one borrowed from Saint Paul, which

says, "the image will reappear in the time of resurrection."²⁵ Pluggy's sacrifice echoes the near death of the Idiot in a fall from the aircraft's open door and Uncle Jean's declared desire to go to the moon in order to finance his movie. Godard's fools thus lend their awkward bodies to what appears to be a lost cause—the production of films at the margins of society.

After all, these fools become vehicles for the author's inquiries about his own place. When Carmen first visits Uncle Jean in the hospital, he startles as she knocks on his door, asking, "Where am I?" This is too brief a moment in the film; indeed, Uncle Jean promptly rephrases his question, saying, "I mean, who is it?" However, this Freudian slip encapsulates Godard's self-conscious questioning of his position in the world of cinema and also in the world of the very film in which he acts. The hospital, the airplane, and the editing suite function as allegories for the *entr'acte*, the space of transition, including the one between Godard's real and screen images. But these spaces are also allegories of Godard's self-imposed exile, the equivalent of the Swiss town of Rolle, the place where he retreated when he refused to participate in the commerce of films and where to this day he indulges in his right not to understand. We find also a carnivalesque inversion where the work's creator and main authority figures as marginal and where costumes and role-play become vehicles for the uncensored expression of the self. *Carmen*, *Soigne ta droite*, and *King Lear* dramatize the tension between exposure and masking. To be sure, the mask typically allows for the full expression of the artist who wears it—here it allows for the expression of Godard's frustrations.

Nevertheless, even if these fools evoke the author's biography, they are far from finalizing, from organizing the author's life in a logical series of causally linked events. The biographical author in Godard's films could not be more removed from Barthes's worst fear, that biography "would exceed the body, give a meaning to life, forge a destiny" (*Pleasure* 56). Quite the opposite—Godard's fools might evoke autobiography, but they do not narrate the man. They

become, instead, the very instrument for the negation of closure—for that matter, the fact that all fools bear slash names, some of which embed the director's own, further dramatizes their instability as independent entities. Godard's mode of self-inscription questions his own authority, as well as the autonomy of the texts he produces. To borrow Jacques Rivette's expression in his call for a move away from a supposedly self-involved and introspective cinephilia in the early 1960s, the self-inscribed author may very well "unframe" the film, opening it up to the outside world. Far from emptying the author's function—far from rendering him abstract—this disjointed body gives him a corporeal existence.

Resisting Dissolution

If in Woody Allen's films the struggles that define the author as a protagonist in the saga to communicate inner feelings and worldviews are narrativized, Godard's fools persistently sidestep from the narrative grid. In other words, Allen transfers his artistic concerns to the story, experiencing them through his characters. Allen's fools blend more easily with his costars and with the overall narrative than do Godard's unadjusted buffoons—what is more, Allen's resistance to staying within boundaries is intermittent. His fools seem to visit the entrance only once in a while, whereas Godard's characters never leave this transitory space—there are variations in quality and degree separating the American and French filmmakers. It is therefore worth asking again the extent to which reality and fiction really mix in Allen's films, which brings me once more to the position of the author in relation to the film: does Allen bridge the film and the outside world, or is he swallowed by the text?

I have suggested that Allen's films keep readjusting to his foreign body, allowing for a sense of closure of which Godard completely deprives us. Still, like with his French counterpart, Allen's relative foreignness reconnects the film author's textual and phenomenological beings; the dynamics akin to both the Bakhtin-

ian fool and the mode of stand-up comedy restore indexicality to this figure. However, though by connecting the film with the real artist, these directors may establish the author as origin, and however consistent may be their understanding of film as a legitimate tool for individual self-expression, the dramatization of their creative and identity crises shuns traditional conceptions of control and authority. In fact, Allen and Godard use their "foolish" bodies as instruments for the disruption of closure, as they disturb any sense of completeness and fixedness, even if to different degrees. This openness, in turn, seals the connection between the film and the outside world; the authors' bodies are agents allowing for the interpenetration between the image and the real. The spatial in-betweenness characteristic of the fool suggests its refusal to let itself be framed or contained by the fiction, to fully belong to the depicted universe. The authors' constant evocation of biographical elements, historical events, the present time, and other films is what defines them as the Bakhtinian fool and, in the case of Allen, as a stand-up comic, both of which are "other" to the universes they comment on and also to the realm of classical film narrative. It is as elements foreign to the depicted world that the self-inscribed directors open this world up to what lies beyond the diegesis, transgress the borders of the screen, and unframe the film.

NOTES

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1. For an account of the origins of stand-up comedy and fools, see Mintz 71–80.

2. I should note that we can find an earlier version of Godard's fools in *Vladimir et Rosa*, which he directed with the Dziga Vertov Group in 1971, and a later one in *Les enfants jouent à la Russie*, from 1993.

3. Godard was born in 1930, Allen in 1935.

4. This interview is punctuated with appearances of Godard as an unnamed fool-like figure very similar to

his character in *King Lear*—which incidentally features a Woody Allen cameo.

5. I would like to thank Robert Stam for pointing this out to me in the aforementioned earlier version of this article.

6. Allen's stand-up routines, for that matter, used to include tales that bordered on the absurd.

7. Incidentally, see Carla Marcantonio for discussion of the sense of an authorial presence in the entr'acte of Max Ophüls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

8. See Bailey 59.

9. For a very interesting discussion of the audience's perception of this film, see Sobchack 258–85.

10. See Baxter and Lax.

11. Genette lists a number of examples, including Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, where the narrator inquires, "What would prevent me from *getting the Master married and making him a cuckold?*" and, addressing the reader, says, "If it gives you pleasure, *let us set the peasant girl back in the saddle behind her escort, let us let them go and let us come back to our two travelers*" (234).

12. In *La Cinéphilie*, Antoine De Baecque attributes *Contempt*'s opening statement that "[t]he cinema substitutes for our gaze a world more in harmony with our desires" to Michel Mourlet's "Sur un art ignoré" (216). Godard's voice-over narration attributes it to Bazin.

13. Illustrating Uncle Jean's vulgarity is the scene in which, hoping that a fever will allow him to stay indefinitely in a clinic, he tells a young and attractive female nurse that the fever will come if he sticks his fingers up her ass.

14. See Morrey 167.

15. This sentence appears also in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.

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