



# Pierrot le fou

Jean-Luc Godard

European Cinema Education  
for the Youth

PEDAGOGICAL PACKAGE



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## CINED: A COLLECTION OF FILMS FOR EUROPEAN CINEMA EDUCATION

CinEd is dedicated to the transmission of the Seventh Art as a cultural object and material to help conceive the world. To accomplish this, common teaching methods were developed based on a selection of films produced by the European partner countries. The approach is designed to be adapted to our time, characterized by fast, major and continuous change in the way we see, receive, broadcast and produce images. These images are seen on multiple different screens: from the biggest movie screens to TVs, computers, tablets and the smallest smartphones. Cinema is an art that is still young, and its end has already been predicted many times. Clearly, these predictions were unfounded.

These changes are affecting cinema: therefore, its transmission must take them into account, particularly the increasing fragmentation of film viewing on different screens. CinEd publications propose and assert a teaching approach that is sensitive, inductive, interactive and intuitive and provide knowledge, tools for analysis and the potential for dialogue between images and films. The works are considered on different scales, as a whole, in fragments and with different temporalities– stills, shots, sequences.

The educational booklets invite students to freely and flexibly engage with the films; one major challenge is to comprehend and relate to the cinematographic images using different approaches: description, an essential step for any analytical process, and the ability to extract and select images, organize, compare, and confront them. This includes images in the film being discussed and others, as well as images from all visual and narrative arts (photography, literature, painting, theater, cartoons...). The objective is that images will not be fleeting but rather make sense; cinema, in this way, is an especially invaluable synthetic art in that it builds and bolsters the perspective of young generations.

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## WHY THIS FILM TODAY?

Grasping cinema, experimenting with its possibilities are some of the principles that have guided the career of Jean-Luc Godard from his first short films in the 1950s up until today. Godard is emblematic as an auteur and also as an instigator of the New Wave. He has remained close to the original spirit of the New Wave, by always refusing to use mainstream, conventional cinematography, and by mastering and integrating technical innovations in his films. Jean-Luc Godard and the New Wave are part of a common cultural heritage that is both French, European, and international; for us, including one of his films in the CinEd Collection seemed essential and made perfect sense.

We chose *Pierrot le fou* with the same perspective, seeing it as a major work in his filmography and one that occupies a special place in his meandering and rich career. *Pierrot le fou* targets the utopia of total art: a film, a symphony, a poem, a painting, a novel – altogether blending the most legitimate arts (from Auguste Renoir to Louis-Ferdinand Céline) and popular culture (pulp fiction, comic books, advertisements). For Jean-Luc Godard, cinema is an art form that reflects both his own art and the present world, and is able to embrace contradictory forces: furiously romantic love confronted with the chaos of the world, the burlesque, and tragedy.

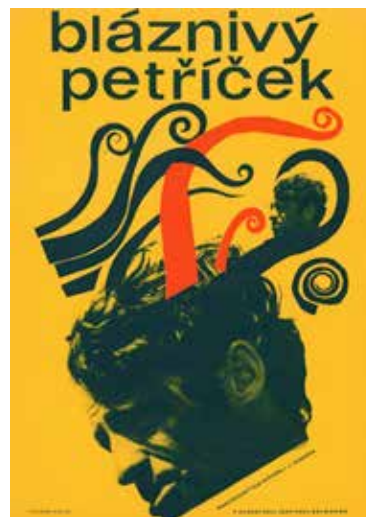
Jean-Luc Godard is sometimes considered difficult to understand; we consider him to be, above all, ambitious for his art and his public. Ambition also underlies the choice of this film: this booklet also hopes to contradict this cliché. Godard is a generous, playful, sensitive and welcoming director. The insightful themes of this 1965 film are still relevant to understanding today's world: the resistance of the real against utopia, the omnipresence of violence, the conflict between materialism and idealism, the difficulty of being, and the grandeur of feelings.



French poster



Spanish poster



Czechoslovakian poster

## TECHNICAL DATA SHEET

**Country:** France - Italy

**Runtime:** 107 minutes

**Format:** Color – 2.35:1 – 35 mm

**Budget:** 2,500,000 French francs

**World Premiere:** August 29, 1965 (Venice Film Festival)

**French Release Date:** November 5, 1965 (298,621 admissions)

**Director:** Jean-Luc Godard

**Assistant Directors:** Jean-Pierre Léaud, Philippe Foubastié

**Screenplay:** Jean-Luc Godard,

Adapted from Lionel White's *Obsession*

**Production:** Films Georges de Beauregard

**Production Company:** Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica

**Original score:** Antoine Duhamel; song lyrics and melodies by Serge Rezvani

**Cinematographer:** Raoul Coutard

**Editing:** Agnès Guillemot

**Sound:** René Levert

**Set decoration:** Pierre Guffroy

**Cast:** Jean-Paul Belmondo (Ferdinand Griffon, aka Pierrot), Anna Karina (Marianne Renoir), Graziella Galvani (Maria, Ferdinand's wife), Dirk Sanders (Fred), Jimmy Karoubi (dwarf, leader of gangsters), Roger Dutoit and Hans Meyer (gangsters), Samuel Fuller (himself), Princess Aïcha Abadie (herself), Alexis Poliakov (sailor), Raymond Devos (man alone at the port), Lazlo Szabo (Lazlo Kovacs)

The Couple and  
Romanticism

Address and  
Language

Pamphlet



Road movie

Actors  
and the Muse

Color  
and Arts

**Pierrot** : “All she thinks about is fun.”

*Later in the scene:*

- **Marianne asks** : “Who are you talking to?”
- **Pierrot replies** : “To the audience.”

## FOCUS

### ADDRESS AND LANGUAGE

Pierrot's camera eye addresses the spectator, thus destabilizing the classical fictional pact. Pierrot also underlines the film's narrative experimentations, rooted in the modernity that emerged after World War II and continued until the 1970s. This is cinema that is self-conscious, questioning itself and the spectator. *Pierrot le fou* mixes all levels of language (from informal spoken language to literary quotations and poetry) and moves from the spoken word into song.

### ACTORS AND THE MUSE

Before pursuing a successful popular career, Jean-Paul Belmondo largely inspired the New Wave. He was discovered in *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless* - 1959), the first full-length film by Jean-Luc Godard. Anna Karina was more than the director's companion – she was a true muse, and in this passionate romantic and artistic relationship, real life and art were conflated.

### ROAD MOVIE

A director and a cinephile, Jean-Luc Godard started as a critic before turning to directing, enthusiastically referencing other films. He greatly admired American cinema, which he often referenced in the film; one might think he had the story of *Bonnie & Clyde* in mind, which would be brought to the screen two years later by Arthur Penn. Godard also chose to use a very large image format – 2.35:1 – which enhanced the locations and gave an epic dimension to the story.

### THE COUPLE AND ROMANTICISM

Pierrot flees convention and bourgeois comfort; *Pierrot le fou* is the simple story of a couple in love, who withdraw from a decadent world to live out their love as modern Robinson Crusoes. The couple's bond is as passionate as it is dysfunctional, with Pierrot dreamy and contemplative, and Marianne versatile and frivolous. With its nonchalant air, the film is full of romance, at once playful and furious, dark and desperate.

### PAMPHLET

An air of freedom blows through the film, its backdrops and its form. While Jean-Luc Godard hadn't yet entered his militant period (1967-1969), he then stated his commitment to the left. He made a virulent attack on contemporary social and political norms with this film, responding with a libertarian and nihilist tone; consequently minors were not admitted to see *Pierrot le fou* "due to the film's intellectual and moral anarchy."

### COLOR AND ARTS

Red – the car upholstery, the stripes in Anna Karina's dress – is one of the bright colors that punctuate the film. As a child, Jean-Luc Godard dreamed of being a painter. *Pierrot le fou* undoubtedly represents the film where he best positions himself as a painter through his choice to use chromatic colors and pictorial compositions. Overall, faced with a decadent era, the director called on all forms of art, including literature, the novel, and poetry.

## SYNOPSIS

Ferdinand Griffon (1) doesn't get along with his wife anymore. Marianne, babysitting his children while the couple attends a cocktail party, is actually a former girlfriend and a great love. Leaving the sinister, mundane soirée, Pierrot joins Marianne and takes her home. They spend the night together, but Marianne is involved in arms trafficking via Fred, who pretends to be her brother. Leaving a dead body and an unconscious man in their wake, they head for the South. Hunted by the police, the couple loses their stash of money, steals a car, splits with the world, and tries to create a romantic, existential utopia. Like shipwrecked sailors, they live on a deserted island so they can love each other far away from the world. But Marianne comes to miss civilization, and soon her shady dealings resurface. She disappears, joining her "brother" Fred and his band of thugs. Caught in the crossfire, Pierrot is tortured and beaten by a rival group. They lose sight of each other. Pierrot tries to forget Marianne and becomes a seaside laborer. But she reappears, involving Pierrot in Fred's dealings, who we soon find out is her lover, not her brother. They plan a hold-up and prepare to settle the scores with the enemy gang. Marianne flees the scene with Fred, and Pierrot follows them on an island. A gunfight starts, and Fred is killed. Marianne is badly wounded by a shot from Pierrot, and breathes her last breath. Desperate, the hero gets his hands on some "nitramite" and commits suicide by blowing himself up.

(1) Since everyone calls him Pierrot and this name appears in the title of the film, we chose to do the same in this booklet.

## CONTEXT: 1965

### TENSIONS AND FISSURES

1965 is not as emblematic as 1968 or 1969. Europe and the rest of the world were divided ideologically; recent decolonizations did not negate the bipolarization of the globe between the United States, the leader of capitalism, and the Soviet Union, the communist model – simultaneously competing with Chinese communism extolled by Mao from 1956 on. While this world did not seem immutable in 1965, it did seem stable, with Charles de Gaulle firmly established as the French Head of State. Like the Western world, France set off on the *Trente Glorieuses* (Thirty Glorious Years - 1945-1973), a period of growth and prosperity (**See Dialogues pg. 22-25**), even if De Gaulle intended to defend France's relative independence between the two opposing blocs, by establishing political ties with Communist countries.



Warren K. Leffer, Protest against the Vietnam War in Washington in 1967

As always, Godard was tuned in to the present – 1965: civil war in Yemen, the United States interfering in Santo-Domingo and deploying troops to Vietnam, bombarding the country with napalm – a conflict that led to protest movements among young men and women in the West. The art world derided the consumerist paradigm and the ideology of progress (Jacques Tati in 1958 with *My Uncle*; Georges Perec's novel *Things: A Story of the Sixties* in 1965, where a young couple gruesomely accumulates symbols of consumer society in their home). Gaullism was thus seen by a portion of the French population as a normative, outdated regime. While, several years after the end of the Algerian War and Algerian independence (1962), De Gaulle was reelected in December 1965, he did not get a majority of votes in the first round of the election, losing votes to François Mitterrand. Mitterrand, as the only candidate on the left, was supported by a large contingent of young people, primarily those whose anger was brewing in Universities where the demographic explosion linked to the baby boom was starting.

### THE NEW WAVE, YOUTH READY TO TAKE ACTION

The New Wave is deeply connected to youth. The New Wave is rooted in modern cinematography, but neither personifies nor initiates it; Roberto Rossellini, for example, preceded it. Jean Douchet nuances this symbolic aspect: "It seems that relatively similar causes, in different contexts, produced comparable effects." The movement originated among film critics who contributed to the *Cahiers du Cinéma magazine*. Their writings gave birth to the "policy of auteurs", which legitimized cinema as a form of art on the same level as literature, theater, painting or music. Alfred Hitchcock or Howard Hawks were thus the auteurs of works of art that spread a vision of the world. What also distinguished this group was that they worked as critics, while aspiring to make films, and these uncompromising critics targeted films with a "French quality" (prestigious adaptations of literary classics) made by the "professionals of the profession" – in the 1950s, an aspiring French filmmaker had to toil for years as an assistant before starting to direct his own films.

The term "New Wave" first appeared in 1957 as the title of a summary of a *Report on Youth* by journalist Françoise Giroud. In 1958, the critic Pierre Billard applied this term to the desire for renewal expressed by these young directors, who were then making short films (1). More than a homogenous aesthetical manifesto, the trend led to a gaggle of young filmmakers trying their hand in 1959 and 1960, many of whom would soon fall off the radar. The New Wave signifies the will to free oneself from norms and current obstacles to cinematography: film the new generation – new and young actors, film on a tight schedule with a smaller team, low-tech methods and reduced budgets, outside of the studio (in the street and each other's' apartments) and take liberties with conventions in storytelling.

### 1965: THE NEW WAVE EBBS AND FLOWS

The New Wave debuted to the world when François Truffaut's *Les 400 coups* (*The 400 Blows*) triumphed at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959. The New Wave was subject to severe backlash in 1960, when its films were disparaged by critics pointing out commercial failures, jaded pride and the amateurism of these young directors who wanted to revolutionize cinema. In 1965, the term was barely in use anymore, people went separate ways, but the influence of the New Wave was important in the 1960s and remains so today.

In Italy, Pier Paolo Pasolini recognized the decisive importance of Godard's *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless* - 1959); in the liberated narrative style, he identified an opening for poetic art. It is also significant that the New Wave crossed the Iron Curtain, notably in Poland where Jerzy Skolimowski (*Bariera* - *The Barrier*, 1963) filmed Polish youth in his groundbreaking productions. Similarly, in Czechoslovakia, probably the country where the spread of the New Wave was the most significant, with the rise of Jan Nemeč, Vera Chytilová, Milos Forman and others. The term "New Wave" is frequently used to characterize the emergence of young generations, such as Romanian filmmakers who entered the scene between 2005 and 2007 (Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Cristi Puiu).

## THE AUTEUR: FILMMAKER, CREATOR AND ARTIST

Jean-Luc Godard is one of the great masters of the Seventh Art, a major artist whose works, since the late 1950s, have continued to fascinate, surprise, divide, and raise questions – above and beyond the cinema industry. Godard's genius is four-fold: his intuitive understanding of his era – many films seem to be fascinating seismographs; constant experimentation with the aesthetic, narrative and technical possibilities of cinema; media communication, and provocation.

### CINEMA, A SUBSTITUTE FAMILY

Jean-Luc Godard was born in 1930 in Paris, with French-Swiss nationality. As a child, he lived by Lake Geneva, and he has lived there since 1977, in increasing isolation. His social roots mixed fortune and culture, and nothing seemed to push Godard to a type of art then considered minor. However, he would become “a breakthrough heir» (3) in relation to his peers, with a taste for confrontation and transgression.



Jean-Luc Godard acting in *Paris nous appartient* (*Paris Belongs to Us*) by Jacques Rivette

As others do with religion, he became a devout cinephile in the 1940s, in the heart of film clubs experiencing a postwar golden age, and at Henri Langlois's Cinemathèque française, where he gained decisive knowledge. Godard's circle was eventually joined by François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer... In 1952, he debuted in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, a magazine then headed by André Bazin and contributed to by this group of filmmakers. For Godard, as for others, it was a substitute family. On the magazine's office, he said, “It was our only home, and I was there more than the others.” (4).

### CINEMA, AN ACT OF CREATION

Godard as critic foreshadowed the filmmaker, through his love of aphorisms and catchy phrasing. In 1985, he spoke of his relationship with the writing process: “It was always tedious and at the last minute. [...] There is pain, but it can be overcome by the pleasure felt in any act of creation” (5). The filmmaker here spoke, not only of the writing process, but also of the unique atmosphere of his film sets, where long moments of doubt and waiting are interspersed with sudden inspiration and fast execution.

He started by directing short films: *Charlotte et Véronique ou Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (*Charlotte and Veronica or All the Boys Are Called Patrick* - 1959), *Charlotte et son Jules* (*Charlotte and Her Boyfriend*) in 1958, and, co-directed with Truffaut the same year, *Une histoire d'eau* (*A Story of Water*). These films sowed the seeds for his first feature-length film, *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless* - 1959-1960): a love of quotation (from literature or film), disruption in rhythm, challenging conventions of storytelling and editing (continuity errors). For Godard, cinema is a form of art that thinks; his films would be precipitates and verbal and visual collages, characterized by heterogeneity, flash and possible meanings. *À bout de souffle* is the start of an astonishing creation cycle: 15 feature-length films and 7 short films between 1959 and 1967.

### A MEANDERING CAREER: RADICALISM, MILITANTISM, RETREAT AND RETURN

Radicality was aesthetically present in the early stages of his filmography: in 1965, it became political. In any case, his radicality turned into a commitment to the Left, while Godard had formerly been seen as a dandy whose taste for provocation was identified with a nebulous right-wing anarchism. Although his left-leaning beliefs only increased with time, he never lost his remarkable ability to diagnose his era – *La Chinoise* (1967), a troubling prophecy of May 1968. The events of 1968 were a disruption, since Godard then disappeared from the industry to move towards militantism - between 1969 and 1973, with Jean-Pierre Gorin, he signed collective films under the pseudonym “Dziga Vertov”. This withdrawal continued in the 1970s when he moved to Grenoble and tackled video as an artistic utopia with a high media profile.

All the while experimenting with video, with *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998) as the masterpiece, he returned to traditional cinema with *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (*Every Man for Himself*), selected for the official competition at Cannes in 1980. The event was sizable and in France, the public was in attendance, with 233,000 spectators. Godard was back in the game and his creativity once again flourished: 16 feature-length films from 1981 to 2014, numerous short films, essays and filmed screenplays. While his public tended to dwindle over time, Godard, today aged 85, remains a creative force – any cinematographic attempt sharply and vigorously experiments with the possibilities of his art.

## ITS PLACE IN THE CANON: PIERROT LE FOU, A COMPREHENSIVE WORK

The career of Jean-Luc Godard is so long that it is difficult to grasp it without betraying its extraordinary richness. It is easy, nevertheless, to recognize *Pierrot le fou* as a major milestone of his filmography, a seminal film that quickly became legendary, the recapitulation of his first creative cycle.

### PREMEDITATED CREATION

During these years, Godard completed projects at a frantic pace, often in a very short amount of time: from the start of planning to the premiere, *Une femme mariée* (*A Married Woman* - 1964) was made in four months! He said of *Pierrot le fou*, “I can’t say that I didn’t work on it, but I didn’t prethink it. Everything came at the same time: it’s a film without a script, editing, or mixing. [...] Since my first film, I have always said to myself, I am going to work on the screenplay more and, every time, I see that I have another chance to improvise more, to create everything on set, that’s to say without applying cinema to a certain purpose.” (6)

Godard learned to draw and paint as a child (see Pathways, pgs. 26-28); the writer (see Cinema Questions – 1, pg. 14) and the painter are both central figures in *Pierrot le fou*. Often when he speaks of his creative process, the director tends to write his own myth. Here, he greatly exaggerates, since *Pierrot le fou* was a project prepared long in advance. While his filming techniques did not fundamentally change, (incorporating passers-by or crew members in the film, rejecting certain scenes, improvising others, long moments of hesitation and sudden inspiration), he had a stricter approach to the different stages than usual, over a period of 18 months. As early as March 1964, he purchased the rights of a Lionel White novel, *Obsession*. He considered the plot to be similar to the plot of *Lolita*, a Vladimir Nabokov novel published in 1955.

Wishing to use the framework of skillfully written detective fiction to better distance himself from it, Godard moves the action to France but stays close to Lionel White’s novel. Even more surprising was that out of the 27 sequences of the 50-page script, one of Godard’s longest ones, most of these sequences were used in the film. Only after filming was completed was the title *Pierrot le fou*, «Crazy Pete», chosen, a reference to the French Public Enemy No. 1 in the late 1940s, a fiendish, violent and antisocial gangster who had formerly been a member of the Gestapo. This title expresses Godard’s desire to protest Gaullist France, its normative society, deals, underground violence (arms trafficking and torture refer to the Algerian War). The name of the heroine who loves yet betrays Pierrot is none other than Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic.

### RECAPITULATE, A FIRST TIME

After failing to cast certain actors (Godard had first thought of Hollywood star Richard Burton for the main role!), the director opted for the duo of Belmondo and Karina, which furthers the idea that this is a recapitulative film: the actor who debuted in *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) was paired with the actress who had become the director’s muse in 1960 (*Le petit soldat – The Little Soldier*), then very soon his wife. He was “Pygmalion” (7) to this woman-child (there was a ten-year age difference), who was presented as such, with her stuffed toy, in *Pierrot le fou*. For the couple, there was no distinction between life and cinema. The joy and suffering in their passionate, tumultuous relationship are played out both on film and in real life.



Anna Karina looks directly at the camera in *Pierrot le fou*



In 1965, their artistic collaboration continued even after their divorce, and did not prevent them from having, according to accounts, a happy film set. As always, intimacy occurs naturally in the film and it is hard to overlook how *Pierrot le fou* takes stock of their tempestuous love – a versatile relationship full of separations and reconciliations (**see Analysis... of a Shot, pg. 20**), with cruel and tender conflicts. One can often see, when Karina looks directly at the camera, a flirty mating display between the filmmaker and his muse. Who is really saying these lines, Pierrot or Godard? “I can never have a real conversation with you, you never have ideas, only feelings.”

Besides these two actors, Godard worked with his usual cinematographer, Raoul Coutard, who used Techniscope for the first time (8). Techniscope is a flexible, budget-friendly film format, difficult to use with proper lighting. The team was small, with Jean-Pierre Léaud as an assistant. Suzanne Schiffman, the script girl played a major role for a film shot haphazardly – chronologically and geographically. This suited Godard, who was struck with anguish at the idea of a film made in advance.

(1) Jean Douchet, *Nouvelle Vague*, 1998, Cinémathèque française / Hazan, pg. 273.

(2) Claude Chabrol even directed *Le beau Serge* (*Handsome Serge*), his first feature-length film, in 1957.

(3) Antoine de Baecque, *Godard*, Grasset, pgs. 15-44.

(4) “Entretien avec Alain Bergala”, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1985, pg. 13.

(5) *Ibid*, pgs. 11-12.

(6) “Parlons de Pierrot”, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 171, October 1965.

(7) Antoine de Baecque, *Godard*, Grasset, pg. 179.

(8) Amazingly, *Pierrot le fou* was first going to be shot in black and white.

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

*This filmography is necessarily selective, given the large number of Godard's films (103, 42 of which are feature-length films), so it was decided to select twenty films that represent every one of Godard's creative periods.*

*À bout de souffle* (*Breathless* - 1959-60)

*Une femme est une femme* (*A Woman is a Woman* - 1961)

*Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live* - 1962)

*Les Carabiniers* (*The Carabineers* - 1963)

*Le Mépris* (*Contempt* - 1963)

*Une femme mariée* (*A Married Woman* - 1964)

*Alphaville* (1965)

*Pierrot le fou* (1964)

*Masculin féminin* (*Masculine-Feminine* - 1966)

*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her* - 1966)

*La Chinoise* (1967)

*One + One* (1968)

*Vent d'Est* (*Wind from the East* - 1969, signed by Groupe Dziga Vertov)

*Vladimir et Rosa* (*Vladimir and Rosa* - 1970, signed by Groupe Dziga Vertov)

*Tout va bien* (co-directed with Jean-Pierre Gorin)

*Comment ça va* (*How's It Going* - 1976, co-directed with Anne-Marie Miéville)

*France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1979, co-directed with Anne-Marie Miéville)

*Sauve qui peut* (*la vie*) (*Every Man For Himself* - 1979)

*Passion* - (1982)

*Je vous salue Marie* (*Hail Mary* - 1985)

*Soigne ta droite* (*Keep Your Right Up* - 1987)

*Allemagne année 90 neuf zéro* (*Germany Year 90 nine zero* - 1991)

*JLG / JLG. Autoportrait de décembre* (JLG/JLG. Self-portrait in December - 1995)

*Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998)

*Éloge de l'amour* (*In Praise of Love* - 2001)

*Notre musique* (*Our Music* - 2004)

*Film Socialisme* (2010)

*Adieu au langage* (*Goodbye to Language* - 2014)

## INSPIRATIONS

### REFERENCES

We emphasized how important Godard's love of film was to his career. *Pierrot le fou* is thus inhabited by memories of cinema, with abundant references, sometimes explicit (*Pépé le Moko*, directed by Julien Duvivier) or merely suggested by situations (the lovers far removed from the world refer to the lovers in Ingmar Bergman's *Monika*). These are just two examples among many possible references.

#### Railroads

- 1 - *L'Homme à la caméra*, caméra (Man with a Movie Camera), Dziga Vertov, 1929
- 2 - *Pierrot le fou*
- 3 - *The General*, Buster Keaton, 1926

#### Weapons

- 4 - *Gun Crazy*, Joseph H. Lewis (1950)
- 5 - *Pierrot le fou*
- 6 - *Scarface*, Howard Hawks, 1932

### A COMPREHENSIVE WORK

*Pierrot le fou* reiterates an intense cycle of creation, Godard repeats themes, motifs and situations he had already explored in earlier films.

#### Tragic Love

- 1 - *Pierrot le fou*
- 2-3 - *À bout de souffle*, 1959-1960

#### Torture et Violence

- 4 - *Pierrot le fou*
- 5 - *Les Carabiniers*, 1963
- 6 - *Le Petit Soldat*, 1960

#### Writing, lettering

- 7 - *Alphaville*, 1964
- 8 - *Pierrot le fou*
- 9 - *Une femme est une femme*, 1961

### REFERENCES



1



2



3



4



5



6



1



2



3



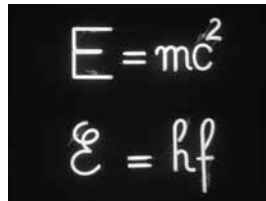
4



5



6



7



8



9

## ACCOUNTS: THE PIERROT LE FOU REVELATION

### CHANTAL AKERMAN

*Chantal Akerman (1950-2015) was a trailblazing female director, with a filmography that covers many fields: fiction, documentaries, art installations. Her works include Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975), News From Home (1977), Golden Eighties (1986), D'Est (From the East - 1993), De l'autre côté (From the Other Side - 2002), No Home Movie (2015).*

*"When I saw Pierrot le fou, I was 15 years old. I didn't know who Godard was, I barely knew that there was an "auteur's cinema". When I went to the cinema, I usually saw La Grande Vadrouille (Don't Look Now... We're Being Shot At! (1)), Disney movies, just to have fun, go out in a group and get ice cream, but certainly not to be emotionally shocked or to see a work of art, I didn't know that movies could be works of art. So I went to see this film because I liked the title, Pierrot le fou... And I saw the film, and it was something else, totally different. I was under the impression that he was speaking to me, that it was poetry. And since before I wanted to make films, I wanted to be a writer, I felt in this film something that achieved great moments of writing, but by another way, and this other way seemed even more fascinating to me. And when I left the cinema, I said, "I want to make films too." (2)*



The shock felt after discovering *Pierrot le fou* would continue since Chantal Akerman's first short film, *Saute ma ville (Blow Up My Town - 1969, above)*, was a burlesque, tragic fantasy. Akerman acted in the film herself, which often made references to Godard's film, notably the creative sound mixing. She climbs the stairs to her apartment while singing, she soon locks herself in her kitchen and performs actions that become more and more odd and absurd, as if to contest the way objects are used and subject them to her whim. The initial burlesque tone evolves into anxiety, where rage against the world and its norms is proclaimed, and the film ends with suicide – a big explosion.

(1) A comedy by Gérard Oury with Louis de Funès, it was one of the biggest popular successes of French cinema (17 million spectators).

(2) Quotes are from the bonus features of The Criterion Collection editions of Chantal Akerman's films.

### ALAIN BERGALA: ON THE SET OF PIERROT LE FOU

*Critic, essayist, teacher and filmmaker, Alain Bergala has extensively studied and written about Jean-Luc Godard, who had many conversations with him, primarily from an editorial point-of-view. He oversaw the publication of Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard (2 volumes, 1985 – 1998), wrote Nul mieux que Godard (1999) as well as Godard au travail, les années 1960 (2006). This is his account of his first "meeting" with the creator of Pierrot le fou.*

*"I was a literature student – because we didn't have film studies then – and for us, Godard was THE director, he was a god. The idea of even seeing him was weird. But I was born in the Var and learned to swim near the Giens Peninsula, where we used to go with my parents. Some of the locations where the film was shot, they're mine, they're the setting of my childhood. It was a cousin of mine, a chef in a hotel on Porquerolles Island, who called me because he knew I was very much interested in cinema. He told me, "A director is going to come and film, named Godard..." I kept bugging him, telling him to let me know when they would arrive. And one day he called to tell me they had arrived.*

*I borrowed a 16mm camera from a friend, bought a roll of film and brought my own simple camera. I set up near where boats docked, so I could be sure not to miss them. And they arrived, I saw Raoul Coutard get out the equipment, etc. I was kind of far away, then I went closer to the hotel, I felt a little like a sleuth... They came out, I saw Anna Karina, Belmondo, Godard. The first scene they filmed was landing on the island, and the shot was of their feet. But on the beach, no one else was there, so I was visible. I recognized Jean-Pierre Léaud, who was a sort of assistant. I asked him, "Could you ask Godard if I could stay and take some pictures?" Léaud went to ask Godard, then he came back and said, "Godard said yes, on the condition that you don't smoke..." This didn't make any sense. So, I was able to film – which was unfortunately lost – and take photographs.*

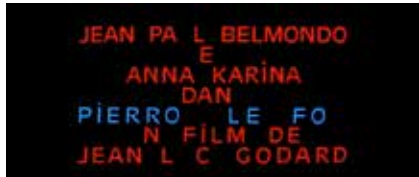
*I only stayed a half-day, but this obviously greatly influenced me – I saw everyone, I saw Godard set up for a tracking shot, how he worked, etc. It was something I did a lot after having this foundational experience: go to film sets, then return to compare the film representation with the reality of the landscape. It was also extremely powerful that the artist I admired most in the world came to "my" territory."*

*Account from February 19, 2016.*

## CHAPTERS IN THE FILM

The chapters below are a useful tool for locating sequences in the film.

*Note: When the opening title appears, Marianne and Pierrot's voiceovers declaim chapters, which do not correspond to the chapters outlined below. Since the sound effects, voices and inserts are often used at the end of sequences to transition to the next one, we had to make several "random" choices. Only certain inserts were included because it was not possible to mention all of them (paintings, texts).*



1 – Opening Credits (0 – 1:05)



2 – Maps of Paris, reading in the bath, getting ready to leave for the reception; a babysitter arrives to watch Pierrot's children. It's Marianne, whom he knows from before (1:06 – 5:06)



3 – A socialite cocktail party: a director defines cinema, the other guests speak in advertising slogans (5:07 – 8:45)



4 – Marianne and Pierrot, five years later, still have feelings for each other and leave Paris together (8:46 – 12:36)



5 – Morning at Marianne's: a dead body in the living room, and a love song (12:37 – 16:35)



6 – Marianne's Shady Dealings: a criminal couple with no money and on the run (16:36 – 21:40)



7 – Travel by night and tenderness: eternal love (21:41 – 23:28)



8 – In a small town: telling stories to earn money (23:29 – 25:48) – see Analysis ... of a Sequence, pgs. 17-18



9 – Fake accident and a trip across France (25:49 – 30:36)



10 – Theft of the Ford Galaxy and driving "wherever": straight into the sea (30:37 – 36:53) – see Analysis ... of a Frame pg. 19



11 – Like Shipwrecked Sailors: Modern Robinson Crusoes (36:54 – 41:51)



12 – Reading and eating: "perfect happiness!" (41:52 – 44:34)



13 – “What can I do?»: conflicting Robinson Crusoes (44:35 – 50:21)



14 – Back to the Real World: theater and the Vietnam War (50:22 – 55:45)



15 – Musical number under the pines: “My Line of Fate” (55:46 – 59:10)



16 – Confession, destiny and the return of dirty business (59:11 – 1:03:54)



17 – Pierrot at the bar, Marianne is falling into the wrong hands (1:03:55 – 1:06:24)



18 – Save Marianne: Pierrot throws himself into the lion’s den (1:06:25 – 1:09:50)



19 – Pierrot is tortured, Pierrot is suicidal (1:09:51 – 1:12:55)



20 – Pierrot works as a seaside laborer in Toulon and Marianne returns (1:12:56 – 1:16:52)



21 – Marianne and Pierrot together again embarking on dangerous adventures (1:16:53 – 1:20:35)



22 – Marianne’s former life and her brother’s dealings (1:20:36 – 1:24:58)



23 – Choreography on a beach and a successful set-up (1:24:59 – 1:29:22)



24 – Bowling and separation, cheating and set-back (1:29:23 – 1:33:51) – see **Analysis... of a Shot pg. 20**



25 – The Sadness of Love: “Do you love me?” (1:33:52 – 1:38:05)



26 – Tragic fate and shootout: Marianne’s death (1:38:06 – 1:41:33)



27 – Face-painting and “nitramite”: Pierrot’s explosive suicide (1:41:34 – 1:45:11)



28 – Closing Credits (1:45:12 – End)

## CINEMA QUESTIONS

This chapter raises specific cinema issues that come up throughout the film. It also refers to the different levels of analysis and to the Pedagogical Activities (see pgs. 30-31).

### 1 – SHOWING-HIDING: THE WRITTEN WORD ONSCREEN

#### A FILM/BOOK OR A FILM TO BE READ

In *Pierrot le fou*, there are multiple quotes:

- From many writers (Balzac, Baudelaire, Jules Verne, “a small port like in Conrad’s novels”, “a sailboat like in Stevenson’s novels”)
- book titles (Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Les Mots*, published in 1964, and Georges Perec’s *Les Choses*, released at the same time as *Pierrot le Fou*, Arthur Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer* (A Season in Hell), Pierrot’s line “to the end of the night” refers to *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (Journey to the End of the Night) by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, one of Godard’s favorite writers, who named the main character Ferdinand)
- the spectator reads words onscreen and fragments are recited such as “Ah! That fatal five in the afternoon” (excerpt from the poem *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* by Federico Garcia Lorca)

This litany of literary quotations is not surprising coming from Godard, who responded to a question about the pseudonym (Hans Lucas) he used to author some of his articles, saying, “[...] this had nothing to do with my family, it was more to make literary references because at the time, I had the ambition of getting a novel published with Gallimard” (1). It is clear that Pierrot the writer – who bases his utopia on literature – is Godard’s alter ego as a novelist, whose hand presumably writes in Pierrot’s journal (2). While *Pierrot le fou* is seen, understood and heard, it is also read: literary ambition joins pictorial depiction (see **Pathways pgs. 26-28**). Godard thus added a fourth component – the written word - which classically was not used in film (except in credits) because it lacks a visual dimension.

#### METHODS FOR PRESENTING WRITTEN WORDS ONSCREEN

*\*Reading: written words are not shown, but revealed by voices*



Pierrot reads Marianne’s inventory poem from his journal

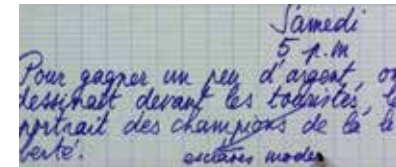


Pierrot reads from Guignol’s Band by Louis-Ferdinand Céline

*\* Written words visualized*



Poetic play on words



Political Satire

*\* Words-form-message*



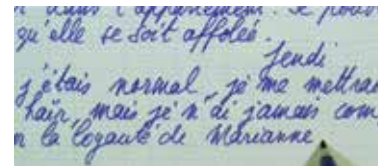
Neon sign: “RIVIERA”  
reframed as “VIE” (“LIFE”)



Pierrot literally  
calls for help

#### “SHOWING-HIDING” WITH WORDS

The use of words onscreen creates tension: we are granted access to dramatic elements that were hidden before being unveiled, retroactively and visually. To begin with, the visibility of the written words refers to a desire that cinema be a pure creation, where all events would be part of the same momentum, the same temporality (see **Its Place in the Canon pg. 9**). In a way, Godard shows things that are normally hidden in a film; in Pierrot’s journal appear elements of a script that is both being written and being filmed. The presence of the written word also recalls the use of cue cards in silent films, which did not substitute for what was “shown” but for what couldn’t be heard. The third dimension of this method of showing the written word enables the reveal of something that is, by definition, not able to be shown – the innermost part of any being: interiority. Indeed, Pierrot’s journal has an introspective value that relays his voiceover.



“Marianne’s Loyalty”



Marianne on Fred:  
«Yes, he’ll do anything I ask him.»

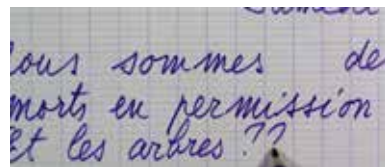
This retrospective approach – moving to and fro between written words and visibility - raises the question of Marianne’s loyalty. It is first mentioned in Pierrot’s journal (**Sequence 19**), but betrayal and duplicity only become effective much later (**Sequence 22**) – a 15-minute delay between the words onscreen and the “seen/heard”. Also, we note that part of the words is visible while part of them is cut off, which prevents us from knowing for certain whether Pierrot refuses to question Marianne’s loyalty or if he has acknowledged her betrayal. Thus the written words are both something which is shown in advance and something hidden.

The written words also often act as a harbinger, sometimes literally as a “road sign”.



«Risk of Death»

The same is true for the combinations of visual and textual elements, which also foreshadow the outcome of the film.



The words onscreen in *Pierrot le fou* act as a Cassandra (see **Analysis... of a Shot pg. 20**), foreshadowing a tragedy not yet consummated, while Marianne and Pierrot move toward their catastrophic, fatal destiny. While romance dominates the first part of the film, death is literally written early on.

## 2 - ACTORS OF EVERY KIND

### A MOTLEY TROUPE

The word “motley” accurately describes Jean-Luc Godard’s approach to actors, and *Pierrot le fou* is faithful to this idea by mixing actors and non-actors – people whose specialty was not always cinema, like Jean Renoir did in *French Cancan* (1954). This approach is based on a desire to play with differences, potential hurdles, and to welcome accidents, reality, and a kind of spontaneity (see **Analysis... of a Sequence pgs. 17-18**). But this

does not at all involve duplicating “real life”; every actor has a singular presence, even those with the smallest parts, notably in a non-naturalist dimension – phrasing and gestures.

Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo alternate moments of stillness and abrupt accelerations, creating ruptures in the film’s rhythm. Jean-Paul Belmondo does so in a mix of nonchalance and physical efforts, his almost elastic body often resembling a cartoon; Anna Karina, sensual but somewhat severe, often moves around in a sinuous, circular manner. Besides the couple, the cast is a completely heterogeneous troupe: Fred is played by a choreographer (Dirk Sanders), American director Sam Fuller plays himself, defining cinema in this improvised line: “It’s a battlefield: love, hate, violence, action, death. In one word: emotion!” The fantastic Lebanese Princess Aïcha also plays herself; the man overwhelmed by the refrain that he alone hears is played by Raymond Devos. This sequence features a sketch written and performed by the comedian. Godard discovered him in a Paris cabaret and decided to include him in the film for a ready-made performance, a “happening” (see **Pathways pgs 26-28**).

### ACTED, DANCED

Jacques Demy directed an important film in 1964: *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*), a musical entirely sung (without any spoken dialogue). The classic Hollywood musical marks each moment where words lead into a song – the music starts up, the actors change their movements into a dance. *Pierrot le fou* includes many transitions from acting to dancing: they are obvious during the three musical sequences. However, Godard clearly contests these conventions. The first sequence (**5**, see **Chapters of the Film pgs. 12-13**) features a song that isn’t really accompanied by a dance, except for a few turns by Marianne (**1**). In the next sequence, no one sings (**Sequence 7**), but the actors’ moves remind one of choreography (**2**) enhanced by the virtuosic movement of the camera.



1



2

The sequences without songs or dances thus often remind us of choreography, for example when Marianne reunites with Pierrot on the port (**3**) or even in the strange, parade-like gestures of the gangster ready for action (**4**).



3



4

For the other two musical sequences, the choreography is much more pronounced. In the interlude for *My Line of Fate* (**Sequence 15**), some parts are clearly danced (**5**), but others are more static (**6**). The sequence on the beach features an acrobatic pop revue (**Sequence 22 – 7**). However, with the use of counterpoint, this scene contradicts the aspect of wonder in Hollywood musicals – here clearly referenced by the bright, colorful costumes – as the choreography and situation hesitate between dance and military training.



5



6



7

### SPEAKING AND SINGING, MUSICALITY AND LYRICISM

In the same way that dance and play indecisively overlap, the use of speech and song is not predetermined. The pursuit of musicality is almost constant through the articulation between dialogue and voiceovers, also playing on Marianne and Pierrot's diction (**see Analysis... of a Sequence pgs. 17-18**). Pierrot uses, notably in the voiceovers, a rhythm of speaking similar to reciting poetry, in any case very different from natural ways of speaking. Paradoxically, in **Sequence 23** (choreographed dance on the beach, revealing Marianne's duplicity), the scene most rooted in classical musicals, the words are spoken, not sung.

What is heard also leads to playful moments involving music. The film sets itself apart with several atypical musical events, such as when Pierre references the four resounding notes of Beethoven's *5th Symphony*, pretending he's an orchestra conductor (**8**). Or when Raymond Devos is the only one who hears the refrain that persecutes him as much as his lost loves do (**9**). Godard also breaks with convention when he puts the source of the music onscreen – a record player by the sea (**10**). When the record player stops because it is hit with waves, the music starts up again in the next shot.



8



9



10

These highly original arrangements are a playground for the filmmaker: exploring the many possible combinations and challenging narrative norms. But beyond this approach of a modern, experimental filmmaker, *Pierrot le fou* is a pursuit of choreographed lyricism, and could be seen as an enchanting and gloomy ballet.

(1) "L'art à partir de la vie", Interview with Alain Bergala, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, Cahiers du CFinéma, pg. 9.

(2) It was impossible to confirm that this was actually the case.



## ANALYSIS... OF A SEQUENCE

### INVENTORS

(Sequence 8 - Time: 23:28 - 25:48)

*Note: The numbering of the photos corresponds to their order of appearance in the sequence and is not always in chronological order in the analysis.*

### CONTEXT AND STAKES

This sequence is from the road movie part of the film and happens after the nighttime trip, singular in its artificialness – shot in a studio with two rotating colored lights projecting luminous halos on the windshield of the car. The sequence was chosen for its density and boldness, also because it presents a clear break with rhythm, form, narrative and drama.

This sequence is based on the principle of heterogeneity – here visual and narrative – perfected by Godard and generally used in modern cinematography (see **Context pg. 6**). After the nighttime trip, the beginning of the sequence conveys a return to prosaic reality: a small town in the center of France. The lovers stop in a café and on the radio, hear they are wanted by the police (**1, 2, and 3**). Wanted for murder and without a dime, they decide to tell stories to the townspeople to make some money and then continue on their way.



1



2



3

### DISTANCING

The way the characters are presented, directly facing the camera, creates a noticeable distancing effect (**5 and 6**). In the context of a carefully planned shooting schedule, contrary to Godard's story (see *Its Place in the Canon*, pg. 9), there was nothing he loved more, however, than deconstructing what had been planned: including moments of reality, improvisation, and welcoming random events. When the actors face the camera and address the audience in close-up shots, makes them witnesses, destabilizing the classic fictional pact. It is one of the motifs of modern cinematography that Godard often uses in his films. It has the effect of putting us in the presence of an admitted representation – addressing the spectator by looking directly at him/her through the camera is most often compared to the distancing initiated by Bertolt Brecht in the theater, the rupture in the illusion of the representation and the invitation to the spectators to reflect on what they see. This process also corresponds, more indirectly, to the adage, attributed to Jacques Rivette, then a critic, that “every film is a documentary of itself being filmed.”

Godard made this situation more complex since the three speaking parts – in direct sound and without music, as if not part of the story – are classified differently. André Éthée (**6**) identifies himself (“Currently a movie extra”), Viviane Blassel is characterized by her profession as a saleswoman (although she was actually a radio announcer), while Laszlo Kovacs (**5**) is none other than Laszlo Szabo, actor and member of the New Wave who found himself on set. Laszlo's portrayal of himself is based on both fact (his real birthday) and fiction (he was neither born in Haiti nor forced to flee the American invasion – see **Context pg. 6**). In this game of pretend, the awkwardness of non-professionals is welcome, such as Viviane's hesitation when speaking, which contrasts with the Belmondo-Karina duo's and Szabo's nonchalant self-confidence.



4



5



6

### COLLAGE AND HETEROGENIETY

These three brief portraits are introduced by Pierrot's finger pointing to the right, associated with Marianne's voiceover: "The people are" (4). The idea of modernity is to subvert norms of narrative and film direction based on homogeneity – classic cinema, in fact, is based on the idea that the components of the film form a coherent, harmonious whole.

Marianne and Pierrot, fictional characters, are figures of heterogeneity in this place and situation. Following a much more uniform sequence – the nighttime car trip, Godard then introduces a collage that mixes fiction (fleeing penniless lovers) with elements of reality (the small town, the "documentary actors"), the backdrop of a dream-like sparkling sea (10) and other visual elements.



10

This art of collage (see *Pathways* pgs. 26-28 and *Dialogues* pgs. 22-25) isn't just visual. It also originates from the way layers of sound, voices and music are organized, in a fervent desire to explore possible arrangements. The clever mixing is similar to a composition for two voices intertwined with the original score by Antoine Duhamel. Linearity is completely rejected, Marianne and Pierrot's lines becoming a chorus recited "out" (the only "in" dialogue in this sequence is by the three protagonists facing the camera) – see **Cinema Questions – 2**. This combination of voices and words symbolizes the harmony of an amorous entity united in the same "out" monologue; this communion continues when Marianne's story is taken over by Pierrot's voice, and vice-versa (7 and 8).



7



8

### NEW LIFESTYLE IN SIGHT

Musicality and poetry are manifested through this method of relaying and mingling the voices, by incorporating repetitions:

- Marianne: "The police broadcast their descriptions on the radio. »
- Pierrot: "People eye them warily."
- Marianne: "The police broadcast..."
- Pierrot: "People..."
- Marianne: "The police broadcast..."
- Pierrot: "People eye them warily."

Here, a form of exteriority is conveyed. Marianne doesn't say "our description" but "their", like a comment on themselves in the fictional story currently happening. Even though the present tense is used, this narration can also be seen as happening after-the-fact or post-mortem. This splitting effect is also mentioned by Pierrot's voice, telling the story of William Wilson who met his doppelgänger in the street: "He couldn't rest until he'd killed him. When it was done, he realized he had killed himself, while his double went on living." After they flee the mediocrity of a degenerate, materialist world (see *Dialogues*, pgs. 22-25), they leave their former selves behind and become something else, to invent a way of living to reenchant their existence.



9



11

This reenchanting perspective, through spoken words and the art of storytelling – fiction, romance, history – becomes visually concrete when Pierrot's narration delivers two images of happiness: *Bather sleeping by the sea* (1892), a painting by Auguste Renoir (9), in between shots of waves reflecting the sun (10). This sequence reveals the agenda that the couple would try to follow from then on: a poetic, avant-garde modus vivendi, an inspired way of living for art itself, in order to resist a world that responds with deafness with indifference. The sequence ends in a crash – a collision, screeching tires – symbolizing this divorce with a now uninhabitable reality (11). In order to live poetically, one must live like Robinson Crusoe (see *Analysis... of a Frame* p.19), far removed from the rest of the world.

(1) As a critic and a cinephile, Godard was deeply moved by the famous shot in Ingmar Bergman's *Monika* (1953), which he wrote about in *Arts* (No. 680, July 30, 1958): "One must see *Monika* just for this extraordinary moment where Harriet Andersson, before sleeping again with someone she had dumped, looks straight at the camera, her laughing eyes misty with distress, making the spectator witness to the disdain she has for herself for willingly choosing hell over heaven. This is the saddest shot in the history of cinema."

## ANALYSIS... OF A FRAME

### SHIPWRECKED (SEQUENCE 10)

**Context.** “Ah! Life may be sad, but it’s always beautiful. Suddenly I feel free. We can do what we want. Watch: left, right, left, right...” After these words, Pierrot reacts to Marianne’s challenge by turning sharply to the right; the Ford Galaxy crosses the foreshore and drives right into the sea – with a superb effect: the splashes make a rainbow briefly appear. The chosen frame shows them right after the swerve into the sea, which is also a turning point in the story.

**Description.** The elements of the shot are dominated by intense shades of blue: the glassy sea (the Mediterranean) and the blue of the strip of sky over the horizon, precisely outlined by the frame. The presence of the horizon and the landscape is considerably enhanced by the choice of a wide format, 1:2.35. Like the framing, the high angle of the camera enhances elements that give off an impression of undisturbed territory (only a miniscule buoy and a ship on the horizon are discernible); almost all signs of civilization have disappeared. This change in environment corresponds to the end of the road movie part in Pierrot le fou; the two characters, like two tiny points swallowed up by the scenery, have just got out of the car.



**Alone and free.** The lovers’ new lifestyle consists, symbolically, of drowning one of the emblems of consumer society in the sea (see **Dialogue pgs. 22-25**). Their freedom wasn’t planned or thought out, just an inspiration in the spur of the moment. The same is true of Pierrot’s unexpected swerve. As such, a parallel can be established between the lovers’ lifestyle and the director’s vision: for Godard, filming is a moment of creation where the idea is to suddenly change the course of the film (see **The Auteur pg. 7 and Its Place in the Canon pg. 8-9**).

**Voluntary Castaways.** Here the film presents a stranded materialist society and the runaway couple as voluntary castaways. While the lovers move towards the left of the frame, carrying their luggage on top of their heads, the car becomes a vestige of a world about to be swallowed up by the sea – the metallic grey-blue car body blends in with the color of the water, with only the red upholstery still visible. Pierrot and Marianne turn their backs, literally and symbolically, moving towards a way of life outside of civilization.

**Towards a new Eden.** Until this moment, the freedom of the couple was conveyed by their ability to move around. This frame introduces a slowdown (the clumsy walk in the water), before staying on an island restricts their movement. Being shipwrecked suggests literary imagination – Marianne and Pierrot get ready to act like modern, mythical Robinson Crusoes: a new Adam and Eve seeking to reinvent love and the world. Jean-Luc Godard said he wanted to film the last romantic couple.

## ANALYSIS... OF A SHOT

### SEPARATED

(Sequence 24, Time: 1:30:20 – 1:31:31)

**Context.** The romantic utopia is long gone. Pierrot and Marianne are back in the chaos of the world: they separate, cross paths, run into each other, get back together, leave each other – all part of an intentionally confusing plot that brings into play caricatures of gangsters and Marianne's loyalty to her brother, who is actually her lover, an arms trafficker. After their failed sojourn on the deserted island, a choreography takes place between Pierrot and Marianne, based on playing with distance, both onscreen (where we follow Pierrot) and off-screen (where Marianne is often placed): appearance/disappearance, proximity/distancing, separation/reunion.

**Description and stakes.** Now comes one of the virtuosic shots of Pierrot le fou. It is broken down into several camera stations and movements; in one minute and 11 seconds, Raoul Coutard, the cinematographer, executed complex pans with tracking shots, reframed several times with variations in zoom. This virtuosity met a need in the story: a painful x-ray of Marianne and Pierrot's love story. This shot could have been cut into several shots, but continuity and length reinforce the desynchronization of the couple.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

**Together and alone.** Filming a couple brings up rather basic directing issues: framing often conveys what state the relationship is in. The frame unites or separates the two, zooming in or out on them. Here, the scale of the frame varies during the shot, but it is generally wide and suggests distance and coldness. Marianne is alone in the shot at the beginning, then it is Pierrot's turn to be alone at the end (**1 and 7**). When Pierrot comes onscreen to join Marianne, he is immediately pushed out as the camera follows Marianne bowling (**2**). Just like when the couple recited a monologue together and invented their way of life (see **Analysis... of a Sequence pgs. 17-18**), Pierrot and Marianne's interior voices are heard, quite muffled and this time separately, with Pierrot asking, "Why did you betray me?"

**Distances.** The arrangement of their bodies is also very significant and defined by distance (**2, 5, and 7**), displaying overwhelming discord and a lack of openness towards each other: they do not make eye contact, their bodies aren't facing each other, they are huddled up, anything but inviting – (**5 and 6**). When physical proximity and a tender gesture occur, this turns out to be Marianne's strategy to get her suitcase back (**5**). The distance in their rapport takes on an obvious literal meaning when the shot follows the bowling ball to and from the end of the lane. In an almost digressive movement (**3 and 4**), the camera relegates the reunion of Pierrot and Marianne off-screen – their voiceovers indicate that it is not a happy reunion.

**Fatal destiny.** It is also tempting to see an allegory of destiny in the rotation of the bowling ball, echoing the song heard earlier, "*My Line of Fate*". The collision of the bowling ball and the pins reinforces the idea that this destiny is violent – the sound mixing is akin to detonation. The lovers' approaching fate is also symbolized in "Shut up Cassandra!" (**7**), that Pierrot gets from the title of the book (see **Cinema Questions – 1 pgs. 14-15**) in front of him on the table. Cassandra predicted tragedies, but no one ever listened to her.

## REFLECTED IN IMAGERY: COUPLES

This page is a free association of images around one of the film motifs.

- 1 - *Pierrot le fou*
- 2 - Bonnie (right) and Clyde (left) in March 1933 (photograph found by the police in their hideout in Joplin, Missouri)
- 3 - An engraving by Albrecht Dürer, *Adam and Eve*, 1504
- 4 - *En construcción (Work in Progress)* by José Luis Guerín (2001)



1



2



3



4

## DIALOGUES BETWEEN FILMS

### PIERROT LE FOU AND RADU JUDE'S *THE HAPPIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD* (2009): TWO SATIRES ABOUT CONSUMER SOCIETY

For easier reading, the film titles are abbreviated under each picture: *Pierrot le fou* (PLF), *The Happiest Girl in the World* (HGW).

*Pierrot le fou* and Radu Jude's *The Happiest Girl in the World* (2009), a Romanian film in the CinEd collection, portray different times and contexts. *Pierrot le fou* takes place in the midst of the "Glorious Thirty Years" of the West (1945-1973), a period of abundance and high employment when an ever-growing part of the population was entering consumer society – hand in hand with the invasion of advertising discourse. The context of Romania in the 2000s was its accelerated entry into the capitalist sphere after the fall of the Communist regime in December 1989. Drastic change in socio-economic status subsequently took place in former Socialist Republics, with Ceausescu's Romania standing out due to its severe shortages of the most basic staple goods. Apart from their location and specific era, the two films create fruitful connections between consumer society and advertising, through images, words and language.

### TRIPS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

First of all, both Pierrot and Marianne, and Delia and her parents, are travelling by car, but with different purposes. While Pierrot and Marianne travel to flee consumer society, the latter's journey is the opposite. This modest, provincial family goes to Bucharest so that Delia can claim her prize – a car – after winning a contest for a brand of orangeade. Her prize also includes acting in a commercial. Here, their goal -to enter consumer society- contradicts that of the lovers in *Pierrot le fou*.



1 (PLF)

In both films, travel leads to the transformation of the protagonists' appearance. Over the course of their getaway, Pierrot and Marianne get rid of **(1)** their first set of clothes and get new ones. Pierrot leaves behind his bourgeois look – suit and tie – for a gangster's Borsalino fedora, while Marianne changes her "schoolgirl" outfit (skirt, serious blue blazer over a white collared shirt) for one that conjures images of guerilla warfare – finally settling on summer dresses, and Pierrot opting for a relaxed look. Delia and her parents, however, leave their old provincial clothes behind when they stop at a gas station **(2)**. Despite this well-intentioned transformation, the blue design of Delia's clothes clashes with the sky blue backdrop of the set for the commercial. The characters of *The Happiest Girl in the World*, particularly Delia, get ready to enter a picture, a representation, a story, and for that you have to look the part.



2 (LFLPH)



3 (LFLPH)

The lavatory is the actresses' (mother and daughter) dressing room, which is not a very flattering space, along with the measly trailer on the set in Bucharest. The transformation process takes a hilarious turn when the father sprays himself liberally with deodorant in the parking lot **(3)**, which is also to mask a lingering odor in the car. Objects also need grooming, so the father tries to spruce up his worn-out car. When the family drives into the outskirts of Bucharest, through the car windows they see endless signs of consumer society, which Delia examines as if she were on a different planet, which also the image of a world becoming uniform – the same neon signs in identical suburbs. In the same shot, when advertising billboards appear, Delia uses a mirror to fix her appearance **(4)**, aware that she will soon be on camera.



4 (LFLPH)

#### ADVERTISING AND SIMULATED WORLD

In *Pierrot le fou*, the disappearance of advertising language and signs is achieved when the lovers find themselves alone in the world. Earlier in the film, Godard enthusiastically incorporates advertising; Pierrot, who we learn worked in television, evolves in a social setting where people talk “in advertising mode”. The beginning of the film seems to be anguished science fiction inspired by the ideas of Guy Debord, whose book *The Society of the Spectacle* would only be published, however, in 1967, two years after *Pierrot le fou*. This work begins with a theory: “The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.”



5 (PLF)

Pierrot's wife personifies the utmost vacuity by vaunting the merits of her “Scandale” girdle: her husband recites the advertising slogan shown in the shot (5): “I've got that young look with my ‘Scandale’ girdle!” As Pierrot was reading Élie Faure's history or art in the previous scene, he spouts, “There was Greek civilization, there was the Renaissance, and now we are in the Civilization of Sex!” In the same way, the guests at the cocktail party at Mr. and Mrs. Espresso's house are just playacting, expressing themselves only through advertising slogans. One man says, “Alfa Romeo has great acceleration, powerful four-wheel disc breaks, a luxurious interior, and of course, great traction [...]” Delia, however, is revealed to be incapable of pronouncing and correctly performing a simple line; this can be perceived as unconscious resistance, a form of honor: breaking the mold imposed by the dictatorship of representation and advertising language. For the lovers in *Pierrot le fou*, their poetic language is a method of resistance in order to invent a new way of living (see **Analysis... of a Sequence pgs. 17-18**).



6 (PLF)



7 (PLF)



8 (PLF)



9 (PLF)

*Pierrot le fou* is unique in the way it includes advertising visuals in the composition of numerous shots (6). This method of incorporating signs of consumer civilization into the film is also reminiscent of a collage, even more so of pop art (see **Pathways pgs. 26-28**), mainly by reusing elements of popular culture (9), of which advertising then became an integral part. Godard also uses disparaging word play, such as when the logo of the company “Esso” is reframed so that only the “SS” is showing, suggesting Nazism (7), while Pierrot and Marianne improvise a play on the Vietnam War for American tourists. The choice of an oil company is not a coincidence, since it refers to napalm bombs dropped by the United States in Vietnam. Through editing, Godard thus creates a virulent association, to say the least – he reuses this framing of the “Esso” logo, here associated with a tiger (8), in *La Chinoise* (1967) – Mao presenting the United States as a “paper tiger”.

Godard criticizes, incorporates and twists these advertising visuals using a method which is both playful and corrosive, disparaging and juvenile, meaningful and disconcerting. Radu Jude did not have the same propensity for using these visuals as eye-catching motifs, even if several shots play with the plasticity of places emblematic of consumer society. Photo 3 presents a highly graphic composition (the straight lines and angles in the architecture of the gas station) and shows the attention paid to color relationships.



10 (LFLPH)



11 (LFLPH)

On set, located in a large square in Bucharest, the severe and caustic intention of *The Happiest Girl in the World* rather tends to suggest the idea of a trivial artifact (blue background, tree), of an absurd simulation (10). Jude relies on “mise-en-abyme” – a set within a film set, and one aspect of the film is the fact that the set is surrounded by the reality of the city; passers-by with no connection to the commercial or the story walk through the set, their expressions sometimes question this strange mise en scène (11).

#### SUBJUGATION

The dictated physical appearance described above contains a form of violence towards bodies subjected and styled to become their ideal representation. Delia's ordeal includes true subjugation of the body; she is tested and even humiliated to service the story of the advertisement. This occurs mainly through a painful hair-removal session (12) after someone bluntly exclaims, “This girl has a moustache!” She also has to plaster a clenched, ridiculous smile on her face.



12 (LFLPH)

Over the course of the takes on this interminable day and under the orders of the team, the audience witnesses the force-feeding of Delia, who has to swallow unreasonable quantities of the suspicious beverage, until she is nauseated: “Drink, drink, drink!” What's more, the young girl is exposed to her parents' greed. Supposed to be happy that she was born after the end of Ceausescu's cruel dictatorship, Delia comes to the conclusion that capitalism and consumerism are in no way Edenic. Obviously without expressing regret for the past regime, Jude seems to convey that the capitalist era is a cruel fiction, a substitute for the socialist paradise.



13 (PLF)



14 (PLF)

This issue of the subjugation of bodies is a theme typically dealt with in Godard films by explicitly connecting capitalism, consuming bodies and prostitution, notably in *Vivre sa vie (My Life to Live)* (1962), *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle (Two or Three Things I Know About Her)* (1967) and *Sauve qui peut (la vie) (Every Man for Himself)* (1979). In *Pierrot le fou*, the socialites at the cocktail party at Mr. and Mrs. Espresso's are frozen in poses, drowning in artificial monochrome filters. The women are more or less nude (13), which was even more pronounced in the script. The highlight of the spectacle, however, ends up being the presentation of a beautiful woman with Asian facial features, reified in an enormous cream-filled cake (14) – the literal image of the “civilization of sex” characterized by Pierrot.



## PATHWAYS

This section connects the film to other types of art and disciplines.

### “CINEMA/PAINTING”: ALL THE ART IN THE WORLD

A comprehensive work of Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou* encapsulates all types of art: cinema (see *Inspirations*, pg. 10), with many references, such as a cameo by Samuel Fuller, song and dance, literature and writing – even going so far as turning words into different forms (see *Cinema Questions* – 1 pgs. 14-15; *Dialogues* pgs. 22-25). However, painting and, more generally, visual arts are central: in the list Godard wrote for the film’s press release, he mentioned, “the intrusion of detective photo novel in the tragedy of cine-painting”.

Besides the director’s talent for communicating, the film is a major accomplishment in the use of aesthetics. *Pierrot le fou* inspired notably the writer Louis Aragon, who subsequently wrote, “What is art? I have been struggling with this question ever since I saw Jean-Luc Godard’s *Pierrot le fou*, where Belmondo the sphinx asks a producer, “What is cinema?”. Aragon continues with this statement: “[...] the art of today is Jean-Luc Godard.” (1) He bases this statement primarily on the idea of collage (see *Cinema Questions* - 1 pgs. 14-15 ; *Dialogues* pgs. 22-25), and classifies Godard as the heir of cubism and surrealism, through his art of freely associating, connecting and confronting sounds, images and text. It is also clear that Godard consciously references two Cubist paintings by Picasso: *Portrait of Sylvette* (1954) and *Jacqueline with Flowers* (1954) (1).



1

### A RETURN TO PAINTING

We have already seen how Godard, in filming *Pierrot le fou*, wanted to make cinema and inspiration for creative acts coincide, describing, by greatly exaggerating, a film that would take shape spontaneously, by following the writer’s pen (see *Cinema Questions* - 1 pgs. 14-15) and the painter’s brush. We also mentioned that Godard’s first artistic endeavours were drawing and painting, a passion that he seriously considered as a career when he was 17 and 18. We know of five paintings where the inspiration was clearly modernist, the portrait being his favorite motif (his father and sisters). We can also see references as diverse as expressionism, stretching towards abstraction with hints of pointillism, geometry and an evident chromatic quest (2, an untitled painting, circa 1947).



2

Not forthcoming about this hobby, Godard did speak about it in a 1992 interview: “I did a little painting when I was very young. I certainly saw a lot of paintings, starting at that time. So, in a certain way, cinema is a return. Not a return to childhood, but to this area of childhood that was, for me, painting. Cinema is still very powerful because it is the heir of painting, as a vision of the world.” (2) While painting is featured in earlier films - *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*) and the portrait - and later *Ofilms* (*Passion and its living pictures*), it noticeably returns in *Pierrot le fou*. For Godard, the idea was simultaneously thinking, referencing, integrating and practicing this relationship with pictorial art.

## IDENTIFYING WITH AND THINKING ABOUT ART

Thinking about art is part of the film from its very beginning, when Pierrot reads a long excerpt from Élie Faure's *History of Art* (3), about Velazquez – a book that is mentioned again later on, in the scene at the movie theater in Toulon. Godard seems to identify with the Spanish painter; some of the passages recall the aesthetics of *Pierrot le fou*, notably the ideas of heterogeneity and collage: "Henceforth, he captured only those mysterious interpenetrations that united shape and tone [...]" Art was also a way to resist this era, as a subversive element "[...] that no convulsion or cataclysm could interrupt or impede."



3

These correspondences arise through almost literal illustrations of Élie Faure's text; as Pierrot reads and later in the film, like reminiscences: "[.] He drifted around things like the air, like twilight [.] Like some ethereal wave skimming over surfaces [...]" (4); "Spanish painters communed with the evening." (5) Godard thus becomes a painter of light, twilight, and moonlight.



4



5

The Élie Faure quotation also serves as a caustic statement about civilization: "The world he [Velazquez] lived in was a sad one, a degenerate king, sickly infants, idiots, dwarves, cripples, hideous freaks dressed as princes whose job it was to laugh at themselves and amuse a court that lived outside the law, caught in a web of etiquette, plots and lies, bound by the confessional and their own remorse. Outside the gates, the auto-da-fé and silence, censorship." The era of Velazquez (Spanish monarchy of the 17th century) is clearly associated with Gaullist France in the 1960s, its political compromises, nagging authoritarianism, and declining society (see *Dialogues* pgs. 22-25). The destiny of *Pierrot le fou*'s lovers can also be discerned, namely their desperation and suicidal streak: "A spirit of nostalgia prevails, yet we see none of the ugliness or sadness, none of the gloom or cruelty of this crushed childhood." And so this long quote from Élie Faure's book can be perceived in two ways, as the underlying plot of the film and its aesthetic manifesto.

## QUOTATIONS, DIALOGUES

In the film, there are 43 inserts mixing paintings, posters, advertisements, book covers and cartoons (3), and many reproductions (posters, postcards). Love and art are the two refuges for Pierrot and Marianne; like Godard did, they surround themselves with these works to protect themselves from a world they reject, and whose ugliness resurfaces (images of war and pornographic photos on the walls). Among these works are numerous portraits, particularly by two tutelary figures: August Renoir (Marianne's last name - Renoir - is no coincidence!) and Pablo Picasso. Paintings by Renoir and Picasso even substitute for shots of the actors during a dialogue: Picasso's *Paul en Pierrot* (*Portrait of Paul in Pierrot* - 1925), and two paintings representing Marianne: *La Blouse roumaine* (*The Romanian Blouse*) by Henri Matisse and *Nu* (*Nude* - 1880) by Renoir (6, 7 and 8). For Godard, the idea is to make painting and cinema commune with each other, making no difference between these two types of artistic representations.



6



7



8



9



11

This direct dialogue between the film and the paintings also materializes when Pierrot carries a fatally injured Marianne; the face in the engraving seems to watch the tragic scene (9). The works of art are not simple illustrations; they interact with the drama. Marianne is watched over by two sets of eyes, those of Pierrot and the woman in the engraving. While Marianne is represented several times by the Renoir's painting *Petite fille à la gerbe* (*Little Girl with a Spray of Flowers* - 1888) (10 – Godard's frame excludes the spray of flowers present in Renoir's painting), you can see that the spray of flowers cut out in the reframing of Renoir's painting is held by the woman watching over Marianne. In this intense dialogue between the film and the paintings, Godard also organizes visual, corporal and chromatic rhymes between the characters of the film and the reproductions on the walls (11).



10

#### CONTRIBUTE, PRACTICE

Godard was not content with just citation, he wanted to participate. Raoul Coutard, the cinematographer, attests to Godard's approach to filming as a painter and a visual artist: "There were cans of paint in bright colors and he would paint objects, either in red, blue or green." (4) He was literally repainting the world in order to create a poetic utopia. Among his many contributions, we particularly notice the boat repainted bright green, red and blue (12), or the graffiti "Vive Dieu!" (*Praise God*)(13) In the same vein, we can mention the movie theater that received generous brushstrokes (14). This association of color with the act of painting is also expressed by the presence of two paintings by George Matthieu (15 – showing a reproduction of the painting *Les Capétiens partout* (*Capetians Everywhere*, 1954), whose technique mixes dripping paint (5) with performance. In *Pierrot le fou*, there is a clear effort to include color, expressed in the long interview of Godard in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, where he responded to a question about the fact that there is a lot of blood in the film: "Not blood, red!" (6)



12



13



14



15

*Pierrot le fou* is the utopia of a museum outside the walls of a museum, where the works would have left to populate the world, and in the presence of art, the world would become a better place to live. Godard and his characters have the same intention: the film, like Pierrot and Marianne's life together, aims to be a work of art. Even if the film begins with the words of Velazquez, this museum mostly focuses on modern art, its great instigators (Matisse, Renoir, Van Gogh) and its principal representatives (Picasso, Chagall, Modigliani).



16



17

Art participates in the world and the film also features what could be characterized as visual interventions referring to contemporary art: pop art and collages (see **Dialogues pgs. 22-25**), drawings, improvised shows, ready-made pieces and performances (16). There is also a relation with compressions and art installations, mainly those of the sculptor César: while running away, the lovers come upon a totaled car, suspended on a piece of an elevated highway. This incongruous mise en scène symbolizes a macabre vanitas of modern society (17).



18



19

Faced with mediocrity and the degeneration of the world, art is thus a refuge. After failing to make his life the romantic, artistic masterpiece he wished for, Pierrot kills himself in an act (18 and 19) where painting (the body is also a canvas, such as Marianne in the skit about the Vietnam War), improvisation and chromatic event, and soon pyrotechnics, are combined.

(1) *Les Lettres françaises*, September 2, 1965.

(2) Alain Jaubert, *Peinture et cinéma*, MAE communication, 1992, pgs. 188-193.

(3) The idea is not to make an exhaustive list of all these quotes. You can visit a very useful site in English: <http://www.thecinetaurist.net/paintings-in-pierrot-le-fou.html>

(4) Alain Bergala, *Godard au travail*, Cahiers du Cinéma, 2006, pg. 278.

(5) A technique which he claims he invented, instead of the American painter Jackson Pollock (usually considered its inventor), involving "dripping" paint and letting it trickle on a canvas, often superimposing colors.

(6) *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 171, October 1965.

## RECEPTION: EXCHANGING VIEWS

“*Pierrot le fou* de Jean-Luc Godard”, Michel Cournot, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, November 3, 1965.

What time is it, it's dark, did you draw the blinds, what season is it already, look there are blue vowels on a black background, the screen isn't a blackboard, but yes it is, why not, free entry, free hand, I do what I want with the screen, a blackboard, a white page, Pierrot writes on the white screen with a blue marker, red marker, with lipstick, cinema-free part, sing, dance, make yourself at home, tear the canvas and dry it out, long live the screen, my freedom!

[ . ] Marianne I loved you, I loved only you, don't ever leave me Marianne, you and me alone in the world, visions of horror in Santo Domingo, you and me alone on the road, the car radio, napalm bombs on the Vietnamese shelters, pictures of Vietnam, the news, they are grey, no red or black, Marianne my love, your dark eyes, let's go through France and ford its rivers, cinema is life, cinema is love, Marianne you and me alone in the world what stupid images of the world we made for ourselves, love changes everything, large and slow and generous cinema of our love tell us what you have seen, I saw Porquerolles, the islands of Hyères, I saw a parrot and eucalyptus trees, illustrated paperbacks, I saw fish and single records, the empty sky, war boats, a drunk American, a screaming Chinese woman, I saw the storm, saw the music, saw the beautiful words from beautiful books, Marianne my love.

[...]

Whatever happens, Pierrot doesn't know, the film has changes voices, he is more broken, less sure, images collide, something has probably happened, you're lying Marianne, I believe you, liar, but you're lying, you made me leave my beach and my books, I don't understand anything about these strangers, these stairs, great another man a pair of scissors stuck right in his neck, no black no red, I don't hear this great music anymore, the shots are hard, images jump out at me I don't see them coming, the colors lost their long warm flow, Marianne where are you? With whom? Who is he? The picture trembled, the sea was to my back and the sun in my face when I shot at them, Marianne two red holes in your dress, death, the sea, take the screen away, I write on the white board of the screen “sea, decease, disdain, desire”, cinema you're good for anything, Pierrot it hurts, Marianne you didn't need to do that, the picture is red, it's Pierrot who's painting himself blue, crazy cinema of colors you're going to let Pierrot kill himself, men always feel a vast dead calm when they decide to die by their own hand, the slowed screen got bigger, whiter, a black noise.

The sun enters the screen, we don't see anything anymore, it's death, it's the sea gone with the sun, what time is it, I don't hear time knocking, the screen is all white, did she open the blinds, Pierrot isn't there anymore, no you're not leaving yet, don't get up, stay there, at least have the decency to wait a few seconds, a film doesn't die like that, don't move, it's completely dark, the cinema of the altar of repose, intersection of meetings. Marianne waits for him I don't know where, crazy Pierrot le fou.

Grigor Tchernev, “Pierrot, Maria and Maria”, *Kinoizkustvo*, No. 4, April 1966.

I just came back from Paris [...]. When I was there, they only talked about two films, *Pierrot le fou* and *Viva Maria*. (1) [...] This resulted in a lot of noise, shouting, we threw insults at each other, fireworks of words [...]. They were the biggest films in Paris. If we hadn't seen *Pierrot le fou* and didn't have some deep things to say about it, we risked appearing like imbeciles in the eyes of the snobs.

[...] *Pierrot le fou* is undoubtedly the best film of the hundreds seen in France. Pierrot and Marianne – Jean-Paul Belmondo and Anna Karina. A crime story. Two lovers get involved in arms trafficking. Car theft, gunshots, chase, dead bodies, a tragic end... At first, the story seems no different than noir fiction. [...] The fascination he inspires is hidden behind the obvious subject appearance, behind the dialogues and images. Behind Pierrot's arrogance and insolence is a contemplative nature, a poetic soul, an instinctive desire and an impulse towards purity. This violent world of wolves devouring each other is not the natural state or environment for man, suggests Jean-Luc Godard. Man sometimes accepts this by default, but, unconsciously or not, cannot escape it.

[...] What inspired my respect for this film is the free manipulation of the means of expression in cinema. It is free in its organization, editing, even if the story unfolds chronologically. [...] But reflexion on the events is hiding in the philosophical and lyrical diversions, the “flights” of the fable. [...] Without this, *Pierrot le fou* is no different from forgettable action movies. In this sense, the film challenges pre-established rules and norms. You think that singing in a film is outdated, but voilà, two lovers start to talk to each other by singing. Poetry recitation? We won't get bored? The action won't slow down? Godard isn't afraid of that. When needed, Jean-Paul Belmondo can remain 5 or 10 minutes with an open book, or write in his journal, or lead his investigation “in the way of cinéma-vérité, “*truthful cinema*”. This sums up the whole issue – these methods and approaches are used by necessity, they are organically intertwined in the fabric of the work and do not appear like extra appendages. Some can do it, others can only imitate, which will resemble stylized eclecticism. Godard knows how to do it, his talent and his intuition as a born filmmaker accomplish it. *Pierrot le fou* is a film of colors. The use of colors, their composition in the frame reach such a height that many experts rightly evoke how this film inherited Romantic French painting tradition, and the celebrated Delacroix. [...] The example of *Pierrot le fou* shows for the umpteenth time that the art of cinema relies on the unity of all of its elements.

(1) Louis Malle film released in November 1965, with Brigitte Bardot and Jeanne Moreau. It was a box office success with 3,450,000 admissions - *Pierrot le fou* had 300,000 admissions.

## PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES

These suggestions echo the teaching principles for the films listed in the beginning of this booklet (see pg. 2). The general idea is to adopt an intuitive and sensitive approach to film, and the tools for these activities can be found in the booklet. The "Chapters" section (pgs. 12-13) helps find specific scenes. A glossary of relevant film vocabulary is available on the CinEd website.

### BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

#### \* Analyze the original poster (see pg. 3)

- Analyze its composition and aesthetics.
- What about the characters and the plot can we glean from the poster? Does the film seem to refer to specific genres?

The original French poster brings out the tragic, violent and morbid sides of the film. However, the second shot also portrays the dreamer in Pierrot, with the faraway look in his eyes. His face smeared in blue paint also draws attention to painting in Pierrot le fou, and more generally to the decision to include all types of art.

- This question can be further discussed by comparing different posters (see pg. 3).

The posters presented in the booklet have a very graphic tone, rather than narrative, and focus on the character of Pierrot. The character of Marianne is not explicitly represented on the Czechoslovakian poster, which insists on the tormented interiority of the male character. On the Spanish poster, the theme of the color red is dominant, symbolizing amorous passion but also blood; in her dynamic movement and in contrast with Pierrot's unmoving face, Marianne appears elusive.

\* Choose a frame from the booklet, show it to the students and ask them to imagine the situation, characters and locations of the film.

\* Listen to the song *I never told you I would love you forever*. Imagine the context where it appears in the film.

### AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

You can imagine a project in three stages.

#### 1) DISCUSS YOUR IMPRESSIONS

Don't be afraid of misgivings about the film – listen to them and question them. Even if the students analyzed the posters before the film, you can use the posters again by discussing whether the posters are faithful to the film.

- Is *Pierrot le fou* a "classic"? How does it destabilize the way we watch films?
- What are the striking moments in the film? Describe them and situate them in the film. Why are these moments striking?
- Describe the trajectory of the characters and the storyline. What is the situation at the beginning and end of the film? What are the main stages and transformations that take place between the beginning and end of the film?
- Does the film evoke different genres, and which ones? Does it belong to a single genre?

#### 2) OBSERVE, DESCRIBE, ANALYZE

With a film as unique as *Pierrot le fou*, you can start with very simple questions that lead into reflection and analysis.

#### What is seen (see Cinema Questions 1 and 2, pgs. 14-16)

- Do the actors all act in the same way? Identify and characterize the variations in acting using precise examples (diction, gestures, movements).
- Are they acting "natural"? What effect does their acting produce? What was Jean-Luc Godard trying to achieve in this respect?
- How do you explain the presence of written words in the film? What does this teach us about Pierrot's character, about his ideal life and the director's ideal life?
- What do the written words show and what do we not see? What effect does this have on the spectator?

#### What is said and heard

\* Characterize the different ways of speaking and talking (particularly the voiceovers) in the film: what is the resulting effect and why this choice?

\* Relationships between speaking, singing and music:

- What do you notice about the relationships between words, songs and music, and in what way does this differ from typical arrangements?
- In what different ways does music arrive on words?

Key sequences for responding to these questions:

- Sequences with music and/or song:  
5, 13, 15, 23, 25 (see Cinema Questions 2, pgs. 15-16)
- non-musical choreographed sequences:  
6, 21, 24 (see Analysis...of a Shot, pg. 20)
- sequences where language tends toward lyricism and poetry:  
8, 12, 25 (see Analysis...of a Sequence, pg. 17-18)

#### Study a song in the film

The lyrics of the songs are truly dialogue pieces and fully contribute to the state of the relationship between Pierrot and Marianne. It is also possible and interesting to also study *My Line of Fate*, which expresses the tragic aspect of the characters' destiny.

#### I never told you I would love you forever (Sequence 5)

"I never told you I would love you forever  
Oh my love  
You never promised to adore me  
All your life  
We never exchanged such promises  
Knowing me, Knowing you  
We never thought we would be caught in love's web  
Fickle as we were  
But gradually, without a word between us  
Bit by bit  
Feelings arose between our bodies  
mingled in delight  
Then words of love rose to our naked lips  
Bit by bit  
Heaps of words of love mingled gently with our kisses  
How many words of love?  
I never thought I would always want you  
Oh my love  
We never thought we could live together  
And not grow tired of each other  
To wake up every morning surprised to still be so happy  
In the same bed  
And want nothing more than that ordinary pleasure  
Of feeling so at ease With each other  
But gradually without a word between us  
Bit by Bit  
Our feelings bound us tight in spite of ourselves,  
Never to let go

Feelings stronger than any words of love known or unknown  
Feelings so wild and strong that we never thought were possible  
before  
Don't ever promise you will always love me  
Oh my love  
Don't ever promise to adore me all your life  
Let's never exchange such promises Knowing me,  
Knowing you  
Let's keep this feeling that our love day by day,  
That our love is a love  
With no tomorrow."

Lyrics and Music: Cyrus Bassiak (Serge Rezvani)  
1965 © Production Jacques Canetti

\* When in the film does this song take place? Are there other parts of the film that are sung? Is it a musical?

*After seeing the excerpt again:*

- What do the words between Marianne and Pierrot say at this point in the film? Is the *mise en scène* of this sung sequence unexpected?
- What would the difference be for the spectator if the same information (about the future lifestyle and romantic relationship between Pierrot and Marianne) were given in a dialogue instead of a song?
- Imagine another way to stage this song (with the same characters, Pierrot and Marianne).

### Citations and references

*There are so many citations and references in the film that you should start with basic ones.*

\* Use the frame analyzed on page 19 or sequences 11, 12 and 13: what archetypes and figures (literary, religious, mythological) do the characters of Marianne and Pierrot correspond to?

\* Are the many paintings included in the editing of the film considered classical or modern? Why? How do you understand Godard's choice?

\* Can you identify any painters among the referenced paintings? Besides painting, what are the different visual arts present in *Pierrot le fou*? (see **Pathways**, pp 26-28) Which ones are surprising?

- How do these many artistic references correspond to the couple's ideal life and more specifically, Pierrot's ideal life?

### Reception

*Page 25 invites the reader to reflect on the reception of the film by comparing two texts, but also by using the Accounts on page 11 and in the sections entitled Context, The Auteur and Its Place in the Canon (pgs. 6-9).*

- Why was this film a founding experience for Chantal Akerman and Alain Bergala? Use a quotation from each text to illustrate why.

- Do Michel Cournot and Grigor Tchernev have the same opinion of the film? Is their approach to *Pierrot le fou* and their review the same?

- How can you qualify the styles of Michel Cournot and Grigor Tchernev's reviews? What are the themes and motifs of both texts? Why do they describe *Pierrot le fou* as a work of art?

- Why can we say that *Pierrot le fou* is a film about its time? What is the film also saying about our time? Identify a contemporary film which would also do it.

### 3) INTERACT WITH IMAGES, FRAMES AND SEQUENCES

*Involve the students actively with the images. There are many possible situations deriving from the sections of the booklet.*

### Working with stills:

Use the **Focus** section (pgs. 4-5), choose a still from the film (or if possible have the students choose a still): what focus from the film can be found in the image and what is missing?

Choose a frame (see pg. 19): establish the context, describe the composition (the space and the position of the bodies, staging elements), explain the dramatic elements in this frame and think about what this foreshadows for the rest of the film.

Use the **Reflected in Imagery** section (pg. 21): choose an image from the film and research other types of images to relate it to. Variation: choose an image and make one or several images that relate to the film.

Use quotations from Élie Faure's book: find images in the film that reflect the meaning of the text and show that Godard identified himself as an artist with respect to this book (see **Pathways**, pg. 26-28).

### Working with moving images

*We can define a shot as a continuity of space and time between two cuts in editing. As for the sequence, it is a unit of drama that is relatively autonomous. Refer to the section Analysis... of a Shot (pg. 20), and respond to this question with other shots or other key sequences in the film: 6, 11, 15, 18, 21.*

\* How are we introduced to a shot or sequence and how do we exit it? What transformations took place between the beginning and end of the shot or sequence?

\* How do the director's instructions and the camera's movement (or lack of movement) contribute to the storyline, particularly the evolution of Pierrot and Marianne's relationship?

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UN FILM DE LUMIÈRE

