

Pierrot le fou, art, and you

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Pierrot Le Fou, Art, and You Jean-Luc Godard's film Pierrot Le Fou is in itself a challenging piece of cinematic art. The film, which experiments with elements of mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing in an unconventional, intricate, and artistic manner, represents a milestone in the film genre known as the French New Wave, and continues to be important to the history of cinema today. With Pierrot Le Fou, director Godard expresses commentary on such things as massculture, politics, America, literature, music, art, and cinema itself. These opinions are communicated to us throughout the film not only through the filmic techniques employed, but by the actors themselves; through their dialogue and their acknowledgment of the spectators presence.

It is Godard's choices to employ a garish color scheme, references to mass culture, narrative intransivity, and the destruction of the “ fourth wall” that allow for Pierrot Le Fou to highlight the dominant pop art movement occurring at the time as well as to confront viewers, express commentary concerning literature and cinema, and break the audience's willing suspension of disbelief. Bright, vivid, and often primary shades of color, in addition to subject matter concerning references and depictions of elements present in mass culture describe the collective term of the artistic phenomena occurring in the 1950's and 60's known as “ Pop Art. ” In Pierrot Le Fou, we are made highly aware of such a movement as much of the film is styled according to such. This can be seen as early as in the opening credits, which slowly piece together in shades of bright red and blue (depicting at first a bunch of A's, B's, and C's) a title and credit screen. With such a flashy opening, characteristics of pop art are instantly alluded to; and continue to

remain present throughout the remainder of the film. One of the most significant scenes in which this is conceptualized is the sequence in which the main character, Ferdinand, attends a cocktail party. The party sequence, which is shot entirely on a 2D plain in which the actors are arranged facing each other against the wall, is also filmed through bright, primary colored filters.

Throughout this sequence, every cut is marked by a change in color scheme. Beginning in a garish shade of red, the sequence then alternates between shades of bright white, yellow, blue, and finally – in the last shot, a combination of yellow, orange, pink, and purple hues. This sequence, through Godard's choice of color filtering, represents not only colors characteristic in much of the “ Pop Art” produced during this period; but makes reference to advertising and consumer products. This is evident in a shot during the sequence in which we are shown a man and a woman sitting together against a wall within a blue colored frame. During this shot, the woman speaks about her “ hairdo”, which is, “ able to keep it's shape all day thanks to a cloud of Aquanet. ” After uttering this, she continues to enthusiastically talk about the Aquanet product to the man as if she were advertising it to the general public. Not only are references to consumer culture made here through such dialogue, but the depiction of her hair after having been sprayed with Aquanet allude to the Pop Art movement of the time in its reflection of consumer culture.

Besides making us aware of such a dominant artistic phenomena, Godard's use of episodic structure to separate scenes in Pierrot Le Fou constantly challenges us to re-concentrate and re-focus our attention, as well as

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explores the notion of cinema as a topic in the narrative. The film, which is divided into different chapters; thus enables for the introduction of interruptions into the narrative. It can be said that such a technique is borrowed from literature – which is a theme that is present not only in this way throughout the film, but implied in numerous other scenes. While challenging the viewer with such narrative intransitivity – a term used to describe Godard's constant interruptions via his introduction of new scenes as “ chapters” – Pierrot Le Fou also challenges the notion of the power of the cinema to “ capture” it's audience without apparently having done so (in terms of making it think or changing it). i In terms of the narrative and cinema, Godard also introduces to us in Pierrot Le Fou the idea of film as a process of writing in images – and by doing so, raises the topic of cinema itself within the narrative. Throughout Pierrot Le Fou, there are numerous instances in which elements of cinema are dissected, and are representational of what they construct. In one such instance, Marianne is shown looking at the audience in a close-up shot with a scissors literally “ cutting” across the screen to mark the cut that follows.

In another occurrence, Ferdinand is shown in a close-up pointing a gun at the audience – to signify a shot. Representationally, both of these instances convey elements of cinema directly to the audience through the objects that the characters present. Thus, these shots, while raising topics concerning the cinema; also break the narrative surface by allowing for the characters direct engagement with the audience. This intentional destruction of the “ fourth wall”, brought to us in the film by shots featuring a confrontation between the spectator and the characters (where we can observe them observing us),

not only breaks that spectator's willing suspension of disbelief, but poses questions about the level of truth in the diegesis but also in terms of cinema itself. Such notions of the misleading and deceiving nature of appearances are constantly touched upon throughout the film, always in a way that is confrontational; and at times, representational. In the scene in which Marianne is asked by Ferdinand about whether or not she will ever leave him, instead of a shot of Ferdinand asking the question, a fox is shown walking around. After the question is asked, a close-up of the fox looking at the audience is presented as Marianne answers, " Of course I won't.

" Immediately after answering, this shot is cut to another close-up shot of Marianne looking out at the audience. These two shots are representational not only of each other, but of such notions of deceit. First of all, it is obvious in the presentation of these two shots that we are to draw a parallel between the creature and Marianne – as they look very similar and both are framed and looking out to us in the same way, one immediately right after the other. The deceptive and cunning nature known to be associated with a fox is also representational of Marianne's expression in the shot, as she appears to look so – and such qualities are further highlighted by the close-up framing of her face. By these two shots alone, notions associated with cinema and fiction are raised as well. It is as if, by being directly engaged with the fox and Marianne, the audience is asked to actively participate in the formulation of questions concerning such things. By allowing for characters to directly engage themselves with the audience, *Pierrot Le Fou*, through such shot compositions, challenges the audience directly to engage itself in the film

not simply as a spectator, but rather, as active participants questioning and creating meanings.

By implementing such elements, with *Pierrot Le Fou*, Godard has created a film stylized to not only highlight, but to comment upon and furthermore challenge notions of Pop Art, cinema, and literature/fiction. It is through such unconventional means of expressing his ideas in his use of mise-en-scene present in the lighting of the garish color scheme, the cinematography choices he made in terms of framing the characters, and how editing was employed to draw parallels and create meaning, that the film conveys its intentions in a diegesis that is complex, artistic, and confrontational. While the entirety of the diegesis's motives may not be initially apparent, due to the complexity of the narrative and the amount of themes and questions Godard raises with the film; we as an audience can recognize how such filmic techniques employed by the director have come together to create such meanings. After all, the movie, like an intricate artwork, takes some studying to truly figure out. Nichols, Bill. *Movies and Methods*. Vol.

II. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1985. Print.