Pop Cinema: Jean-Luc Godard's Pierrot le fou

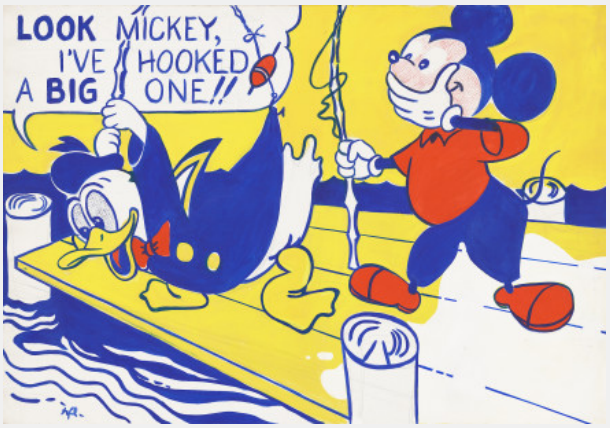

Fig. 1 - Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*, 1961, oil on canvas, Gift of Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1990.41.1

Pierrot le fou (1965) presents the adventures of countercultural heroes Ferdinand Griffon (Jean-Paul Belmondo) and Marianne Renoir (Anna Karina). Jean-Luc Godard's film possesses many characteristics common to pop art, especially the work of three of its greatest North American practitioners: Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenburg. Most pop artworks employed the mediums of painting, print, or sculpture; *Pierrot le fou* is pop in celluloid. It critiques cinematic conventions, consumer society, and cultural and military imperialism with images in Techniscope and the brilliant hues of Eastmancolor. By sampling and remixing various sources, Godard (b. 1930) brought quotidian, commercial, and political subject matter into the realm of film. The director engaged with the world through the camera lens, omnivorously consuming all manner of subjects and weaving them into a common audiovisual fabric, confounding clear bounds between reality and fiction, acting and action. Revealing his own experimental spirit and an expansion of the definition of cinema, the director stated, "*Pierrot le fou* is not a film, but an attempt at cinema" that "reminds us one must attempt to live." [1] Godard asks spectators to reassess their relationship with the conditions of modern life as well as modern cinema.

One of pop art's primary roles, arguably, was to attack the divide between distinct categories of culture. Highbrow and lowbrow intermingle in the oeuvres of many pop artists. Warhol (1928–1987), for instance, mined advertising, newspaper headlines, celebrities, and inexpensive consumer products. He turned these already mediated, popular subjects—which are normally consumed quickly and then often thrown away—into more

timeless works of art. Warhol printed on colored canvases. Silkscreen (a commercial technique) collides with painting (a fine art) in his works. We know that Warhol was on Godard's radar, at the very least for his films. In May 1967, *Cahiers du cinéma* profiled Godard, Alfred Hitchcock, and Warhol, revealing how different pop artists based in the United States worked in similar ways. Oldenburg (b. 1929) asks spectators to reassess consumption by shifting everyday objects—from lipstick to typewriter erasers—into large-scale sculptures. Throughout his career Lichtenstein (1923–1997) also provocatively mixed high and low brows of culture, a basic recipe he marvelously reinvented many times over. Early paintings like *Look Mickey* (1961) (fig. 1) saw Lichtenstein using the red, yellow, and blue palette and dotted ink marks of pulp to depict Disney characters on a large canvas. Lichtenstein also translated artworks by famous modern artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Piet Mondrian into his own signature style. Additionally, he critically mimicked the marks of the abstract expressionists, caricaturing their expressive brushstrokes and rendering them in a comic-book style. This move worked masterfully to quell the rhetoric of the previous generation of "American-type" painters and critics, like Clement Greenberg, who patrolled the bounds of "avant-garde" and "kitsch." [2]

Pierrot le fou is loosely based on *Obsession*, a 1962 crime novel by the American author Lionel White. For his version, Godard rejects traditional narrative and bends and blurs genres. Although Ferdinand's voiceovers allude to chapter numbers, this literary structure is ultimately subverted as the numerical order of the chapters becomes increasingly hypertrophied and chaotic throughout the movie. The madcap journey Godard represents evokes the conventions of road movies, action thrillers, spy films, and even musicals with dance numbers; he apparently saw *Pierrot le fou* as an amalgamation and continuation of his prior projects. [3]Suggesting that the work confounds easy categorization, he called it "the first film noir in color." [4]

Ferdinand and Marianne's story begins with a chance meeting: Marianne Renoir, Ferdinand's ex-lover, is posing as the niece of his friend Frank (with whom she carrying on an affair); she is enlisted to babysit Ferdinand's daughter while he accompanies his wife, Maria, and friends to a cocktail party at the home of his wealthy in-laws, Madame and Monsieur Espresso. Ferdinand had worked in television, but recently lost his job. His wife hopes that her father can introduce him to a Standard Oil executive at the party who might want to hire him. The reencounter with bohemian Marianne prompts Ferdinand to reject his bourgeois life and its associated rituals, and run away with—or back to—her. But tuning in and dropping out proves to be complicated: Marianne is involved in more dangerous activities than Ferdinand expects. His search for adventure and excitement takes him on a path toward gun-running and deadly intrigue. His transformation from upright citizen to secret agent or revolutionary begins to concretize when, early in the film, Marianne baptizes him with the moniker "Pierrot" as he drives her home. She insists on referring to him by this name, despite his protests. Pierrot is one of the stock characters from the *Commedia dell'arte*, the tragic and naive clown dressed in white and smitten with the female character Columbine. Marianne's interpolation seems to work: rather than drop her off, Ferdinand stays the night. From this moment, he veers further and further away from staid Ferdinand and toward the "crazy" (*fou*) Pierrot.

Ferdinand's change is further cemented with a cut from the automobile nocturne to the cold light of day at Marianne's apartment, which houses a cache of the arms she is involved in smuggling (fig. 2) and a dead body with scissors plunged into the nape of its neck. Frank arrives on the scene; Marianne smashes a bottle over his head while Ferdinand distracts him, an episode that compels them to flee Paris. They head south, sustaining themselves by criminal activity and storytelling. They fake a car accident and proceed on foot, eventually stealing another car to make the final leg of the journey to hide out in the Cote d'Azur. There they live, relatively

Figs. 2 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

isolated from modern life, periodically performing for tourists to earn a living. Ferdinand turns increasingly self-involved as he attempts to devote himself to writing. Despite their idyllic surroundings, Marianne becomes disenchanted and bored with this elemental mode of subsistence. "We've played Jules Verne long enough! Let's go back to our gangster movie!" she exhorts. And they return to urban life, traveling to the small city of Toulon. There, a band of criminals, apparently members of the OAS (Organisation armée secrète, a short-lived right-wing terrorist entity that operated in opposition to Algerian liberation)—whom Marianne seems to have double-crossed, tracks them down. Confirmation that Godard intended them to be the criminal group comes in the red letters, "OAS," on the wall of the Paris flat Marianne occupied after dispatching its prior occupant; she amended "IS" in blue, staking her claim and relabeling it "OASIS."), Marianne kills one of them and escapes, while Pierrot is tortured by the others. Although they are separated for a time in the confusion, when they find one another Marianne convinces Ferdinand to help her steal a case of money from the remaining OAS agents, which she intends to keep for herself and her real boyfriend, Fred. Ferdinand realizes he has been tricked and he follows Fred and Marianne, shooting them on sight before killing himself.

Pierrot le fou establishes that it will blur boundaries of culture from the beginning. Quoting—literally—from the history of art, and pulling it into the movies, Ferdinand soaks in a bathtub while reading aloud passages on the famed Spanish baroque painter Diego Velázquez from a paperback edition of Élie Faure's *Histoire de l'art*. In addition to the characters who recite art history, Godard situates reproductions of works of art throughout the film.

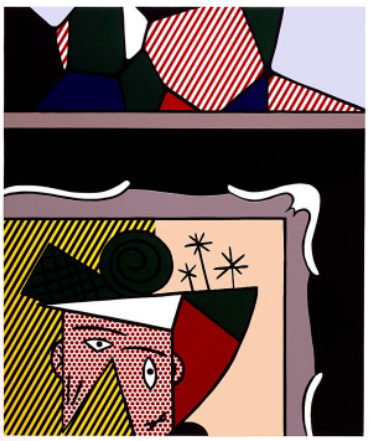

Fig. 3 - Roy Lichtenstein, *Two Paintings*, 1984, woodcut, lithograph, screenprint, and collage on Arches 88 paper, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Roger P. Sonnabend, 1986.90.21

According to Donald Judd, Lichtenstein successfully produced a similar kind of "representation of a representation" with many of his pop artworks. For instance, his *Two Paintings* (fig. 3) is a print depicting the edges of paintings by Picasso and Jasper Johns. [5] Godard too plays with images of images, interweaving mechanical reproductions of artworks rather than originals, which are further multiplied by their capture, into the film. Artworks form one element of the sets' décor. Marianne's flat is replete with posters and postcards: the women of Amedeo Modigliani meet *Paris Match*, Picassos share the screen with automatic weapons—props equally proper to Hollywood and television news images of Vietnam (an idea hinted at when Ferdinand and Marianne entertain tourists with a play about the war). At different moments, both

Ferdinand and Marianne are flanked by reproductions of Picasso's *Portrait de Sylvette* (1954) and *Jacqueline aux fleurs* (1954), implying parity between filmic and painterly representations.

Furthermore, Ferdinand sleeps below a trio of postcards—including Picasso's *Paul as Pierrot* (1925), a work whose title evokes both Marianne's moniker for the character and the actor Belmondo's given name (Jean-Paul). Marianne's surname, Renoir, is echoed in the paintings by the impressionist Auguste Renoir that Godard weaves into the scenery, in order to redouble the presence of her character. Paintings that are visual puns on the characters' names are also inserted into the film as close-up shots that cut up the action. Images from comics and glossy magazines, found on set and used to punctuate the action, play a similar role in the visual ecology of the film. Multiple shots of *Les Pieds nickelés* (a comics anthology from the early 20th century that Marianne takes from Ferdinand's home, which they carry with them throughout the whole film), as well as other comic images, raise questions about the difference between art and other kinds of culture. Godard's juxtapositions and ruptures do not occur lightly. Instead, they are deliberate and pedagogical. As film scholar Richard Dienst argues, *Pierrot le fou* "offers lessons in *seeing as a political act*." [6]

Fig. 4 - Andy Warhol, *A Boy for Meg*, 1962, oil and egg emulsion on canvas, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, 1971.87.11

Godard's interest in repurposing text again aligns him with pop and specifically with artists such as Lichtenstein and Warhol. His close framings of signage and hand-written texts, resembling the works of art discussed above as well as a number of spoken quotations from various kinds of sources, serve to break the narrative. *Pierrot le fou* commences with striking blue-and-red credits on a black background. Letters appear on-screen one by one in alphabetical order, finally spelling out the names of the actors and the title. Godard's title sequence is serial and ordered, in some ways paralleling Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), a series of silkscreens on canvas that was generated based on a specific, predetermined order (a list of flavors the Campbell's company provided to Warhol). Texts pulled from preexisting sources also play an important role in Warhol's headline paintings, like *A Boy for Meg* (1962) (fig. 4), as well as in numerous works by Lichtenstein, in which the artist matches images with new comic-book dialogue. Lichtenstein interwove image and text in projects such as *CRAK!* (1963/1964) (fig. 5), which incorporates onomatopoeia as part of the picture via expressive, motivated typography. Arguably, this kind of designed language, found in comic books, efficiently transmits feelings or sounds that are difficult to portray in the traditional modes of visual art.

Fig 5 - Roy Lichtenstein, Leo Castelli Gallery, Colorcraft, *CRAK!*, 1963/1964, color offset lithograph on lightweight, white wove paper, Gift of Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein, 1996.56.137

Godard proposes that a surreal poetics can potentially be teased out of real-world linguistic elements. Rather like Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines*—works of art that mix odds and ends of life with artistic media (canvas and paint)—the film juxtaposes all manner of material for aesthetic ends. Rauschenberg's artworks orbited in close proximity to pop and were included in some of the genre's important early exhibitions, such as *My Country 'tis of Thee* (1962) at the Virginia Dwan Gallery. Rauschenberg produced a linguistic corollary to his work in 1963. He composed an artist's statement packed with words pulled from commercial signage he observed as he traveled along the highways:

I find it nearly impossible free ice to write about Jeepaxle my work. The concept I plantatarium [sic] struggle to deal with ketchup is oppoed [sic] to the logical continuity of life lift tab inherent in language horses and communication. My fascination with images open 24 hrs. is based on the complex interlocking of disparate grammar. The form then Denver 39 is second hand to nothing. The work then has a chance to electric service become its own cliché. Luggage. This is the inevitable fate fair ground of any inanimate object freightways...[7]

Fig. 6 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

Godard also alights his lens upon words found in the modern landscape. Like Rauschenberg, the director extends the logic of collage to language in *Pierrot le fou* by isolating and highlighting the extradiegetic information that is normally semiconsciously absorbed. For example, "SOS" appears behind Ferdinand, suggesting he is in trouble. Ferdinand and Marianne walk past a sign with a warning about a harbor-front drop that reads "*danger de mort*" (danger of death), which seems to presage the characters' fate (fig. 6). The director mines commercial signage, too, prompting its insistent typographies to be repurposed in order to make new messages. In a similar fashion, visual artist Ed Ruscha focuses on and manipulates language. Ruscha's word drawings reveal an understanding of the importance of graphic design and text in the experience of modern life. In the 1960s, Ruscha drew upon his background in layout design to render whimsical words and phrases in both commercial typefaces and his own drawings of objects such as pills, beans, pencils, or strips of paper. *Ruscha's Standard*

Station (1966) (for illustration, see "Industrial Arts," fig. 12), a depiction of a gas station in clean geometric forms, also suggests a punning contemplation of the "standardization" of modern life, in which corporations, chain stores, and branded goods promote homogeneity and conformity. The possible double entendre appears in *Pierrot le fou*: Godard seems to trade upon the selfsame word play by selecting Standard Oil as the name of the company Maria hopes will hire Ferdinand, and two scenes were shot in Total gas stations. The camera captured the text of real signage, allowing the words to take on additional significance. Written words are marshaled into the filmic text; they resonate with and amplify the dialogues. Rather like the "Standard" in Ruscha's *Standard Station*, Godard's "Total" can be read as taking on the meaning "sum total" (summing it up), and also might speak of a totalizing push toward a homogenized, standardized capitalist existence.

Fig. 7 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

Godard once said that "beyond the theater is life, and behind life, the theater. My point of departure was the imaginary and I discovered the real; but behind the real there was the imaginary." [8] This idea resonates almost exactly with Warhol's assessment of his own films: "I don't know where the artificial stops and the real starts." [9] This blur between the fake and the real is precisely what horrifies Ferdinand. In the scene where Maria, his wife, is getting dressed for the cocktail party, she cites a magazine ad for the Maidenform girdle she will wear and shows it to him. Godard pulls in close to the illustration and a photo of the product (fig. 7), accompanied by Ferdinand's voiceover: "After Athens, after the Renaissance, we are now entering the civilization of the rump." His sardonic words imply that instead of staying the course toward enlightened thinking, current society hews to pleasure, superficiality, and titillation.

Godard was preoccupied by struggles for liberation and methods of coercion on an individual as well as a societal scale. His initial interest was mind control, but he turned to torture for the film *Le petit soldat* (1963), whose promotional poster appears in Marianne's apartment. In a 1960s interview with American critic Andrew Sarris, the director said, "The happenings in Algeria made me replace brainwashing with torture, which had become the big question . . . to be free is to be able to do what pleases you when it pleases you." [10] *Pierrot le fou* address both forms of control, mental and physical: Ferdinand is in some ways Godard's test subject, under duress from waterboarding, whose ways of acting are influenced by his (at times extreme) environmental surrounds. Warhol similarly noticed that behavior modification could be achieved without direct coercion by disciplinary institutions: "Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more that way." [11]

Godard too was clearly perturbed about the powerful grasp of mass-mediated consumer society on citizens' minds that Warhol describes. *Pierrot le fou* most explicitly explores them in the cocktail party scene. The cocktail party, a staple of bourgeois social life beginning in the 1950s, epitomizes the world that Ferdinand flees from. In scenes of the stuffy

event he attends at his in-laws' home, guests' interactions are totally mediated through gendered advertising imagery. They communicate by trading slogans: Frank repeats the copy from an ad for "the new Alfa Romeo, with its four-wheel disk breaks," to which a woman responds, "To combat underarm perspiration, I use Odorono after my bath for all-day protection." The scene illustrates the strangeness of publicity speech, showing it out of context, in a "real" setting rather than a commercial.

Fig. 8 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

Godard saturates the scenes with color—red, green, blue, yellow—apparently by placing filters on his lens, or possibly by using colored lights (fig. 8). The result is a single hue that overpowers all others, flattening them to dark browns or blacks. This flattening effect emphasizes the scriptedness of the one-dimensional routines and social rituals that can characterize a rote social event like a cocktail party, but also lays it bare. In what might be read as an acceleration of advertising's tendency to sexualize women—or an acknowledgment of repressed desire just below the surface—the female guests are shown both clothed and topless. This literal denuding, incongruous with the otherwise banal party setting, gives the whole bourgeois affair a surreal air. The characters' thoughts have apparently been replaced or reshaped by mediated consumer culture. The scene deftly illustrates the ways that language can reflect and reproduce certain political ideologies, even if the speaker is not fully aware of them. The characters' repetition of the content of commercials indicates a broader acceptance and performance of the status quo. Conversely, the publicity language is ironically deployed against the grain when the protagonists stop in a Total gas station (notably, a French firm that extracted much of its oil from Algeria after World War II; also, evocative of the oil business from which Ferdinand escaped, as well as an index of US-style car culture). [12] Ferdinand repeats the slogan of the competing American brand (Esso), telling the attendant to "put a tiger in my tank," before he and Marianne assault the attendants and steal gas for their car. Marianne affirms their rejection of work—and capitalist exchange—as she knocks one of the men to the ground with a Laurel and Hardy–inspired blow.

Fig. 9 - Andy Warhol, *Birmingham Race Riot*, 1964, screenprint in black on wove paper, Reba and Dave Williams Collection, Florian Carr Fund and Gift of the Print Research Foundation, 2008.115.302

In form and logic, the moving images of the cocktail party scene parallel Warhol's Death and Disasters series of silkscreens. For these works, Warhol printed horrific images culled from mass media onto boldly colored grounds. While the *Pierrot* party is not horrific per se, it does bring spectacular mass-media imagery, similar to that used by Warhol, into cinema: in one scene, Marianne and Ferdinand encounter a peculiar flaming car crash, isolated at the edge of the highway. The images of the burning car, seemingly a film studio prop, recall the eerie, charred wrecks in Warhol's *Green Car Crash* (1963) and *Saturday Disaster* (1963). [13] In other scenes, Godard invokes disaster when he depicts Ferdinand being waterboarded; in the context of 1960s France, the torturous interrogation method was a specific reference to the Algerian War, a conflict that ultimately led to the North African colony's independence. Such depictions would have potentially resonated with original audiences in a fashion quite similar to Warhol's various iterations of *Birmingham Race Riot* (1964) (fig. 9). By graphically transmitting the way that the government—in the form of police force—brutally operated to maintain the order of things, Warhol's work indicts the ugly side of race relations in the United States.

In addition to the scenes of burning cars and waterboarding, numerous weapons—including guns—make an appearance in *Pierrot le fou*. In the American context, the gun is a common pop element in television and film; the right to bear arms is mentioned in the Second Amendment of the US Constitution. Pop artists reflected the ubiquity of firearms in American culture (both fictional and real). Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Oldenburg fixated on this aspect of modern society and incorporated representations of pistols and rifles into their work. For example, Warhol's *Double Elvis* (1963) depicts a reduplicated Elvis Presley, legs broadly spread, pistol drawn, in an image that hails from a publicity still from the film *Flaming Star* (1960). *Cagney* (1962–1964), Warhol's portrait of actor James Cagney wielding a Thompson submachine gun and flanked by another, similarly multiplies and highlights firearms. Warhol also dedicated a print portfolio to the killing of John F. Kennedy, which was the work of an assassin with a scoped, bolt-action Italian carbine (fig. 10). *Pierrot le fou* protagonists take an identical rifle when they go on the run (and which Marianne uses to

Fig. 10 - Andy Warhol, *Untitled*, 1968, color screenprint on wove paper, Gift of the Collectors Committee, 2012.31.6

shoot two men in a convertible): indeed, before tossing the firearm to Marianne, Ferdinand remarks that it is "the same make that killed Kennedy." In response, Marianne quips, "Didn't you know it was me?"

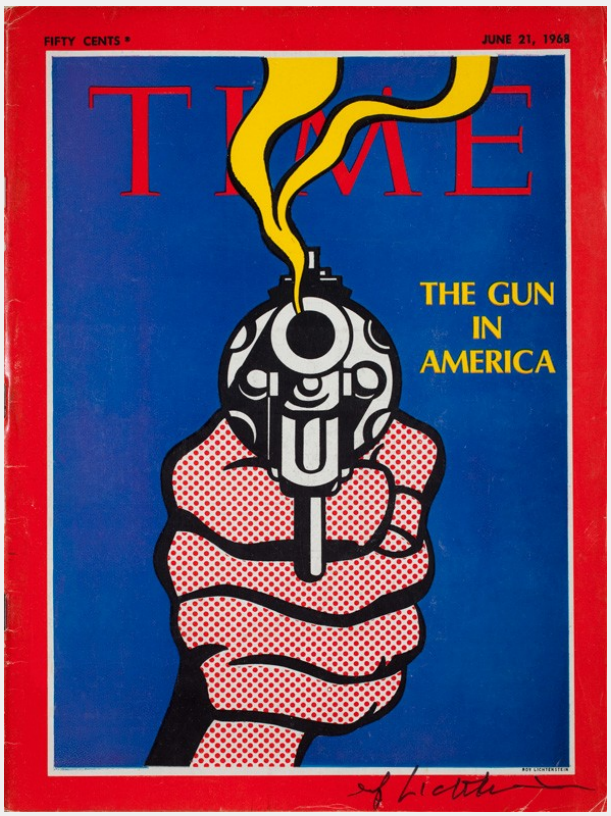

Fig. 11 - Roy Lichtenstein, *Time Magazine The Gun in America Cover*, 1968, offset lithograph on white coated paper, 11 1/6 x 8 1/4 (28.1 x 21). © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

Fig. 12 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

For his part, Lichtenstein transferred the numerous weapons found in comics onto canvas, often prompting a more profound consideration of their position (fig. 5). His depiction of a foreshortened hand grasping a pistol pointing threateningly out at the viewer graced the cover of special edition of *Time* on "the gun in America" (June 21, 1968) (fig. 11). Lichtenstein's image was partially informed by a photo of a woman holding a gun—his framing is nearly identical to Godard's in a scene where one of the gangsters menaces the camera with a pistol in the same fashion (fig. 12). The weaponry in *Pierrot le fou* makes sense within the genre of the action film. However, as Godard incorporates reports of actual violence in Vietnam, he too raises questions about its portrayal in the media. He plays with possible punning connections between shooting film—and bullets—by pointing his camera directly at the barrel of a gun, and by shooting a view from Marianne's scope; she muses that "soft breasts and thighs" should not prevent from "her from killing everyone to stay free or defend herself" (fig. 13). Additionally, Godard disrupts the visual pleasure that might be experienced from viewing Marianne lounging on her bed by also including one of her rifles below with its muzzle trained back on the audience. Both setups seem to heighten the sense of the political, ethical, and aesthetic

dynamics of "shot/reverse shot" that the director would later contend is the essence of filmmaking. [14]

Fig. 13 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

Fig. 14 - Claes Oldenburg, *Glass Case with Pies (Assorted Pies in a Case)*, 1962, burlap soaked in plaster, painted with enamel, with pie tins, in glass-and-metal case, Gift of Leo Castelli, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1991.54.1

Oldenburg affirmed that "art should be literally made of the ordinary world; its space should be our space; its time our time; its objects our ordinary objects; the reality of art will replace reality." [15] His soft sculptures and papier-mâché objects typically depict everyday consumer products. By changing the scale, texture, and rigidity of these quotidian icons Oldenburg renders them strange: they seem to be the stuff of (bad) dreams made real. Oldenburg created nonfunctional ray guns, which he presented like specimens of natural history in his *Ray Gun Wing (1977).* In *The Street* (1960) and *The Store* (1961–1964) Oldenburg hawked "bad" consumer goods—sloppily painted, globby foodstuffs (fig. 14) and articles of clothing that do not provoke desire, but instead seem to confound consumption. Thus, in some ways he defied the function of the space of commerce that he parodied. Often, Oldenburg relied on shifts in scale and texture to produce uncanny objects; Godard achieves similar effects with the camera. A close-up of Karina's hand with scissors prompts them to become monstrous; the lens slightly distorts her now-gigantic digits and shears, making them appear softer and rounded. Marianne uses the scissors to commit murder more than once, giving them a sinister air and perhaps transforming them in the audience's eyes from common, everyday object to lethal weapon (fig. 15). Oldenburg, too, recast gigantic scissors in a distinct role, envisioning them in 1968 as a replacement for the Washington Monument (fig. 16). His outlandish attempt to reimagine the obelisk also potentially asks audiences to reassess their relationship to memorials.

Fig. 15 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

Oldenburg's films and performances also resonate

with *Pierrot le fou*. *Photo-death* (1961) comically proposes a connection between capture on camera and death (a literal *fotomaton*), with actors slumping to the ground nearly as soon as the lens is trained upon them. Godard presents close-ups of the pistol and scissors—tools for shooting and cutting, actions proper to cinema production, but also for killing—in close sequence. He weaves a metaphoric entanglement similar to Oldenburg's, connecting death and the cinema. The final action scenes of *Pierrot le fou* involve the choreographies of numerous motor vehicles. Driving separate cars, Ferdinand and Marianne gracefully arc and weave around each other and trees before pulling up side by side and exchanging a kiss from their respective driver's seats. This auto-dance directly parallels Oldenburg's *Autobodies*, a 1963 happening with cars staged in a Los Angeles parking lot.

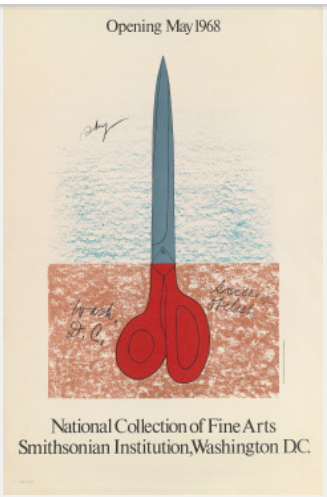

Fig. 16 - Claes Oldenburg, Atelier Mourlot, H.K.L. Ltd., *Scissors as Monument*, 1968, color lithograph on wove paper, Corcoran Collection (Gift of the National Collection of Fine Arts), 2015.19.1067

Fig. 17 - Andy Warhol, *Green Marilyn*, 1962, acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, Gift of William C. Seitz and Irma S. Seitz, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, 1990.139.1

Like Warhol, Godard was aware of the East German playwright Bertolt Brecht. [16] Unlike Warhol, however, the director took a special interest in Brecht's politically committed theater, translating many of his strategies to the screen. Brecht believed it was important for the audience to be aware that they were witnessing constructed fiction, so that they would not suspend disbelief, but become aware of the staging of theater. He used distinct devices, which he described as U- and V-effects, to provide audiences with critical distance and to make strange established tropes. [17] Godard includes various elements that perform similar didactic or revelatory functions in film. He makes spectators aware they are watching a film and further prompts them to reflect on the conditions of production. Often this is achieved via testing the bounds between reality and representation—and letting the former flow into the latter. For instance, at the conclusion of the first Total scene, the characters make statements that apparently refer to the story they are in: "It was an adventure film," Ferdinand says; Marianne counters, "It was a love story." Like Brecht, who had posters appear onstage at certain times, Godard employs texts equally to augment and disrupt the action. Moreover, *Pierrot le fou* bends and blends established elements of distinct genres and combines them in a new, "improper" fashion. The actor Belmondo gives an almost parodic performance of the Hollywood leading man. His iteration of heartthrob, it could be said, parallels Warhol's *Double Elvis* and *Green Marilyn* (1962) (fig. 17)—visual multiplications of stars that can be read to register the process of celebrity reification that buoys the film industry.

In the cocktail scene, Ferdinand speaks with the American director Sam Fuller, who tells him he is in Paris to make a film. Fuller, a filmmaker whom

Godard admired, actually plays himself. Unlike most of the other conversations, which are infused with color, this exchange is clearly illuminated with white, artificial light, a move that recalls Brecht's belief that stage lighting should not be concealed. A series of close-up shots presents short "screen tests" of people who are apparently extras and crew members, not actors in character (though this truth is undercut by the fact some are regulars in Godard's productions). They identify themselves and speak candidly to the camera about their lives, revealing something about the collective nature of producing a film. Later, as the couple drives south, Ferdinand remarks as an aside: "All she thinks about is fun!" When Marianne inquires who he is speaking to, he replies, "the audience" ("*les spectateurs*"). In another scene, she refers to Ferdinand once as Jean, Belmondo's first name. Rather than do an additional take to fix the "mistake," Godard retained this fissure in the film's fictional fabric. Godard's affirmation "Not blood, red" when correcting an interviewer who asked about representations of bodily harm, reveals his understanding of some effects as tellingly theatrical (as well as aesthetic). [18]

Resonating with Brecht's call to present "the truth" in art, Godard registers the Vietnam War and provides information about it. [19] He upsets the notion that he is producing a work of pure fiction by including an actual newsreel and radio report of fatalities in the war, which the characters listen to while driving. With a Brechtian spirit, Marianne says of the loss of life, "They say '115 guerillas' and it doesn't mean a thing to us." Indeed, the mass media—which brought the death statistics into countless living rooms—surely had an influence on artists and filmmakers alike. Godard's use of information parallels Warhol's paintings with headlines. Many of Warhol's works in this mode mention death statistics, such as his painting *129 Die in Jet (Plane Crash)* (1962). He was interested in exploring the way that a morbid curiosity with death drove people to buy newspapers. Moreover, following from Marianne's analysis, encountering and contemplating abstractions of death out of context—in a gallery space or movie theater—prompts further reflection on the way it can be reified. Godard shows the ways that mediation abstracts tragedy and death, converting them into goods to be consumed by hardened news addicts.

Fig. 18 - Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Pierrot le fou*, 1965, color, courtesy of Rialto Pictures.

Marianne and Ferdinand present a carnivalesque rendition of the Vietnam War. Marianne appears in orientalist guise, playing an allegory of Vietnam (it appears her problematic yellowface getup is meant to appeal to the audience of Americans they "change [their] politics" for) (fig. 18). Belmondo, donning a naval uniform, repeatedly intones, "Sure, yeah, oh yeah, communist." Their performance suggests that the theater of war is in some way governed by the logic of spectacle and perhaps not consumed so differently. Their play-war (or war-play) resounds more forcefully than the news reports of the ongoing conflict. The scene was inspired by an anecdote Godard overheard: "Someone coming back from China told me this is how it happens: suddenly, in a marketplace, five people come along; one plays the American imperialist, and so on. . . . My inclusion of a newsreel about Vietnam after that was pure logic: . . . they were playing a game but . . . the matter of their game preexisted." [20] As can be observed in the collectively authored film Godard participated in, *Loin du Vietnam* (1967), a very similar form of street theater existed in Vietnam. Like Brecht, who was interested in Chinese theater—evinced by his *Good Person of*

Szechwan—Godard was fascinated by Chinese culture and politics. He was nevertheless critical of blind acceptance of the teachings of Mao Zedong, as can be seen in his *La Chinoise,* a film that includes a play about the Vietnam War resembling the one Marianne and Ferdinand put on. [21]

True to his namesake from the Commedia dell'arte, Pierrot/Ferdinand is spurned by the female protagonist. Betrayed, Ferdinand strikes back and kills Fred and Marianne. Distraught by what he has done to his lover, he decides to kill himself. Warhol once mentioned that he wished he had been able to film his friend Freddie Herko's suicide: as part of the Death and Disaster series Warhol created *Suicide* (1963). Like Warhol's, Godard's representation of this tragedy is highly aesthetic: Ferdinand paints his face sky blue following Marianne's death. The film cuts to an azure notepad with a handwritten “1a rt” on it; for a moment it seems as though Ferdinand might be on a path back to the art (*l'art*) that began the film, but it is toward death (*la mort*) that he is driven: the missing "mo" is penciled in. He wraps a layer of yellow nitramite around his head then encircles it with bright red dynamite. The blue, yellow, and red palette recalls Lichtenstein's. Ferdinand lights an entire box of matches and sets off the fuse. He regrets it almost immediately and tries in vain to extinguish it. "*Merde*," he says, instants before he is consumed in an explosion so sudden that the timing feels almost comical and certainly evokes some of the absurdity of death. Following the termination of Pierrot/Ferdinand, Godard concludes *Pierrot le fou* with a traveling shot of a blue sky and horizon: not quite transcendence or eternity, but rather, as Ferdinand and Marianne's voiceover tells us, "Just the sea. And the sun."

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NOTES

1. Godard in “Pierrot My Friend,” in *Godard on Godard*, ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne (New York, 1986), 215; Godard in “Let’s talk about *Pierrot*,” in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Alain Berglia, trans. David Willis (Paris, 1985), 263.

2. Godard described *Pierrot le fou* in promotional materials in terms of titles of his prior films: “UN PETIT SOLDAT QUI DECOUVRE AVEC MEPRIS QU'IL FAUT VIVRE SA VIE, QU'UNE FEMME EST UNE FEMME, ET QUE DANS UN MONDE NOUVEAU, IL FAUT FAIRE BANDE A PART POUR NE PAS SE RETROUVER A BOUT DE SOUFFLE.” See Jean-Luc Godard in “Slogans pour *Pierrot”* (1965), in *Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris, 2012), 110.

3. Godard described *Pierrot le fou* in promotional materials in terms of titles of his prior films: “UN PETIT SOLDAT QUI DECOUVRE AVEC MEPRIS QU'IL FAUT VIVRE SA VIE, QU'UNE FEMME EST UNE FEMME, ET QUE DANS UN MONDE NOUVEAU, IL FAUT FAIRE BANDE A PART POUR NE PAS SE RETROUVER A BOUT DE SOUFFLE.” See Jean-Luc Godard in “Slogans pour *Pierrot”* (1965), in *Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris, 2012), 110.

4. Jean-Luc Godard in “Slogans pour *Pierrot”* (1965), in *Jean-Luc Godard*(Paris, 2012), 110 (my translation).

5. Donald Judd, “Specific Objects” (1965), in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art,* ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Los Angeles, 2012), 138.

6. Richard Dienst, “The Imaginary Element: Life + Cinema,” in *Jean-Luc Godard’s “Pierrot le fou,”* ed. David Willis (Cambridge, 2000), 26 (original emphasis).

7. Robert Rauschenberg, “Note on Painting” (1963), reproduced in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art,* 374.

8. Jean-Luc Godard cited in Jonathan Cott, "Jean-Luc Godard: The *Rolling Stone* Interview," *Rolling Stone,* June 14, 1969, http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/features/jean-luc-godard-19690614 (accessed on May 11, 2017).

9. Andy Warhol quoted in Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol ’60s,* (New York, 1980), 280.

10. Godard in Andrew Sarris, *Interviews with Film Directors* (New York, 1969), 172–73.

11. Andy Warhol quoted in Gene Swenson, “What Is Pop Art?” (1963), reproduced in "Statements," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art,* 392.

12. Mohammed Sassi, "*Compagnie Française des Pétroles* and Its Contribution to the Re-establishment of France’s Position among the Oil Countries after the Second World War," *Business and Economic History* 4 (2006): 1–15.

13. Like Warhol Godard explored the motif of the auto wreck repeatedly. He staged his own "Saturday disaster" in his famous seven-minute traffic jam and bloody collision travelling shot in *Week-end* (1967), a film that can be considered a "double" of *Pierrot le fou*.

14. Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma,* DVD, directed by Jean-Luc Godard, (1988–1998; Paris: Gaumont, 1999).

15. Oldenburg quoted in "Lot 353: Claes Oldenburg & Coosje Van Bruggen SCREW ARCH MODEL," *Sotheby's,* September 25, 2013, www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.353.html/2013/contemporary-art-n09010, (accessed June 10, 2017).

16. See Warhol quoted in Swenson 1963, reproduced in "Statements," 392.

17. Following Frederic Jameson and Ernst Bloch, the V-effect, *Verfremdung*, translates best to estrangement rather than defamiliarization. See Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (New York, 1998), 85–86 n13, and Ernst Bloch, "*Entfremdung, Verfremdung*: Alienation, Estrangement," *TDR* 15:1 (Autumn 1970), 120–125. According to Bloch's definition of estrangement, "The strange externality purposes to let the beholder contemplate experience separated, as in a frame, or heightened, as on a pedestal. As has been suggested, this leads increasingly away from the usual and makes the beholder pause and take notice. Thus a faint aura of estrangement already inheres in the kind of spoken inflection that will suddenly make the hearer listen anew" (123). Additionally, following William Burling, *Verfremdung* is best grasped as a subset of *Umfunktionierung* (functional transformation/refunctioning). See Burling, "Brecht's 'U-effect': Theorizing the Horizons of Revolutionary Theatre," in *Brecht, Broadway, and United States Theatre,* ed. Chris Westgate (Cambridge, 2007), 166–187. The U-effect, *Umfunktionierung,* includes practices that attempt "to convert institutions from places of [mere culinary] entertainment into organs of mass communication"; see Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues,*trans. John Willet (London, 1965), 41, in "Brecht's 'U-effect.': Theorizing the Horizons of Revolutionary Theatre."

18. Godard, "Let’s Talk about Pierrot," in *Godard on Godard*, ed. and trans. Tom Milne (New York and London, 1986), 217.

19. See Bertolt Brecht, "Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties" (1934), in *Galileo*, ed. Eric Bently (New York, 1966), 131–150.

20. Jean-Luc Godard, "Parlons de Pierrot," *Cahiers du cinéma* 171 (October 1965): 25.