

# A Madison for Outcasts: Dance and Critical Displacements in Jean-Luc Godard's *Band of Outsiders*

## Un Madison pour les exclus : danse et déplacements critiques dans *Bande à part* de Jean-Luc Godard

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## ABSTRACT

In light of Timothy Corrigan's discussion of the cult film as "adopted child," Godard's *Band of Outsiders* (*Bande à part*) can be viewed as a film which has transcended its original destiny and opened doors to diverse critical and spectatorial receptions. Drawing upon pulp fiction and the "B movie" genre, Godard's original intent was to make a mainstream film. But it was precisely the film's homage to the American mainstream that soon led to its cult status in non-mainstream cinema. Based on a pulp fiction novel by Delores Hitchens, *Band of Outsiders* celebrates dance and movement from American popular culture and, in particular, American jazz dance as popularized in Europe in the early 1960s. In one sequence, the protagonists break into the Madison, a line dance that quickly moved from the African-American community to the white mainstream through such television shows as *American Bandstand* and to Europe through the work of such performers/teachers as Harold Nicholas. The freedom of movement within a structured environment, which defines the Madison, recalls the director's own approach to filmmaking as well as his high regard for the physical dexterity of his actors. Inasmuch as each dancer dances the Madison "solo," the dance allows individual characters to articulate through movement their mental and emotional states. At the same time, it permits the three protagonists to function as a synchronized group, a "band of outsiders." The Madison sequence, moreover, presents a microcosm of many of the ideological and aesthetic premises of the *Nouvelle Vague* and is particularly reflective of Godard's love of Americana. This dance, itself synonymous with the film, is the sequence that generates the most intricate intertextual references as well as the most divergent critical response. The Madison has thus become the vehicle through which *Band of Outsiders* has come to stand in for non-mainstream cinema at large.

*Voir le résumé français à la fin de l'article*

Timothy Corrigan (1986, p. 91) defines a cult film as an “adopted child,” a work which has been uprooted from its original destiny. Although the definition of a cult film as deployed by Corrigan embraces such films as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and *The Road Warrior* (1981), an examination of the reception of other works not traditionally considered cult films reveals that Corrigan’s words have a much broader application. A case in point is Jean-Luc Godard’s 1964 *Band of Outsiders* (*Bande à part*), a film which (perhaps surprisingly) was originally intended for a broad, commercial audience, yet which can be deemed a critical *mise en abyme* of the aesthetic discourse of the *Nouvelle Vague*.

*Band of Outsiders* is an homage to America, and specifically to the America of grade “B” gangster films that, as James Monaco (1976, p. 147) has articulated, “motivated Godard in the first place.” Based upon Delores Hitchens’s 1958 novel *Fool’s Gold*, a pulp fiction piece published by Doubleday for its Crime Club and published by the French *série noire* under the title *Pigeon vole* the same year as its American release, the film is, according to Monaco, “suffused with a gentle, lyrical quality and a nostalgia for the American movies of [Godard’s] youth” (p. 147). *Band of Outsiders* moves between reality and the mythos of the cinema, between the underbelly of Paris and the realm of daydream. The characters play-act Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid and navigate through a world of Jack London, trashy American novels and *film noir*. Integral to the film is a discourse of movement, which defines the protagonists’ games and dances and blurs the distinction between the quotidian and reverie. At one point, Anna Karina, Samy Frey and Claude Brasseur break into the Madison, an American line dance fad from the late 1950s and early 1960s. This number, mistakenly referred to by James Monaco as “a Bob Fosse dance” (p. 147), has become the most frequently mentioned sequence of *Band of Outsiders* in critical discourse, and is integral to the film’s celebration of Americana. Moreover, Godard, who has always valued the physical dexterity of his actors (Jousse 1990, p. 16), contextualizes the dance sequence within an array of physical stunts and playful gestures that evoke American pop culture, a process in line with a great

deal of the aesthetic discourse of the *Nouvelle Vague*. If *Band of Outsiders* itself embodies the theoretical and aesthetic tenets of the *Nouvelle Vague*, then the Madison sequence becomes the core of this self-reflective study. Moreover, inasmuch as *Band of Outsiders* is in and of itself an “adopted child,” the Madison is the centrepiece of the ensuing cult phenomenon.

### Have Gun Will Fumble

Pauline Kael (1968, p. 173), in a seminal 1966 article originally published in *The New Republic*, describes Godard’s recouplement of tawdry American gangster movies as “the urban poetry of speed and no afterthoughts.” For her, “it’s as if a French poet took an ordinary banal American crime novel and told it to us in terms of the romance and beauty he read between the lines” (p. 170). And this poetry is, to use an unfortunate cliché, poetry in motion. Like the often slapstick movements in *Band of Outsiders*, Godard’s films, as Kael (1968, p. 177) asserts, “become playful gestures, games in which you succeed or fail with a shrug.” Godard himself feels that the fluidity of the film allows us “to feel existence like physical matter” (quoted in Narboni and Milne 1972, p. 211). For him, “it is not the people who are important, but the atmosphere between them” (pp. 211-212). Describing the importance of play-acting in the film, Kael (1968, p. 70) argues that when the protagonists of *Band of Outsiders* attempt to turn their games into reality, “we watch, apprehensive and puzzled as the three of them *act out* the robbery they’re committing as if it were something going on in a movie—or a fairy tale” (emphasis ours). Kael continues by stressing: “The crime does not fit the daydreamers nor their milieu—*Band of Outsiders* is like a reverie of a gangster movie as students in an espresso bar might remember it or plan it—a mixture of the gangster film virtues (loyalty, daring) with innocence, amorality, lack of equilibrium” (p. 170).

What were Godard’s original intentions in making the film? Kael reminds us that while the director intended to make “a film about a girl and a gun... A sure fire story which [would] sell a lot of tickets,” what actually resulted was a film that sold less tickets than ever. We can deem *Band of Outsiders* a playful

gesture which, like the botched robbery it depicts, derailed from Godard's agenda. The director actually mocks his purported commercial goals in a cameo appearance in the film. Sitting in on the English class the three protagonists attend, Godard asks the teacher, herself enamoured with Shakespeare more than with language instruction, how to say in English "one big million dollar picture." But money was not the director's sole goal. On an aesthetic level, Godard desired to "recreate the populist, poetic climate of the pre-war period" (Collet 1972, p. 40). Although he cites as his sources German classicism, English Romanticism, Queneau, Bernanos and Cocteau (Godard 1964), the film's overt Americanism betrays the director's youthful passion for the caper film.

The film's story is simple. Three young Parisians, Odile, Arthur and Franz, meet in an English class and decide to steal a seemingly immeasurable sum of money hidden in the villa where Odile lives. Arthur and Franz are gangster wannabes, and Odile is a romantic young woman seeking acceptance and romance. Over the course of three days, the trio dances, runs through the Louvre in nine minutes and 43 seconds, plays in shooting arcades, and meanders through Paris as they await the appointed hour of their heist which, due to their own incompetence as thieves, must be attempted twice. When the robbery is finally committed, the bounty is far less than expected. Arthur dies in a shootout, and Odile and Franz elope to Argentina. Of particular consequence is that the U.S. setting of *Fool's Gold* is transplanted to France, although the original American context is continually evoked by references particular to the grade B crime genre to which Hitchens's novel belongs.

### Yankee Doodle Discourse

*Band of Outsiders* is comprised of highly textured references to American culture, as evidenced from the opening sequences of the film. As we catch sight of the sign for "Loui's School," where Franz and Arthur meet Odile, the image is juxtaposed with a brief snippet of New Orleans jazz on the soundtrack. The name "Loui" thus evokes Louis Armstrong, and the school where one can learn English, German, Spanish and typing

recalls a *film noir* speakeasy with an intimidating doorman to control entrance. Arthur self-reflexively relates the trio's actions to American cinema; he reminds his co-conspirators that they must wait until after nightfall to undertake their heist in keeping with the norms of B movies. The final sequence of *Band of Outsiders*, moreover, pays homage to such popular trash. As Odile and Franz embrace on a boat bound for Brazil, the voice-over narration promises a sequel which will relate their adventures in South America. We then see a spinning globe recalling the Universal Pictures logo, and the narrator informs us that the new film will be in Cinemascope and Technicolor.

Franz, who of the three characters is most enamoured with the United States, dreams of buying a race car and participating in the Indianapolis 500. And racing with America is indeed a motif in the film. When the trio runs through the Louvre in a matter of minutes, they beat by several seconds the record set by an American, Jimmy Johnson of San Francisco. Yet the discourse of Americana in *Band of Outsiders* is not limited to low-brow culture. Franz, who owns a large collection of American books, has a particular fascination with Jack London. At one point in the film, he recounts the plotline of London's short story, "Nam-Bok the Unvoracious," published in 1902 in the author's third book, *Children of the Frost*. Franz's love affair with the Great American North matches Odile's romanticism and explains in part the young woman's eventual preference for Franz over Arthur.

### Kinesthetics American Style

In his direction, Godard sought a great deal of spontaneity on the part of the actors. Writing dialogue at the last minute so that the performers would not have the time to prepare and hence would give more of themselves, the director allowed only one or two takes with little rehearsal for most scenes (Collet 1972, p. 42). Such spontaneity helped foster the atmosphere of improvisation and play-acting which characterizes *Band of Outsiders*. At the same time, it is in part through such spontaneity that Godard makes his most overt references to American pop culture. In a playful movement sequence, Franz and Arthur

enact the shooting of Billy the Kid. Despite the frolicsome and lighthearted nature of this sequence, a closer examination reveals that well-focused intent was involved in its references to American dance. As Arthur draws, Franz beats him, whirling downward into a deadly, efficient shooting crouch. After taking the hit, Arthur leans backward into a Grahamesque hinge position, where the body is straight from knee to shoulder, then crumples to the ground. As a fallen gunfighter, Arthur rolls onto his side, where he wheels around his stationary head and shoulder by using the sides of his feet to scoot in half a circle. As Franz starts the Simca, Arthur scrambles through the door, timing his entrance for the last possible minute. The play-acting is then over. Arthur's mock death anticipates a later sequence which, although not a play-acting scene, is equally imbued with a feeling of spontaneity; playing dead foretells his ultimate demise in a real shootout. The backfall resembles the death of gunfighters in American westerns and recalls Richard Boone's *Have Gun Will Travel*. (Boone studied dance with modern dance pioneer Martha Graham.) Such a movement, moreover, has become an integral motif in American culture. For instance, in *All That Jazz*, a 1978 film about the life of Bob Fosse and directed by Fosse himself, Roy Scheider performs the kneeling back hinge, which can be viewed as a metaphor for death. (The direction back-deep from the body centre is at once physically difficult to accomplish in a controlled manner and reflects the natural human fear of falling, particularly backwards.) The lighthearted, slapstick Billy the Kid sequence is thus a direct citation of American dance culture, one example of a seemingly improvised movement sequence in *Band of Outsiders* which is clearly rooted in formal dance technique.

Godard's movement dynamics are similarly evidenced in a scene in which Anna Karina runs to meet her two co-conspirators at a factory; the fluidity and ongoing-ness of her movements make the sequence play as if she were running to meet her lover in a romantic-era ballet based on a Victor Hugo novel. She must temper her momentum in order to overcome obstacles encountered while taking a challenging shortcut; Karina climbs a ladder to a higher level of ground, pulls a boat to her side of a



stream, steps onboard, floats on the current to the opposite side, and then feeds a circus tiger with meat brought specially from her guardian's refrigerator in a net shopping bag. This sequence reveals much about her character; she is resourceful, feminine and generous, yet is bent on meeting Arthur, the man who, at this time, she thinks she loves. In this sequence, there is no separation between movement and the character's inner state. In this respect, it reflects the dynamics of the famed Madison sequence.

Referring to his Madison, Godard states: "We invented the steps" (quoted in Collet 1972, p. 42). This is in keeping with the spirit of the dance, which was first performed by African-American teenagers who were adept at improvising and creating many variations of the original steps to rock and roll dances (Love 1993). Godard stresses: "On the other hand, for the dance scene in the café, we rehearsed for two weeks, three times each week. Samy and Claude didn't know how to dance... It's an original dance, and we had to perfect it. It's a dance with an open, line figure. It's a parade. They dance for the camera, for the audience" (quoted in Collet 1972, pp. 42-43). Godard himself evokes the importance of the dance in an early character sketch for Arthur. He writes:

[...] he is a boy for whom the mystery of life is not necessarily hidden in a distant Forest but very possibly on the motorway to the East, where he roars to and fro straining his old Simca. Possibly, too, behind the counter of an unfashionable café, where he dances an imaginary Madison to recapture the lost time of Annabella and Préjean, on a 14th of July, beneath the roofs of Paris (Godard 1964).

Thus, according to Godard, the Madison was already a part of the early stages of the film's development, although it appeared in the director's mind considerably different from the final product. Where the dance appeared in the conceptualization of *Band of Outsiders* notwithstanding, it is without a doubt the most discussed and cited sequence of the film. It is the sequence which is recalled when other details have been forgotten. And the scene's notoriety extends beyond five decades of critical discourse on Godard and has come to be associated with non-mainstream film at large. A case in point is a currently



active website providing up-to-date information on festivals and recent films. Describing itself as a “film and culture blog with a focus on non-mainstream topics,” the site is titled “Like Anna Karina’s Sweater.”<sup>1</sup> This is a direct reference to a parenthetical comment made by the seemingly omniscient voice-over narrator during the Madison sequence in which we learn that Odile is wondering if the two men are noticing the movements of her breasts underneath her sweater. Albeit named in reference to a *Nouvelle Vague* film, “Like Anna Karina’s Sweater” spans the broader scope of contemporary cinema. Focusing on non-mainstream film, it expresses its commentaries with a great deal of lightheartedness and sense of fun. In this way, it underscores the sense of spontaneity of Godard’s film. At the same time, “Like Anna Karina’s Sweater” reveals the extent to which *Band of Outsiders* has transcended Godard’s original intentions and come to embody so much of the aesthetic project of the *Nouvelle Vague*. The sweater Anna Karina sports as she dances the Madison, which was the willing object of a voyeuristic gaze, has become a metaphor for an entire spectatorial project which extends far beyond the confines of *Band of Outsiders*.

### Jazzin’ It Up

The Madison came with the first wave of rock and roll dances that were popularized by *American Bandstand* when it moved to television in 1957 (Stearns and Stearns 1968, p. 4). Like the Birdland, the Stroll and the Cha-Cha-Cha, the Madison was a group dance performed in a line or circle formation. The steps could be performed solo or with a partner. Offering a retrospective look at the dance, Leroy Green and his colleagues, as middle-aged adults, demonstrated variations of the Madison and the Cha-Cha-Cha line dances at the Twenty-Seventh Annual Festival of American Folklife, sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Interior and held outdoors in Washington, D.C., in 1993. In Sam Love’s documentary, which focuses on the festival, Green states that these were the same dances he and his friends had performed as teenagers in the Washington, D.C., high schools in 1961-1962. Green demonstrates the basic six-count step of the Madison and stresses that each high school had their

own version of the dance, which they performed simultaneously on the same gym floor in competition with representatives from other schools. It is important to note that, although most of the steps of the Madison are four or eight counts, a six-count movement against a 4/4 rhythm is characteristic of black dance. While Green and company dance vigorously and freely in bermudas and sundresses, Soum Sokhon, a Cambodian immigrant to the U.S., and his compatriots perform the choreography with contained movement, garbed in formal evening dress and accompanied by Cambodian music.

White teenagers who attended integrated high schools were able to copy the dances performed by their black peers. Consequently, the public unfairly credited the movements to white individuals who appeared on *American Bandstand* in Philadelphia (Jackson 1997, pp. 208-210) and the *Buddy Deane Show* in Baltimore instead of to the African-American originators. In fact, to attract white consumers, the name “rock and roll” was substituted for “rhythm and blues.”

It was common marketing practice for television producers to connect a dance craze with a specific recording (Jackson 1997, p. 211). Record sales were promoted by the fact that real teenagers, unschooled in dance, were viewed performing with confidence. Accessibility was enhanced by the lack of formal expectations concerning leading/following as are required in traditional social dancing. An uneven number of men and women could actively participate in a line dance. Furthermore the men would not need to maintain a frame with and supportive of their partner because the Madison could be performed in two lines with partners facing in an open position, as opposed to the more intimate closed dance position of, for instance, the waltz; there was thus no danger of pelvic contact in a line dance (Jackson 1997, p. 217). Another advantage that line dancing possesses for non-dancers over traditional social dancing is that everyone performs the same steps, which move forward, back and side-to-side in a moderate tempo to a 4/4 time signature (Banks 1999, p. 98). The distinctive feature of a line dance is that by making four quarter-turns, the choreography is repeated facing each wall of the room.

The black tradition in jazz, tap and line dance allows interpersonal competition, an ingredient very appropriate to a dance scene with one female and two heterosexual male characters. These were most likely practical considerations for Godard when choosing a dance to be performed by actors, two out of three of them not having any prior experience in dance. The Madison thus was a dance which blended structure and improvisation, at the same time constituting a popular art form, one which allowed for individual expression, but placed emphasis on the collective formation of the line dance.

How might the Madison have reached the cultural space of the French *Nouvelle Vague* and of Godard in particular? African-American dancer Harold Nicholas credits himself with having brought the Madison to France. Nicholas argues: "I was the American dancer, and I taught the French how to do certain dances. It started with the Cha Cha, then the Madison" (quoted in Hill 2000, p. 242). In 1956, the Nicholas Brothers dance team went to Europe, with Fayard returning home in 1958 and Harold remaining in Paris.<sup>2</sup> The brothers were separated for seven years and later reunited on the *Hollywood Palace* television show in July, 1964. During this interim period, Harold Nicholas significantly impacted the dance scene in France and Scandinavia, the latter where he felt particularly welcome (p. 243). Harold was very successful in Europe and was even recognized as a singer, performing a solo nightclub act in casinos. Other highlights of his career abroad included co-starring with Josephine Baker at the Olympia Theatre in Paris in 1959, starring in *Free and Easy* in Amsterdam, and appearing with Eddie Constantine in the French film *L'empire de la nuit* (1963). Nicholas had thus attained a high artistic profile in Europe, was a recognized authority on jazz and tap, and would have been able to recruit as students top artistic figures.

It is clear that the Madison had considerable impact in France. In fact, it became mainstream enough to be included in French instructional dance literature, which was subsequently disseminated throughout parts of the Francophone world. Indeed, Soum Sokhon stresses in Love's film that he perfected the dance by studying a French social dance manual in Phnom Penh in 1964.

The original steps—Basic, Boss Turn, the M and the I movements—accompanied the first recording entitled “The Madison” (Love 1993). The second hit tune, called “The Madison Time,” incorporated additional movements, including, among others, the Jackie Gleason and Wilt Chamberlain steps.<sup>3</sup> (John Waters’s *Hairspray* offers the same steps to “The Madison Time” in a theatrically choreographed version based on an instructional segment from a teenage dance show.)

The particular nature of Godard’s Madison reflects Anna Karina’s adhesion to the dance style of Nicholas and other African-American dancers. Her performance style in the film is different from that of the white teenagers on television—the stance appears more natural and grounded. Legs are bent in *demi-plié* and torsos move slightly away from the vertical dimension. In addition, Anna, and sometimes Franz, incorporate hip and shoulder isolation movements into the dance steps. The Nicholas Brothers’ home movies of their performances at the Cotton Club in the fall of 1938 show that they had incorporated subtle isolations of the hips and shoulders into the choreography performed to “Congo Conga” played by the Locares Orchestra dance band, booked as part of the current fad for Afro-Cuban dancing (cha-cha-cha, rumba, conga) (Hill 2000, p. 140). Referring to white kids trying to imitate black kids’ dancing, but omitting the hip movements, Hank Ballard’s voice-over in *The Twist* critiques: “It just ain’t happening.”

### **Bad Boys Don’t Dance, But Good Girls Lead**

In order to understand the significance of Godard’s use of the Madison within the context of both the film’s celebration of Americana and its broader reflection on the aesthetics of the *Nouvelle Vague*, an analysis of the dance sequence of *Band of Outsiders* and its context within the film is helpful. Brechtian distanciation and intertextual layering provide the framework for Godard’s dance sequence. Such devices thus prepare the spectator to view the Madison through the lens of citation and critical distance. In order to discuss the timing of their caper, the three protagonists visit a working-class café. This is direct reference to American gangster films in which crimes are plotted

in coffee shops or diners. In line with Godard's future reference in *Masculine-Feminine* (*Masculin-féminin*, 1966) to "the children of Marx and Coca-Cola," Odile orders a Coke. Arthur, in the meantime, orders liquor, which he subsequently uses to slip her a Mickey Finn, again a citation of American film. As Odile walks to the ladies' room we hear (from a jukebox) Catherine Deneuve singing two songs from Jacques Demy's *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (*Les parapluies de Cherbourg*), composed, of course, by *Band of Outsiders* composer Michel Legrand, whose music appears "for the last time on the screen," according to Godard's opening titles. The latter song starts and stops abruptly, unmotivated by the film's diegesis. Odile, moreover, descends the staircase to the restroom; returning to the restaurant, her fingers linger on the handrail, evoking Deneuve in the earlier film. Upon her return, Odile looks at a gadget with liquid which is supposed to flow from one side to the other if the man holding the other side is in love with her. The gadget is obviously accurate; Arthur does not love her. In the final sequence of *Band of Outsiders*, the same device will confirm Franz's love for Odile. (Such a gadget was a common product sold through American women's magazines in the 1950s and early 1960s.) Unsure as to what to do next, Franz proposes a moment of silence. Not only are the characters' voices silenced, but moreover, the soundtrack is squelched altogether as artificially as the starting and stopping of Deneuve's voice. This heightens the discomfort of both characters and spectator and distances the spectator from the narrative.

Franz breaks the silence with "That's enough. I'll play a record." Arthur retorts: "Want to dance?"

Through individual movement patterns, Arthur and Odile manipulate their fingers in a prelude to the Madison. Her fingers clearly perform a "side-close-side-kick" movement on the table. Arthur responds with a finger dance in which he mixes up kicking and stepping so that there is no distinguishable pattern. This anticipates his dance style in the upcoming sequence and moreover reflects his psychological confusion. Whereas, Odile's precise finger movements suggest the clarity of her desires and the greater precision with which she will soon dance.

As we segue to the Madison, it is a black hat that catches one's attention for two reasons—as a dramatic prop and as a symbol of Franz's current feelings towards Odile. (In the car scene earlier, when Odile dons Franz's hat, re-adjusting the mirror for primping, Franz quickly retrieves both hat and mirror.) As Odile and Arthur prepare to dance, Franz tenderly places it on her head, indicating a growing affection for her. Franz joins them, side by side in a line formation, woman in the centre. The trio of conspirators fall into the pulsating beat of the music by bouncing from the knees and snapping their fingers.

In the Madison as performed in *Band of Outsiders*, Odile, Franz and Arthur violate the accepted format of a line dance where identical choreography is performed prior to each quarter-turn. The first movement is Odile's finger dance performed for real, the sidestep.<sup>4</sup> This configuration appears before the first quarter-turn phrase.<sup>5</sup> Rather than repeating the sidestep, the actors perform a diagonal movement prior to the repeat of the quarter-turn phrase. Of course, it is impossible to determine if this irregularity was the result of a mistake on the part of the performers. The steps in *Band of Outsiders* do not look much like the movements preserved in the television clip that director Mann incorporated in *The Twist* or which were recreated in *Hairspray*, nor are they exactly as described in *The Encyclopedia of Social Dance* (Butler and Butler 1975, pp. 242-244). Inasmuch as Godard has claimed that they invented the steps, it can be said that the director's innovative spirit carries on the tradition of the African-American teenagers and of the American social dances, which are living art forms (Love 1993). No choreographer is listed in the credits for *Band of Outsiders*. It is possible that Anna Karina's dance training made her the natural leader in the creative dance process.

"While the body in classical Western dance (and the white teenager's version of the Madison) is distinguished by its verticality, the body of the black dancer is distinguished by its diagonality" (Hill 2000, p. 200). The divided front where the lower body faces one direction and the upper body rotates to face another direction is a characteristic of jazz dance (Mahoney 1976, p. 15). There is in fact a diagonal movement in Godard's

Madison. It occurs on the finger snap which follows the first quarter-turn; the diagonal is the alternate movement prior to the second turn. When the torso twists in opposite direction from the lower body, the result is a disconnected appearance (LaPointe-Crump and Staley 1992, p. 85). This three-dimensional movement is often called a spiral by modern dancers or a corkscrew in show business. Such a spiral is also used by Godard in his non-dance movement strategies. For instance, Franz changes from standing to a low shooting stance by means of a spiral in the Billy the Kid sequence.

Despite the cropping of the actors' bodies, the viewer nonetheless is aware of the spatial relationship of the head, shoulders and arms. Space around the body has volume that can be projected on the flat screen by diagonal movement or design as mentioned earlier. This theoretical spatial configuration conveys a sense of immediacy to the film audience. It is as if each person performs in a cube with an imaginary diagonal line connecting opposite corners to form a diagonal cross of axes intersecting through the centre of the body (Bartenieff 1980, p. 32). During the accent on count two of the diagonal movement, the performers, in suit with the black tradition, involve their upper bodies in the dance. As the fingers emphasize count two with a snap, a rotation of the upper spine results in a diagonal line formed by the shoulders, forward arm and kicking leg that connects from deep-right-forward to high-left-backward.

This diagonal dynamic reflects other movement sequences of *Band of Outsiders*. For instance, in the beginning of the film when the men are driving to meet Odile for information that will abet their criminal intentions, the camera is placed so that Franz appears to drive his automobile along a diagonal pathway on the cinema screen. The diagonal motif is recurrent in Godard's film and seems to lend a sense of anticipation to the audience. Given the fact that Godard expects tremendous athletic dexterity on the part of his actors, we must recall the importance of diagonal planes of motion in sports. From a historical perspective, we can think back to the 1920s when white audiences seemed to feel that black jazz dance evoked great freedom of movement. Consequently, they tried to imitate the



steps; in the Charleston, for instance, the torso twists and tilts forward and backward towards the floor as if the performer were taking a chance in life by drinking illegal liquor and jazz dancing in a speakeasy. As LaPointe-Crump and Staley (1992, p. 58) argue, “the spectrum of energy in jazz dance is probably the most important element.” (In France, the Charleston was immortalized by American Josephine Baker.)

In Godard’s film, it is the diagonal movement that renders this version of the Madison distinct. The stepping for the diagonal movement consists of half of a Jazz Square floor pattern.<sup>6</sup> Godard’s reference to the Jazz Square is in and of itself a citation of American pop culture. Indeed, the complete Jazz Square, in which the dancer makes a series of four steps that form the corners of a square floor pattern, has become fairly mainstream in American dance culture; for instance, it is part of choreography for the non-dancing role of sleazy lawyer Billy Flynn in the Broadway show *Chicago* and is an important part of vocabulary in jazz dance textbooks.<sup>7</sup>

Each performer in *Band of Outsiders* dances the Madison solo. There is no partnering. The men leave the dance; first Franz, then Arthur. Odile continues alone until the music ends. She exits the dance by turning. The revolving action is consistent with the continuity of her seamless transitions between movements. Odile’s body undulates as she transfers her weight; free flow effort is a dominant characteristic. She completes each gesture fully; the expression is genuine and authentic as is her character in the film. She sustains the diagonal arm gesture with lyricism. Although Odile participates enthusiastically in the Madison, it is the men who emphasize making very loud sounds by forcefully exerting the weight of the entire body. As LaPointe-Crump and Staley (1992, p. 157) reminds us, “most emotional states like anger, happiness etc. are communicated non-verbally through the amount of energy exerted. Dancers call this ‘attack.’”

The loud accents of feet pounding, punching and thrusting against the dance floor communicate aggressive physicality that anticipates the forthcoming crime.<sup>8</sup> This brings to mind a prior incident when Franz body-slams Arthur sideways along the

banquette. In the Madison sequence, the men's behaviour is inappropriate to the café setting and to the performance of a line dance. The stamping sounds are too loud for even a tap dance, where the performer withholds the full weight of the body to crisply pat the floor.<sup>9</sup> Jazz tap should only be sprinkled with loud stomps for accent.

In praise of line dancing in general, it has been said: "Just dance as the spirit—or music—moves you" (Banks 1999, p. 98). This comment is at once evocative of Godard's Madison and of the broader American cultural sphere he references. Dance as a venue for inner expression is not new to American popular entertainment. Godard surely hoped for the Madison to achieve this purpose. A voiceover during the dance clues the audience to the director's intention and describes the characters' feelings at the moment of the dance. In this respect, in the Madison sequence, Godard is essentially following suit with Agnes DeMille, who used dance as a means to disclose the thoughts and feelings of a character in a Broadway show.<sup>10</sup>

When the voiceover informs the audience that it is time for another digression ("a second parenthesis," in French) to describe the sentiments of the characters, the viewer becomes cognizant of the relationship between the individual dance styles of the characters and their mental/emotional state at the moment. Arthur, the narrator stresses, "continually looks at his feet, yet is thinking of Odile's mouth, of her romantic kisses." As mentioned before, Odile wonders if the two men notice the movement of her breasts under her sweater. And lastly, Franz "thinks of nothing and everything, wondering if the world is becoming a dream or a dream is becoming the world." From this moment on, Franz's attitude towards Odile begins to change. He is more protective of her and appears to sense a growing affection for her. In the dance, he looks at her and attempts to synchronize his movements with hers. In sum, she leads and he follows. Arthur, on the other hand, indeed looks at his feet and seems disconnected from his companions. His movements, moreover, seem detached. His arms remain flat and fail to work accurately in the diagonal. On occasion, he is somewhat behind the count. Arthur, thus, is clearly not focusing

either on the moment or on the dance. The dance mirrors the dynamics of the film in which the relationship between Odile and Franz deepens and Arthur grows more aggressively critical of her, particularly during the robbery attempts. His disconnect-ness from the dance also foreshadows his gradual withdrawal from Odile and his ultimate demise.

Godard's Madison is clearly distinct from its American fore-runner. Yet it follows the same spirit of self-expression of individuals within a group, and therein lies the parallel with American culture. As Thorpe (1989, p. 13) foregrounds:

Whereas the dances of the white races are so often concerned with conveying grace, dignity, pride, or elegance, with Black dance, the concern is not with the self conscious presentation of something "beautiful" for the onlooker to observe, but almost wholly with what is felt, what emotion is being experienced by the dancer himself. The beauty of Black dance lies in its total lack of inhibition.

And like other movements in *Band of Outsiders*, it recontextualizes movements from American pop culture. In many respects, the freedom and creativity fostered by the Madison recalls Godard's own way of creating. The Madison, which establishes a basic structure setting the parameters in which improvisation can take place, reflects the director's comments on his artistic process. "I always like to impose restraints upon myself. The freer I am, the more I feel I must force certain basic conditions and rules upon myself" (Collet 1972, p. 42). The structured pattern of the choreography contrasts with the many digressions in the plot of the film. It also allows the performers freedom to dance as the spirit or music moves them. The dance provides emotional satisfaction to the audience because it allows the leading characters to exist as a harmonious and synchronized group—a *Band of Outsiders*.

On a broader level, Godard's Madison embodies a good number of the ideological and aesthetic premises of the *Nouvelle Vague*. Its discourse of improvisation reflects in a microcosm the freshness and innovation of the movement's creative process. The freedom of movement permitted by this line dance, moreover, is in keeping with the heightened freedom of camera

movement which served to contribute to the *Nouvelle Vague*'s originality. Of equal importance is that the dance permitted the direct communication of individual emotions, which recalls the movement's intent to posit the viewing experience as an intimate conversation between filmmakers and film viewers (Monaco 1976, p. 8). Indeed, it was in the structured pattern of an American rock and roll line dance that Godard himself found his freedom to imbue a story drawn from a B novel with the dynamics and spontaneity of the *Nouvelle Vague*.

If we expand on Corrigan's examination of the cult film as adopted child, we see that Godard's *Band of Outsiders* and, in particular, its Madison sequence, are the products of a number of displacements. First of all, the setting of Hitchens's novel is displaced from the United States to France, although the U.S. is forever present through the main characters' fascination with American culture. The film is thus a "mid-Atlantic" project in which the *Nouvelle Vague* is once again infused with healthy doses of Americana. Prior to its appearance in Godard's film, the Madison, as a cultural phenomenon, itself passed through a series of displacements, traveling from its origins among African-American teenagers in Washington, D.C., to its recoument by white teenagers on *American Bandstand*, and finally to its popularity abroad. And in this process, the Madison went from spontaneity to "it just ain't happenin'," and onward to a multiplicity of cultural discourses. With regard to the dance's presence in *Band of Outsiders*, the manner in which the sequence has been read and re-read over the course of the past five decades is especially complex. The emphasis the sequence places on both freedom and structure, individualism and group dynamics, speaks to Godard's own style of direction, to his melding of spontaneity and constraint. But moreover, the dance has come to embody the very aesthetics of the *Nouvelle Vague* at large and, more importantly, to *transcend* this context. Godard, whose intent was to make a "big million-dollar picture," essentially gave his film up for adoption. This is due largely to the Madison sequence, which itself has become synonymous with the film, all the while opening doors to expanded audiences and reception contexts. The Internet blog "Like Anna Karina's Sweater"

allows the Madison to stand in for the broader context of non-mainstream film and for lively critical debate on issues of cinema and reception. As Joshua Clover quips in the booklet accompanying the Criterion Collection DVD release of *Band of Outsiders*, “blame it on the Madison.”

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#### NOTES

1. < <http://filmbrain.typepad.com/> >
2. Constance Valdis Hill provides a list of Harold Nicholas's films prior to his trip to France. These include *Kid Million* (1935), *The Big Broadcast of 1936* (1936), *The Great American Broadcast* (1941), *Sun Valley Serenade* (1941) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943).
3. Such a variant can be viewed in “Lesson 3: ‘The Madison’” performed to “The Madison Time” in Mann's documentary, *The Twist* (1993).
4. A description of the movement is as follows: (1) step on the right foot to the right side; (2) step closed on the left foot; (3) step on the right foot to the right side; (4) kick the left leg across front as the hands clap loudly. The movement to the left side of the body is then repeated on counts 5-8. With the exception of the kick, this step is the same as The Big “M” described in *The Encyclopedia of Social Dance* (Butler and Butler 1975, p. 243). On count 4, Butler directs the mover to “touch the left foot together with the right.”
5. Such a turn occurs on counts 5, 6 of the following eight-count dance phrase, which can be summed up as follows: (1,2) step forward on the right foot and a hop on it; (3,4) step forward on the left foot, hop on it; (5,6) step on the right foot, jump landing on both feet; (7) weight on the balls of the feet, drop both heels loudly; (8) repeat heel drop. One must ask, however, if counts 7 and 8 are not, in essence, two more jumps. The director does not film the entire body; therefore, the viewer is hard pressed to decide. It is essential to note that the Cross in Front movement has hops and Making a “T” movement has two jumps (Butler and Butler 1975, pp. 242-243).
6. The diagonal movement stepping in half of a Jazz Square can be described as: (1) Step in place on the left foot; (2) kick the right leg diagonally front with the same arm reaching as the fingers snap; (3) step across in front on the right foot; (4) step back on the left foot. The “crossing in front, then stepping back” in *Band of Outsiders* resembles half of the Jazz Square movement of American Jazz Dance (LaPointe-Crump and Staley 1992, p. 119).
7. The traditional “complete” Jazz Square consists of: (1) Beginning on the right foot, step across to the left side; (2) step backwards on the left foot; (3) on the right foot, step open to the right side; and (4) step forward on the left foot (LaPointe-Crump and Staley 1992, p. 119).
8. According to movement theorist Rudolf Laban: “Effort is an outward manifestation of inner attitude” (quoted in Bartenieff 1980, p. 51). The motion factors time, weight and space are continuums, each having polar opposites. One end of the continuum resists the motion factor and is a fighting effort element; the other end of the continuum goes along with the motion factor and is an indulging effort element. The performance described emphasizes a combination of fighting effort elements called

“punching action drive”: accelerated time, strong weight or pressure, and single focus or direct space.

9. A tap sound uses the less violent dabbing action drive: accelerated time, light weight and direct space efforts (Bartenieff 1980, p. 58).

10. Although performed by accomplished dancers rather than singer/actors, Agnes DeMille's dream ballet in *Oklahoma!* can be deemed a benchmark for this process.

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## RÉSUMÉ

### Un Madison pour les exclus : danse et déplacements critiques dans *Bande à part* de Jean-Luc Godard

Svea Becker et Bruce Williams

Dans la perspective de Timothy Corrigan, qui définit le film-culte comme un « enfant adopté », *Bande à part* de Jean-Luc Godard peut être pensé comme un film ayant transcendé sa vocation initiale et ouvert la voie à différentes réceptions critiques et spectatorielles. Attiré par la littérature de gare et les films de série B, Godard avait comme intention première de faire un film grand-public. C'est précisément parce que *Bande à part* rend hommage au cinéma populaire américain qu'il est devenu un film-culte du cinéma marginal. Adaptation d'un roman de gare de Delores Hitchens, *Bande à part* rend hommage à la danse populaire américaine, et en particulier à la danse jazz, popularisée en Europe au début des années 1960. Dans une séquence du film, les protagonistes exécutent un Madison, une danse en ligne d'abord populaire au sein de la communauté afro-américaine, mais que les Blancs se sont rapidement accaparé par le truchement d'émissions de télévision comme *American Bandstand* et, en Europe, grâce au travail d'interprètes/enseignants comme Harold Nicholas. Cette liberté de mouvement au sein d'un environnement structuré, qui est propre au Madison, on la retrouve également dans la démarche de Godard, notamment dans l'importance qu'il accorde à l'agilité physique de ses acteurs. Dans la mesure où chaque personnage de la séquence du Madison danse « en solo », on peut dire que cette danse leur permet d'exprimer leurs émotions et états d'âmes respectifs. Mais le Madison leur permet aussi de s'affirmer en tant que groupe, et de faire en quelque sorte « bande à part ». Par ailleurs, cette séquence offre une synthèse de ce que représente la Nouvelle Vague, tant sur le plan esthétique que sur le plan idéologique, et est particulièrement représentative de la grande estime qu'a Godard pour la culture américaine. En termes de références intertextuelles, la séquence du Madison est la plus chargée du film, et c'est par ailleurs celle qui a suscité les réactions les plus variées chez la critique. Le Madison peut donc être considéré comme le véhicule grâce auquel *Bande à part* a pu devenir un archétype du cinéma marginal.