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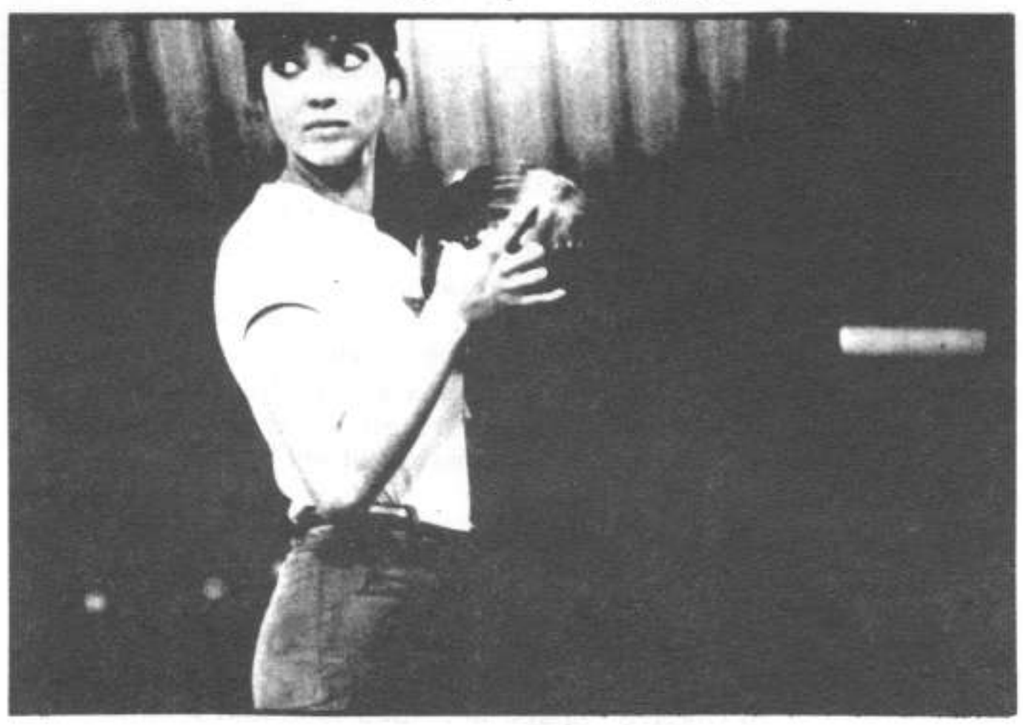


An Analysis of Jean-Luc Godard's PIERROT LE FOU

by PETER LEHMAN

The history of the cinema is full of examples of films dealing with the relationship of characters to their environment. The word "environment" as used here means not only the physical or natural elements of a particular geographical location, but includes the man made culture as well. In other words, the larger context in which the characters are placed and in which the events transpire. At times, this context can be almost entirely natural and physical, as in NANOOK OF THE NORTH and MAN OF ARAN by Robert Flaherty. Other instances show a complex subtle interaction between a natural environment and an advancing civilization. John Ford's SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON and FORT APACHE, for example, introduce an advancing Eastern civilization (associated with reading and writing, roads and stagecoaches and telegraph systems) into the natural environment supplied by Monument Valley. In EARTH and ZVENIGORA, the Russian director Dovzhenko is concerned with the introduction of machine technology into the lives of peasants and farmers.

Film, perhaps more than any other art form, is peculiarly equipped to view the complex interrelatedness of man and his environment. Of all filmmakers, Jean-Luc Goddard has presented the most sophisticated treatment of this subject. The concern, as has been indicated, is certainly not new. There was a period in film history when the effects of machine technology on people was a primary interest. In addition to Dovzhenko, Sergei Eisenstein in OLD AND NEW, Fritz Lang in METROPOLIS, Rene Clair in A NOUS LA LIBERTE, Fernand Leger in BALLET MECHANIQUE, and Charlie Chaplin in MODERN TIMES all share this concern. But if the theme is not new with Godard, the environment in which his characters live certainly is.

By the time Godard started making films, the machine age was history. Electric technologies and whole new media had so encompassed modern man that the primary concern with the relationship of man to machine had all but vanished. This new environment reached its extremity with space travel and the landing of the first men on the moon. It is entirely appropriate that PIERROT LE FOU (hereafter referred to as PIERROT one of the most complete and profound filmic presentations of modern man in his environment, should include a reference to lunar exploration.

Due to the state of existing criticism on Godard's films, it is absolutely necessary to outline the critical approach that will be most useful in exploring PIERROT. Godard is one of the most original figures to ever have worked in films; his whole approach is unlike anything that has gone before him. Most critics, however, have analyzed his work in the same way in which they have dealt with more traditional films and the results have been disastrous. Many articles on Godard's films have ended up talking about narrative aspects which have little or nothing to do with the films under consideration.

The critical method that is set up at the beginning of the investigation of a film will in large part determine the results of the analysis. If the wrong kinds of questions are asked, an interesting and complex film can appear to be poor or even incomprehensible. This is precisely the problem that has plagued Godard criticism. CONTEMPT is not about the break-up of a marriage, MASCULINE-FEMININE is not about the difficulties of a love affair, and PIERROT is not about two gangsters who are in love and on the run. To consider the making of the film within-the-film in CONTEMPT as merely the backdrop of the love story is to reduce a profoundly complex film about contemporary aesthetics to a simple love story. To ask why Marianne leaves Ferdinand or why Ferdinand commits suicide in PIERROT is to invite an answer so trivial as to make the film seem laughingly underdeveloped.

The first point to be made about PIERROT, then, is that it is not a film of psychological realism. To ask the question "why?" over and over in relation to the events of the film is to apply the questions raised by 19th century novels to a work of 20th century originality. This is not to suggest that the characters are not important in PIERROT, but rather that their importance lies in an area other than psychological realism. The same can be said about the plot. Definite elements of narrative exist in PIERROT but they do not serve the same function as in a traditional film. There are characters and there are events in PIERROT, but they have more in common with T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" than they do with any film that presents psychologically real characters in a traditional narrative framework.

Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier more than any other critic has recognized the need to establish a proper critical framework from which to approach Godard's films. In an article entitled "Form and Substance, or The Avatars of the Narrative" Ropars-Wuilleumier makes two points appropriate to PIERROT. Writing about BREATHLESS she observes:

> For when Godard suppresses, in A BOUT DE SOUFFLE, all of the dramatic links not only between scenes but also within the scenes and even within a single sequence, he is tearing down logical continuity and therefore the very finality of the story line. By cutting out all transitions and explanations, Godard is able to bring the audience's eyes and its attention back to the image itself, which he preserves in a kind of primitive state by divorcing it from the role of intermediary it usually plays vis-a-vis the succession of shots.[1]

This technique plays an even more sophisticated role in PIERROT.

Ropars-Wuilleumier goes on to note:

> In Godard, space becomes less and less a manner of expressing the temporality of the individual; instead it becomes more and more the image of a piece of time, of a fragment of life containing an inexhaustible totality whose slightest movements must be captured and put together. Therefore the abstract elements composing the traditional storyline are replaced by symphonic recomposition of their discernible parts.[2]

In other words, the usual narrative style isolates something by stressing its momentary importance. The viewer becomes absorbed in its connective function, i.e. how does this relate to what has just happened or what is going to happen next? A great deal of the viewer's attention is absorbed by involvement in the narrative level. Once this narrative interest factor is removed, the viewer's attention is free to be applied elsewhere with a degree of intensity not previously allowed. (It should be noted incidentally that Andy Warhol's films experiment along similar lines. Warhol initially reduced narrative elements to a total non-entity and freed the viewer's attention to perceive either objects or people in an intense detail never before possible. As with Godard, it takes a considerable degree of effort on the part of the viewer to make films like these meaningful since the usual crutch of being caught up in an entertaining temporal flow is totally removed.)

Closely related to the above points is yet another technique which Godard employs in PIERROT to produce an unusually intense awareness in the viewer: the placing of a familiar object in an unusual or unexpected place. Along with the gaps in narrative continuity and the near total spatialization of time, this device increases the viewer's involvement and causes a focusing of attention on things which are frequently not noticed at all. An excellent illustration from PIERROT is Godard's handling of cars. Cars are to be found in virtually every narrative film made about contemporary society. Yet rarely, if ever, has their presence and importance been so keenly perceived as in PIERROT. One of the more significant scenes involving this car imagery can be noted briefly:

> Long-shot: Ferdinand enters the restaurant through an open window. It is empty except for red painted wooden tables and chairs and a Mercedes car mysteriously parked in front of the bar. Music blares from the jukebox...
> (p. 76 of the shot description and dialogue published by Simon and Schuster)

In this scene, during a conversation between Ferdinand and the unidentified man, the car is always present and unexplained; for that matter, nonchalantly unnoticed. The significance of this technique plus the other stylistic aspects already noted suggest the main thematic concerns of PIERROT: Godard raises the cliches of the environment in which the characters live to a conscious level of awareness in the viewer's mind, and in so doing, precipitates a complex process which ulti mately turns the most trivial, commonplace, even totally unobserved aspects of modern life into a profound experience.

In a recent book, From Cliche to Archetype, Marshall McLuhan discusses certain spects of art (and modern twentieth century art in particular) that are directly applicable to PIERROT. McLuhan suggests that the given environment at any specific moment in cultural history is a cliche. That is to say, that there is an everyday ordinary, all pervasive aspect of the environment which surrounds all of us and which we do not consciously comprehend—this despite the fact that this "cliche" has tremendous influences and effects upon us. According to McLuhan, if "we" (the ordinary members of the culture) don't notice this, the artist does and it is the artist's job to make us aware of this "cliche." The artist takes the cliche and raises it to a conscious level at which point it becomes an archetype. The only difference between an archetype and a cliche in this system depends upon whether or not there is a conscious level of awareness. To illustrate from the example used previously, a car in a film can be either a cliche or an archetype. In most films cars are merely cliches. They perform the exact same function in these films (transportation) that they are perceived as performing in "real life." If the setting of a film is in a period when cars exist, cars are used. Only if the filmmaker uses the car as a cultural artifact instead of as performing the commonly perceived function of transportation is that cliche raised to a conscious and archetypical level.

An archetype is the result of a process which can be referred to (although McLuhan doesn't use the word) as archetypalizing. The only thing that stands between the cliche and the archetype is the work of art. The art object is created by the artist who perceives the cliche and raises it to a level of conscious awareness, the participant interacts with the art object, the cliche is revealed, and turned into an archetype. PIERROT performs this function to one of the richest, fullest and most complex degrees of any film ever made about the modern environment as of 1965. Since the characters in the film move in an environment identical to the one in which the audience lives (modern technological Western culture) all aspects of previously unperceived relationships between the characters in the film and their environment apply directly to the lives of the viewers. Anything the viewer learns about Ferdinand and Marianne he, in effect, learns about himself. One of the things that makes PIERROT complex is that the perceptions of the audience are not shared by the characters. The characters move through the cliches of the environment in the same way as we, the audience, do on a day to day basis. It is Godard's perception which enables us to see things about the characters' lives (and our own), which the characters themselves don't perceive.

PIERROT marks a point in Godard's career where there is an increasing political content in his films. References to the Vietnam War (cited by one interviewer as being potentially out of place) are found in PIERROT and are present in such films as MASCULINE-FEMININE.[3] To argue that these political references are intrusions and that the films tend to become propaganda is the exact opposite of the truth. McLuhan has written:

> Jacques Ellul observes in Propaganda: "When dialogue begins, propaganda ends." His theme that propaganda is not this or that ideology but rather the action and coexistence of all media at once, explains why propaganda is environmental and invisible. The total life of any culture tends to be "propaganda" for this reason. It blankets perception and awareness, making the counter environments created by the artist indispensable to survival and freedom.[4]

It is not the ideology expressed in PIERROT, MASCULINE-FEMININE, or ONE PLUS ONE that is important, but rather the way in which Godard relates the political events to part of an invisible media environment. ONE PLUS ONE, far from being propaganda, is a brilliant, penetrating study of how political events are part of this pervasive environment. The Vietnam War cannot be separated from a magazine or a radio. PIERROT is the point in Godard's career when he begins to deal with this extremely important contemporary theme.

The primary function of the narrative in PIERROT is to establish broad patterns of movement. A five part division of the film can be discerned:

I (Introduction) The cultural-environmental milieu (pp. 23-44 in the Simon and Schuster Pierrot Le Fou)

II Flight from the cultural-environmental milieu (pp. 44-58)

III Into nature: the island as counter environment (pp. 58-69)

IV Return to the mainland environment (pp. 69-100)

V (Conclusion) Death and dissolution (pp. 100-104)

The fact that the narrative elements present are in the form of a detective story is also relevant but this aspect of the plot will be considered later. What is important to notice here is the generalized pattern of the movement and that this pattern is far from being arbitrary or uncontrolled.

Moving through the five main blocks or segments of the film are two main characters: Ferdinand and Marianne. The word "generalized" can be applied to them as well as to the plot. They are not specific (psychologically real) characters. Almost all narrative films have attempted to present specific characters (unique in the sense of being real individuals) in a particularized situation. The viewer (similar to the reader of the nineteenth century novel) is led to believe that he is watching real people in a real situation—in other words, the emphasis is on the unique, the specific, the individual. With the altering of one aspect of realism (the plot), the other (the characters) is also automatically altered.

It should be pointed out that Godard's method is obviously part of a much larger artistic movement of the twentieth century. Painting and literature, for example, have been developing along these lines since the years immediately following World War I. Artists have turned their attention to the cliche/archetype pattern previously discussed. Neither cliches, archetypes, nor the archetypalizing process have anything to do with psychological realism. The rise of the influence of comic books on the arts should also be noted. In film not just Godard, but Marker, Resnais, Edwards, Leone, and Fellini, to name just a few, all have been influenced by comics. In painting, Pop Art is an obvious example of the same thing.

Cliches (the unobserved constantly present aspect of our lives) and their elevation to archetypes (the observed and comprehended aspects of our lives) deal entirely in generalities. Realism, in an attempt to pinpoint the specific, tried to draw the participant in further and further; whereas what I call cliche/archetype art forces the participant out. It is almost like going opposite directions in concentric circles PIERROT derives its richness by reverberations going out from generalized cliched characters moving through highly recognizable generalized situations. This is one of the main reasons for the often noted distanciation devices employed by Godard. For example, when Ferdinand talks directly to the audience (p. 55) and when Marianne tells Ferdinand that they are not characters in a film, they, paradoxically, remind the audience that they are (p. 59). To destroy the viewer's illusions that he is watching a real, specific situation is central to Godard's art in PIERROT. He considers these illusions harmful delusions.

Each of the five sections of PIERROT serves a specific function in advancing the film. The introduction (part one) presents the basis of the central problem. This is stated in its most direct form during the party scene:

> Ferdinand: No... I'm worn out. I've a mechanism for seeing, called eyes, for listening called ears, for speaking, called mouth. I've got a feeling they're all going their separate ways... There's no co-ordination. One should feel they're united. I feel they are deranged.

Ferdinand's environment in the first section of the film has created a feeling of sensory imbalance and separation in him. He feels disrupted and longs for a sense of integration, a more organic relationship between his sensory perceptions.

The way the other members of the culture react to this environment is equally important. Unlike Ferdinand, they are neither dissatisfied nor aware of the situation. Their behavior introduces a main recurring motif in the film, that of numbness. This numbness is conveyed through the characters' inability to react in any way to phenomena they encounter. It is as if they are in a trance, which is exactly what McLuhan has repeatedly suggested is the result of this type of sensory perception disruption. Two areas of experience are especially emphasized by Godard: sex and violence. During the cocktail party, the guests partake in an absurdist conversation which is, significantly enough, nothing but a regurgitation of the cliches of media advertising. Barely alive, they seem to be mouthing values which totally rule their lives even though they themselves are not aware of it. The script describes one such encounter during the party as follows:

> ...a couple is seen drinking and talking. The man is in a dinner jacket, and the girl is wearing a topless dress. Both her partner and Ferdinand, who is walking past, seem unaffected by the sight of her naked breasts. Ferdinand is walking slowly from right to left as before. The girl is talking. (p. 33)

After leaving the party, Ferdinand returns home to find Marianne, the babysitter, and takes her home. This scene stresses another major motif of the film: the constant bombardment of the environment upon the characters. The scene is described in the script as follows:

> It is night and the green and red reflected lights of a motorway zoom up and over the windscreen. The lights seem to start in the throat, flood through the face and fly off at a tangent into the sky. (p. 35)

The whole conversation between Ferdinand and Marianne must be viewed through the colors and lights of the city which seem to become part of the character's lives. Godard further accentuates this constant bombardment of modern life. Marianne turns on the car radio and they hear a news bulletin from Vietnam. Their lack of reaction and Marianne's ensuing remarks both emphasize that they are numbed by their environment. The 115 deaths referred to mean virtually nothing. The announcer's report produces no noticable response.

After Marianne regrets the anonymity of the newscast-photograph aspect of modern life, a short exchange takes place which introduces the central character relationship:

> Ferdinand: Yeah...that's life.
>
> Marianne: Yes, what makes me sad is that life in novels is so very different. I'd like it to be the same, clear, logical, formal. But it's not like that at all.
>
> Ferdinand: It is, much more than people believe.
>
> Marianne: No, Pierrot.
>
> Ferdinand: I'm not going to tell you again, my name is Ferdinand (p. 36)

Marianne's feeling that life is not like a novel and Ferdinand's insistance that it is defines the core of the problem between them throughout the film. They respond totally differently to the electric (traffic lights/radio) environment in which they live. Marianne feels that the written word, and its art form the novel, no longer relate to her (or to the modern environment). Ferdinand feels the opposite and, as will be noted later, his decision to keep a diary stems from his desire to understand his life in a clear, logical, formal fashion.

Another important recurring motif is illustrated by this dialogue: Marianne's insistance on calling Ferdinand "Pierrot." Pierrot is associated with the comedia dell arte tradition (he is the stock type of the lover who loses) but the figure has appeared frequently in twentieth century art. As McLuhan notes:

> The poets and pointers and muscians of the later nineteenth century all insist on a sort of metaphysical melancholy as latent in the great industrial world of the metropolis. The Pierrot figure is as crucial in the poetry of Laforgue as it is in the art of Picasso or the music of Satie. Is not the mechanical at its best a remarkable approximation of the organic? And is not a great industrial civilization able to produce anything in abundance for everybody? The answer is "Yes." But Chaplin and the Pierrot poets and painters and musicians pushed this logic all the way to reach the image of Cyrano de Bergerac, who was the greatest lover of all, but who was never permitted the return of his love. This weird image of Cyrano, the unloved and unlovable lover, was caught up in the phonograph cult of the blues... Chaplin's clown—Cyrano is as much a part of a deep melancholy as Laforgue's or Satie's Pierrot art... Read as a Chaplin-like comedy, Eliot's "Prufrock" makes ready sense. Prufrock is the complete Pierrot, the little puppet of the mechanical civilization that was about to do a flip into its electric phase. [5]

This passage perfectly describes the "blue" or "Pierrot art" aspect of Godard's film. Ferdinand, as will be seen, does not "flip" into the electric environment so much as he seeks both physical and perceptual escape from it. (David Ehrenstein points out that Pierrot le fou was the nickname of a famous French gangster. [6])

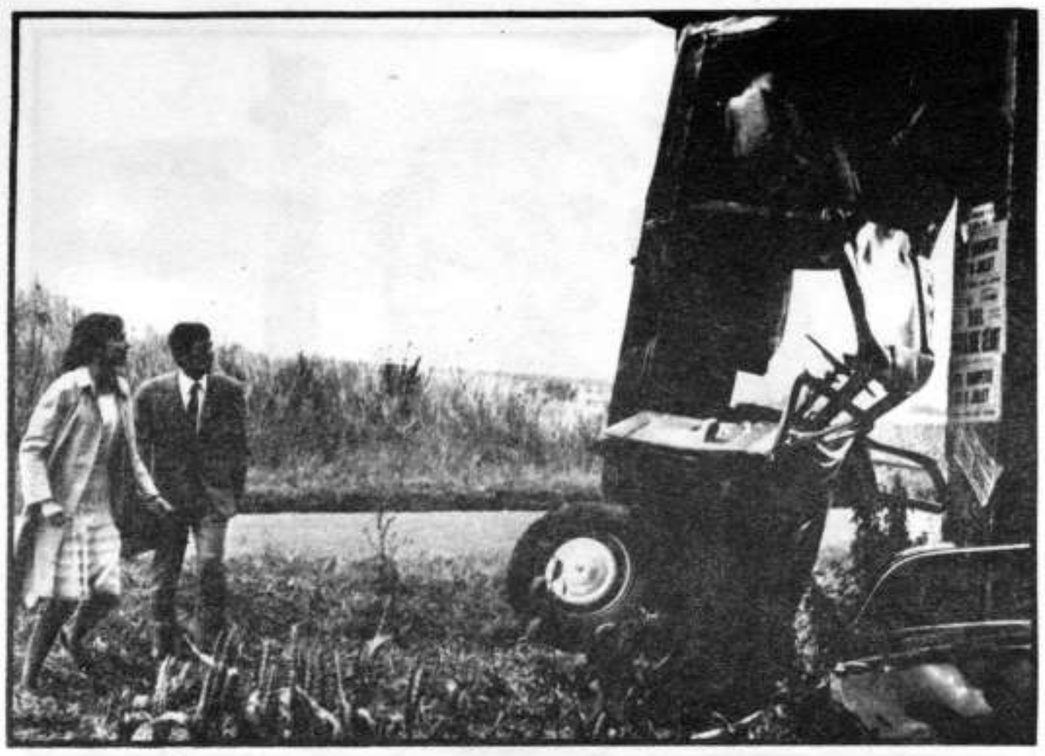
The conclusion of part one is a scene in Marianne's apartment. It develops the theme of numbness introduced at the party, as is shown in the following description of Marianne:

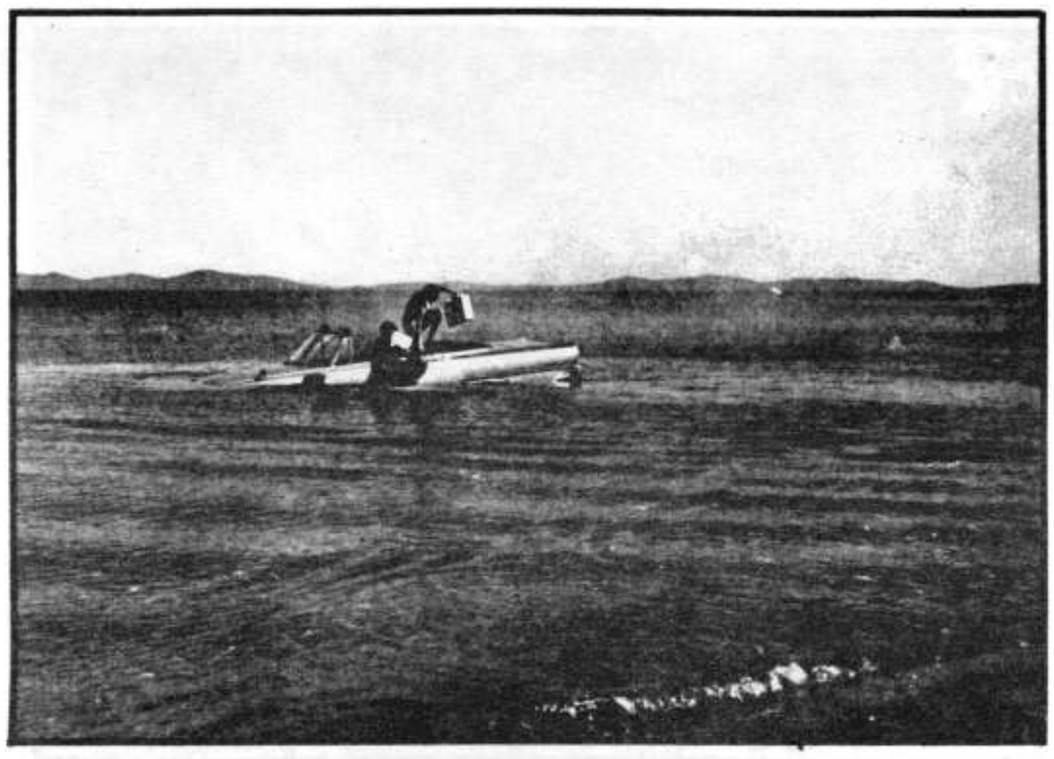
> She bends down at the side of a double bed on the left of the room and as she takes a breakfast tray from on the bed, we see for the first time the body of a man lying face downwards. A pair of scissors is embedded in his neck. His shirt is covered with blood. She picks up the tray as if the body did not exist. (p. 38)

Neither the characters nor the camera so much as glance at the dead body. This lack of response is repeated in the scene when Ferdinand and Frank encounter the body.

During the scene Ferdinand is wearing a T-shirt with his name lettered on it, a further reminder of the identity crisis he seeks to combat by labelling himself with letters. The scene ends with Ferdinand and Marianne fleeing the apartment in a state of confusion over a vaguely hinted at crime intrigue. It is significant that Godard films this scene without a linear, clear narrative line. Some shots, for example, include jumps back in time or repeat previous moments. This sense of time confusion introduces the last major theme of the film.

The second section, "Flight from the cultural -environmental milieu," is very short and primarily serves to instill the feeling of movement into the viewer. It functions, however, to develop several of the motifs already introduced. Ferdinand and Marianne are now seen to be caught up in the same process as were the people at the party. Even as they flee, they are trapped in the very cultural mold they are fleeing from. "Put a tiger in the tank!" Ferdinand says as he pulls into a gas sta-





tion (p. 44). "I've just remembered a gag in a Laurel and Hardy movie," Marianne tells Ferdinand and she then proceeds to employ it (p. 45). As their flight continues, they speak of their own lives as if they were in a novel or a film. Close-ups of comic strips and crime novels are interspersed with the actions. The implications are clear. The characters' behavior is so closely related to these things that they in effect believe that they are in a novel, a film, or a comic book.

The final scene of the second part richly develops the same motif. Ferdinand and Marianne decide to abandon their car at the site of a previous accident. Although there is a chunk of highway absurdly appearing in the middle of a field with a crashed car, bloody corpses in full view, neither Ferdinand nor Marianne respond in any way. They are incapable of feeling anything for the human lives involved or of wondering at the ridiculousness of that piece of highway coming from nowhere and going nowhere. They are numbed to everything, especially human life, and accept total absurdity without so much as a double take.

Godard uses visual images brilliantly in PIERROT. An analysis of a single frame shows just how he develops these themes without dialogue. In the final shot of the second section, Marianne and Ferdinand are walking away from their burning car after shooting the car to start it on fire. The shot consists of four important elements: the field, the anandoned wreckage, Marianne and Ferdinand, and the telephone-electrical wires stretched over the field above their heads. The combinations of the components of the images supply several levels of meaning. The first, and most basic, is a syntactical meaning. The shot of the field coming exactly where it does in the film introduces the theme of nature or the natural environment. Previously all we have seen is the urban setting and the contrast is marked. The meaning of the highway with the crashed automobile and dead passengers has already been suggested. In combination with the natural setting of the field, it is a reminder of the city that Marianne and Ferdinand are fleeing, the city which emphasizes objects and cars and numbs people's ability to respond to basics such as love, sex or violence. The directional movement of Marianne and Ferdinand deep into the frame implies the continued sense of the journey, of leaving the city behind and entering into nature. The telephone cables overhead, however, add an element of irony to the shot since the apparent change of environment is not nearly as total as might be immediately suggested. A larger environment (associated with the modern city and its technologies) has extended itself over the natural setting of the field.

Part three begins with Marianne and Ferdinand walking in a river and then moving towards the bank and sitting under trees. This first shot introduces an important motif. Ferdinand is holding a book. Even as he is apparently leaving his old life behind and entering a new one, he is ironically bringing the most important aspects of his past with him—his modes of perception and thinking. In the next shot, Ferdinand is "reading the book, wearing a gangster style hat and double breasted suit" (p. 52). This, of course, is a further continuation of the theme that Ferdinand is like what he reads, thus the feeling of movement away from what he was remains illusory. This is re-emphasized during the few remaining shots of their continuing journey into "pure" nature. The newspaper and the car radio, for example, with their coverage of the events seen at the beginning of the film all suggest that the environmental media network that they are in follows them, or rather, that they never leave it.

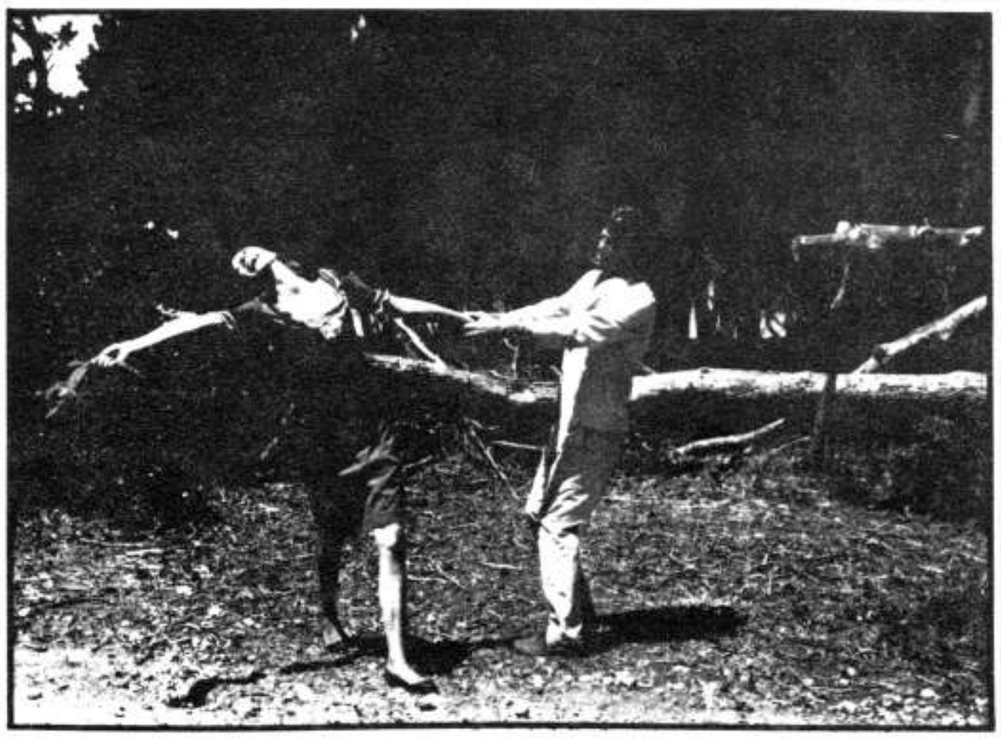
Several of the main motifs of the film are expressed during the final scenes of the flight into nature. Ferdinand at one point suddenly swings the car from side to side of the road, prompting Marianne to remark, "Little fool... little fool. He's following a straight line and he's got to stay with it right to the end." (p. 56) Ferdinand, who perceives his life in terms of novels and literary functions, is associated with linear movement, a pattern which he is trying to break. This linear movement contrasts, as will be seen, with the patterns of Marianne's movements.

The image of an abandoned car is also developed further. As the two are driving along in the car:

> Very long-shot: The car swings from the road and drives across the grassy slope between the road and the sea. But the car does not stop. Ferdinand drives it striaght into the sea...
> Long-shot: They are hastily getting themselves and their belongings out of the car as it gradually drifts out to sea, sinking. (p. 56)

The car (the environment they are trying to escape from) is slowly engulfed by the sea. As the two characters wade away from the sinking wreckage, the feeling is one of beginning a new life and marks the final transition between the city and nature. In the next shot they are seen sitting on the beach with their rescued suitcases. Ferdinand announces that they are going off to an island; the break from the city is complete —at least geographically.

At this point in the film, Godard introduces a level of extreme irony. Marianne and Ferdinand are lying on the beach at night and while the camera remains stationary on a long shot of the moon, we hear their voices discussing the cultural consequences of Russians and Americans landing on the moon. The cultural environment (Lenin and Coca Cola) has been extended to the moon and the web covers the entire earth. Although Ferdinand and Marianne appear to have escaped the modern technological environment, it is entirely delusory. There is no escape, as the remainder of the sequence demonstrates.



During the early scenes on the island, Ferdinand begins writing in his notebook. His first entry is revelatory:

> I have decided to keep a diary. Such is the essence of that being, face to face with nature, who is unable to believe. The urgency to describe it with language. (p. 59)

Ferdinand, in other words, is trying to understand the new (nature) with the old (reading and writing)—another level of irony. Godard presents this very effectively with a shot of Ferdinand walking along in nature reading his book. He has come to the island to start a new life, something which he is distinctly not doing.

Godard also associates Ferdinand with Robinson Crusoe in several ways. Initially this is conveyed by having a parrot sitting on his shoulder as he writes in his diary. In addition, he refers to Marianne as "my girl Friday." (p. 59) Ferdinand is behaving in a way which is entirely outdated, appropriate perhaps to Defoe's time but not to the modern world. Ferdinand is not on an island in the sense that Robinson Crusoe was (as demonstrated by the moon sequence) nor does language serve the same function in understanding experience as it did in the eighteenth century. Marianne understands these things and recognizes from the beginning that Ferdinand is doomed. It is precisely for this reason that she calls him Pierrot throughout the film. Ferdinand is fated.

Tractors, transistor radios, newspapers, records and record players all inundate Ferdinand and Marianne on the island. Their isolation on the island is far from complete. The situation they are in, however, causes the basic differences between them to surface. Marianne stresses her desire for action, for something to do. As the script notes at one point, "...she is desperately and agonizingly bored. He is completely absorbed in his writing..." (p. 62) The contrast between them is total. In the same scene the following exchange takes place:

> Ferdinand: Why do you look unhappy?
>
> Marianne: Because you talk to me with words and I look at you with feelings. (p. 62)

Words lie at the root of the differences between them. Marianne returns from the mainland where she has gone to get books for Ferdinand. (The fact that she goes to the mainland to get things, incidentally, is a further irony in their Robinson Crusoe life style.) Ferdinand explodes upon seeing that she bought a record. "I told you only one record for every fifty books. Music comes after literature," he tells her. (p. 64) For Marianne it is the exact opposite. The oral culture (in the McLuhan sense of the word) of the record and record player is of far more importance than the print culture of the book or diary. It is Marianne's craving for action and involvement with modern society that ends part three. They decide to return, to go back to where they came from.

The return to civilization is marked by encounters with the Vietnam War, American tourists, and finally, the confused and jumbled world of intrigue, violence, and action which Ferdinand had originally sought to escape. Interestingly enough, the American tourists (who vulgarly applaud and shout approval of the destruction depicted in the Vietnam skit) are seen reading comic books and detective novels, the exact same things Ferdinand and Marianne read. In this way, Godard ties everyone together. All of these characters, however different they appear to be from each other, are a part of the same cultural environment from which there is no escape.

It is also important to note that the trip back begins with a song and dance sequence. As the script describes it, "she starts to sing and dances round him excitedly..." (p. 73) It is Marianne, once again who is associated with music, who begins the singing. Earlier in the film, her first expression of love to Ferdinand comes in the form of a song. The scene also reemphasizes their contradictory patterns of movement. Marianne begins to dance around Ferdinand who is walking in a straight line.

The actual return to the mainland is greeted by a full return to absurdity. The midget, who was seen earlier during the confused events which began the flight, is waiting at the dock. Appropriately enough, the midget is talking excitedly into a walkie-talkie, the final example of the insanely complex technological environment in which the characters on the "mainland" move. After the midget takes Marianne to the apartment, this incredible collage of media reaches its height:

> Marianne's conversation is interrupted by sounds of the walkie-talkie. She puts the telephone down hastily as the midget comes through the door behind her, a large Coca-Cola bottle in his hands. She grabs a newspaper and holds it in front of her face as he picks up the walkie-talkie and shouts incoherently into it. He takes a piece of paper from a typewriter on the table between them and reads from it into the walkie-talkie. (p. 77)

Godard once again calls attention to the commonplace by putting it in unusual circumstances. Reading from the typewritten pages into the walkie-talkie, for example, is an apparent inversion of the normal dictaphone process—an act which makes

no sense to either Marianne or the audience. How anything could be communicated through this process is not explained, even though the ostensible purpose for typewriters and walkie-talkies is to communicate. The midget, like all the characters, is caught up in some mad process which he can't understand or control, the absurdity of which he is unaware and which the other characters are too numbed to appreciate. It is a fitting irony that when Ferdinand and the other men arrive at the appartment the midget is lying dead, stabbed in the neck with a pair of scissors. First he is totally ignored and then ludicrously thrown into a chair, his body an object of absurd violence.

In episode of part four, Ferdinand is seen sitting in a movie theater. He becomes bored watching a newsreel about the Vietnam War and takes out a paperback history of art. Once again the War is used as an image which indicates how numbed the characters are. Earlier, Ferdinand and Marianne could not respond to news of the War on the radio; now Ferdinand cannot respond to it in a film. Paradoxically, Godard links the failure to respond to the near total information about the War in the media. Yet the characters fail to recognize this. Ferdinand and Marianne are equally unresponsive to news and film reports about Vietnam and to actual personal encounters with violence.

The fact that Ferdinand's response is to take out a book is another instance of Godard's placing the ordinary (reading) in an unusual situation (a darkened movie theater). It re-emphasizes Ferdinand's attempt to order experience through the written word, a preference which is a retreat from the modern environment in which he lives.

Godard counterpoints this scene in the theater with a subtle irony in the very next scene. Ferdinand is now sitting outside (the real world as opposed to the inside of a movie theater) apparently in the employment of the Queen of Lebanon. She speaks to the camera as if she were in a newsreel interview —exactly like the one Ferdinand had just been watching. The Queen, apparently for political reasons, has adopted the format of the film interview in her speech and behavior patterns. Yet Ferdinand is totally oblivious to her behavior. (Godard develops this theme even more in such later films as MASCULINE-FEMININE and ONE PLUS ONE. MASCULINE-FEMININE illustrates the total breakdown of the distinction between public and private realms of experience in the new, modern, technological environment. ONE PLUS ONE treats the same theme only with an emphasis on the political aspects of this phenomenon.)

The fourth section of the film concludes with Ferdinand and Marianne reunited and entering for the last time the world which is going to destroy them—the world of gangsterism. The caper in which they engage in reiterates all the major imagery associated with them throughout the film. Marianne's "brother's" gang operates behind the front of a dance troop and Marianne once again dances around Ferdinand. The actual events of the crime are edited out of time sequence and this failure of linear sequence again confuses Ferdinand. This central aspect of their characters receives its fullest expression in the following exchange:

> Ferdinand off: It is always complicated with you.
>
> Marianne off: No, everything is simple.
>
> Ferdinand off: Too many things happen at once.
>
> Marianne off: No. (p. 95)

What separates the modern environment from the older one of the printed word is exactly this lack of linear sequence and the accompanying sense of simultaniety. Ferdinand, attempting to understand his life and experience in terms no longer applicable, is doomed. Significantly enough, the fourth section ends with Ferdinand engaged in the linear act of counting as he interacts with Marianne. It is the last time that they interact in the film.

The fifth, and concluding, section of the film begins with Ferdinand's pursuit of Marianne who has returned to the island. Before he follows her, however, he meets Desnos sitting alone on the quay. The story that Desnos tells Ferdinand becomes a virtual parable for the main theme of the film. Desnos' love life has become inextricably intertwined with a record, a record player, and the radio. His inability to think of loving a woman as divorced from that song is the final and most absurd example of the total inundation of the characters by media which control their lives.

So Ferdinand follows Marianne and gets caught up in another confusing sequence of events which he is unable to comprehend and which leads to his accidentally killing her. Her death is an inevitable result of Ferdinand's attempt to live life in his own way and simultaneously love Marianne. Having killed her, he futilely attempts to understand the events. He calls his home desperately attempting to make contact with his literate past, with what he once was. (The number he is calling is Balzac 75-02.) Although he has destroyed the identity of that past, associated with the name Ferdinand, he has failed to achieve a new identity—he responds to a question over the phone by answering, "It (the call) is not on anyone's behalf..." (p. 103) A final shot of his diary reveals meaningless fragments, a last indication of his failure to comprehend existence through that form. Ferdinand has now totally been transformed into the blue Pierrot figure. Appropriately, he paints his face blue and kills himself. Still attempting to explain things in a way he can't, Ferdinand mumbles meaningless last words and almost bungles his suicide (he changes his mind too late). His death and dissolution (he is blown apart by dynamite) is a direct result of (and metaphorical expression of) his central crisis in the film. The film's final fragments of dialogue, spoken by the voices of Ferdinand and Marianne, suggest the mythic organic beauty which has escaped them in life as it escapes all modern mankind.

A final word can be said about the genre to which PIERROT belongs which is, of course, the gangster film. The genre serves the function of advancing the movement of the film (accounting partially for the five sections which have been discussed) and introduces the detective story element which is central to the perceptual problem the film deals with—in other words, the incessant attempt on the part of Ferdinand to understand what is happening. The added, and important, sense of time confusion also grows directly out of the generic aspects of the gangster/detective story. Finally, the gangster genre is a part of the modern technological mythology to which Ferdinand relates. By framing his story as a gangster film, Godard is able to demonstrate the complex relationship between Ferdinand's behavior and the very genre of the film.

Footnotes

[1]Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, "Form and Substance, or the Avatars of the Narrative," Focus on Godard ed. Royal S. Brown (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 92.

[2]Ibid., p. 95.

[3]Jean-Louis Comolli, Michael Delahaye, Jean-Andre Fieschi, Gerard Guegan, "Let's Talk About Pierrot," Godard on Godard ed. Tom Milne (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 225.

[4]Marshall McLuhan and Wilfred Watson, From Cliche to Archetype (New York: Pocket Books, 1971), p. 82.

[5]David Ehrenstein, "Other Inquisitions: Jean-Luc Godard's PIERROT LE FOU, Jean-Luc Godard ed. Toby Mussman, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1968), p. 222.