2. The Camera as Brush—Film and Painting

“For the last hundred years (if we except the activities of specialists) art history has been the history of that which can be photographed.”
André Malraux

Based on the concept of theory developed in chapter one, Farocki’s and Godard’s interest can now be described more exactly: both filmmakers confront media in order to create abstraction. They develop thoughts about cinema and its representational logic through the collision of concrete film images. In the words of Eisenstein: from the impact of two visibilities, to obtain something invisible and render it visible. However, the colliding elements may be of different constitution; the images that in their combination express something about “the image” can belong to different media contexts.

An obvious method of thematizing a medium is its diegetic confrontation with another medium. What implicitly characterizes film as a complex assemblage of image, sound, and writing can become an explicit theme if the cinematic framework contains different types of images: film and painting, film and photography, film and video. This possibility is not limited to a particular cinematic genre, such as the experimental film or the classical auteur film, even though it seems more likely to find an examination of media possibilities in these fields; the use of painted images in films is one of the most prominent areas in which the implicit affinity of Hollywood to theory can be demonstrated. Katharina Sykora has shown this to be the case for a series of films made within the framework of what David Bordwell and Janet Staiger have called the “Hollywood mode of production.” Despite all standardization, and within the seemingly rigid requirements of the individual genres, the films of Otto Preminger, Alfred Hitchcock, or Albert

2 Although it has long since become commonplace, it should once again be said here that film “constitutes a privileged place in which the play of various modern discourses and media is staged.” Jürgen E. Müller, Intermedialität. Formen moderner kultureller Kommunikation (Münster: Nodus 1996), 133.
Lewin reflect the medium within their images in the way that film theory is understood here. Through the inclusion of female portraits in various plots, the narrative splits into a literal thread oriented to the action and an allegorical one to do with image production and reception.

Yet there is a difference between the theoretical elements in a film like Hitchcock’s REBECCA and Godard’s PASSION. Hitchcock’s visual theory remains largely implicit and is closely interwoven with the narrative, and this is the strength of the film. The painting of Mrs. de Winter’s late predecessor, with which she is often confronted in the course of the film, is—apart from its use to reflect cinematic means—also an important element of the crime story. It is therefore perfectly possible to see the film as an exciting thriller in which the painting could be substituted by something else. The film is an invitation to a “double reading,” and Hitchcock’s success with both the general public and in academic circles owes itself to this twofold readability, which enables his films to be seen as both a gripping narrative and as complex and abstract reflections on the medium of film. Farocki’s STILL LIFE or Godard’s PASSION pose the question of the representational character of film and painting in much more direct terms. The paintings they deal with are so central to these films that the structure would collapse if one attempted to replace the reference to painting with something else. Instead of the representation of reality, the reality of representation comes more sharply into focus; what is depicted is, more than anything else, a reality of images. STILL LIFE and PASSION mark two extremes—one in the form of the classical documentary, one bearing traces of a storyline—in that they not only focus on painting but also insist on and consist of paintings and, in cinematic repetition (PASSION) and analysis (STILL LIFE), contrast the different representational models of film and painting.

When film—in whatever form—encounters painting, or when painting attempts to operate cinematically, two media meet whose relationship to reality is as different as their respective modes of representation. Painting is an expressive medium: the artist applies the paint to the canvas, and the image seems to emerge “from nothing.” To address the painter as the actual author of the image is less controversial than in the case of a film. Light-sensitive celluloid, by contrast, receives the impression of an image and can therefore be placed in a tradition of other imprinting techniques. Stanley Sykora, As you desire me. Das Bildnis im Film (Cologne: Walther König 2003), particularly 16–25.

André Bazin implies this when he characterizes the Turin Shroud as a precursor of photography (and hence of film), and adds in a footnote: “There is room, nevertheless, for a study of the psychology of the lesser plastic arts, the molding of death masks, for example, which likewise involves a certain automatic process. One might consider photography, in this sense as a molding,
Cavell, one of the few philosophers to have given considerable thought to films and the forms of knowledge they articulate,\(^6\) sharply contrasts these two forms of reference: “[T]he object has played a causal role in the taking of the photograph altogether other from its role in the making of the painting. A representation emphasizes the identity of its subject, hence it may be called a likeness; a photograph emphasizes the existence of its object, hence it may be called a transcription.”\(^7\) According to this model, film undoubtedly belongs to what Cavell calls “transcription.” It is part of the “universe of technical images”\(^8\) and attests to the continuum from photography to the Lumière’s cinematograph. Film would not exist without the inventions of Niépce, Daguerre, and Talbot; neither could images have been set in motion without the movement studies of Muybridge and Marey.\(^9\) Joseph Plateau’s afterimage experiments, with which he examined the effect of an image on the retina and the functioning of optical perception—often at the risk of losing his own sight through continued staring at the sun—are as much a part of the emergence of the cinematic dispositif as Edison’s idea of transferring consecutively shot images onto a flexible material such as celluloid, thus also allowing longer takes to be archived on a roll. So it seems that film is primarily a technical medium, and as Erwin Panofsky emphasized, the birth of the cinema is the only case in the history of art in which a particular technique didn’t follow an artistic impulse, but rather that “a technical invention […] gave rise to the discovery and gradual perfection of a new art.”\(^10\)

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7  Stanley Cavell, “What Photography calls Thinking,” Camera Austria 19/20, 1985, 32–43. 33. Cavell’s text is also interesting here because it similarly attempts to discern thought process in photography itself.
8  Vilém Flusser uses this term to describe the image world that has ruled our lives since the caesura of the invention of photography. See Vilém Flusser, Into the Universe of Technical Images [1985], trans. Nancy Ann Roth, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2011).
9  For a short overview of the technical precursors of film, and an interpretation less in terms of their material aspects than their idealistic desire for a victory over time and successful duplication, see André Bazin, “Le mythe du cinéma total” [1946] ibid., Qu’est-ce que le cinéma, vol. I, 21–26. A more unconventional derivation, which places Samuel Colt’s invention of his revolver, with its round drum, and the fragmentation of processes into single moments at the beginning of cinema history, is proposed by Friedrich Kittler in his lecture on optical media: see Friedrich Kittler, Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999, trans. Anthony Enns (Cambridge: Polity Press 2010), 145–147.
The relationship between film and painting is less obvious—at least in terms of their technical histories: paintings don’t seem to be a preferred reference point for the medium of film. Jacques Aumont remarks that few theorists have thought about the correlation between the two media, and if they have, then generally for the purpose of contrast: “As far as film theory is concerned, it seems to have linked film and painting together—rare as the case may be—solely for the purpose of being more able to contrast them and distinguish them from one another.”  

Aumont—not least in debate with Godard’s film PASSION—suggests focusing on the differences between the two media and recognizing a common ground in the way in which they make use of the flexibility of perspective and perception. Aumont understands both media as manifestations of a shared configuration, which he calls the “variable eye” and sees as the decisive innovation of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, the term takes account of the painterly development around 1800—in the paintings of William Turner, for example—which departed from the ideal of accuracy in favor of elusiveness and liveliness. 

In painting from then on, the relativity of the chosen perspective—and thus a subjectification of the standpoint—was more important than the timeless validity of the resulting image. According to Aumont, it is crucial that this development is linked to a shift in the function that painting and film can have. “What we have here is nothing less than the constitution of seeing, a new confidence in seeing as an instrument of knowledge.” Aumont argues not so much from the perspective of the media technology as that of the eye, which is not only modified by new, technical apparatuses—that is, film and photography—but also by a new approach to the old medium of painting. In this sense, the media caesura should not be set at 1900 (that is, with the invention of the cinematograph) but almost a century earlier, from which time the media should be seen as “diverse manifestations of common problems, or rather a common problem, namely the spatial and temporal variability of looking at what is accessible to our sight.” 

Where Aumont tries to bring film and painting together in his concept of the “variable eye”, filmmakers had always striven to model their work

12 See ibid., 80.
13 Ibid., 81.
14 Ibid., 87.
on older visual art in both form and content. Early films from the Lumière brothers’ studio, such as La vie et la passion de Jésus-Christ (1898), are necessarily oriented to the long iconographic tradition and relate closely to paintings; the Passion film is particularly conceived as a sequence of clearly framed tableaux. But apart from such individual quotations, reference to art-historical tradition in later film history always went in two directions. On the one hand, it inspired the struggle for the “absolute film,” as aspired to by Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, or Viking Eggeling in the 1920s. Here, the medium is released from its reproductive task and used for the dynamic depiction of surfaces, rhythms, and patterns. The crossover to both animated film and the abstract painting of Constructivism is evident in Ruttmann’s OPUS series or Richter’s RHYTHMUS 21. But painting, alongside the theater and the novel, was also interesting for the realistic schools. The early attempts to establish film as an art form, and later to untangle it from its industrial production context and open it up to more individual creative possibilities (“caméra stylo,” “auteur film”), are all indications of the desire to take the medium beyond its transcriptional function and transform it into one of expression and reflection. Michelangelo Antonioni, who came to film from painting, and—particularly in his first color film Red Desert—took the cinematic image in the direction of abstract painting through flatness and coloration, can stand for this endeavor alongside Stanley Kubrick’s reconstructed tableaux in BARRY LYNDON or Peter Greenaway’s art-historically charged productions.

Jean-Luc Godard is part of this tradition, and since the 1980s he has repeatedly brought cinema and painting together. PASSION is not the only example. A LETTER TO FREDDY BUA CHE, a short film that depicts the topography of Lausanne in its colors and forms and pushes the cinematic image towards abstract painting, is another, along with THE OLD PLACE, which was commissioned from Godard and Anne Marie-Miéville by the

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Museum of Modern Art in New York. However, Godard’s sensibility for the motifs and procedures of modern and classical painting can be traced back to his earlier films. In La Chinoise (1967), Godard proposes a divergent technological genealogy and characterizes film as a productive coincidence of various findings from optics, chemistry, and mechanics: “Lumière,” announces the Maoist Guillaume Meister (Jean-Pierre Léaud), was the “last impressionist painter.” That this should not be dismissed as the confused position of a misguided political sectarian but the director’s own conviction becomes clear when we compare Meister’s assertion with Godard’s speech at the opening of the Lumière retrospective in 1966: “So Louis Lumière, by way of the Impressionists, was a descendant of Flaubert, and also of Stendhal, whose mirror he took on the road.” This sounds like a provocation: the apparent realist Lumière, whose name stands like no other for the documentary, objective aspects of cinema, is supposed to have been an Impressionist? Someone who wasn’t familiar with the contemporary artists of his time and never picked up a paintbrush in his life? What function does such a coupling of painting and film have? Doesn’t it eliminate the difference between the two media and their specificities?

In the following, I will attempt to show that this convergence of film and painting, asserted in the unconventional reappraisal of Lumière, is part of an extensive involvement with painting—not only with Impressionist painting, but particularly so—through which Godard was repeatedly able to gain a new perspective on film. In its quality of being a genuinely visual medium, painting represents a reflective counterpart to film to which, via proximity and distance, similarities and differences, a system of reference is established that allows Godard to enter into a theoretical debate with his own image production. It is particularly revealing to analyze the interrelationship of both media, as this has characterized

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19 A Letter to Freddy Buache, CH 1981, director: Jean-Luc Godard; The Old Place. Small Notes Regarding the Arts at Fall of 20th Century, F/USA 1998, directors: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville. For the origins of this film, see Colin MacCabe, Godard. A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2003), 310–315.
20 Jean-Luc Godard, “Thanks to Henri Langlois” [1966], Godard on Godard, 234–237: 236.
21 Godard’s suggestion of bringing together Impressionism and early cinematography was taken up in an exhibition in Lyon in 2005: Impressionnisme et la naissance du cinématographe, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, April 15–July 18 2005. A critical review in the Cahiers du cinéma points out the danger of eliminating media differences: “In short, Impressionism is a resemblance that is ending, cinema one that is beginning. Resemblance, their thin common dividing line, is also the boundary which irreconcilably divides them.” Jean-Pierre Rehm, “Lumière au grand jour,” Cahiers du Cinéma no. 603, July/August 2005, 68–71: 70.
the conceptual space of Godard’s film work from the very beginning and is still one of his central means of argument. From Breathless to In Praise of Love, whose second half engulfs the viewer in an explosion of color and uses digital video technology to create distortions that take the cinematic image in the direction of painterly composition, Godard has often drawn on painting. More than just a motivic preference, painting serves as an important structural element that can reveal the contours of the cinematic medium.

Passion is without doubt the film in which Godard speaks most clearly and thoroughly about the relationship between painting and film, and in which he attempts to interweave them as closely as possible. It is one of the few films in the history of the cinema that actually would not exist without painting, as it literally consists of paintings from the history of art. The film is based on a conflation of two contexts that are also characterized as places of work. There is the factory, where Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert) works and comes into conflict with the management, and—not far away—there is the film team, which is reconstructing famous paintings as tableaux vivants for a television production. These re-enacted paintings are not simply a part of the cinematic diegesis—objects framed on another level by the plot—but constitute much of the narration by repeatedly collapsing the difference between frame and framed. So it is not surprising that Passion provoked a whole series of books and texts that celebrated the film as a complete redefinition of the relationship between film and painting.22 Looking at Passion, however, should not obscure the fact that Godard’s films prior to this climax were already full of allusions and references to art history and quotes from its imagery. Even in his early phase as a director,23 Godard constantly, if casually, made reference to paintings and related them to his characters. Not only do all his films since Breathless engage with film and literary history, they also take a side glance at painting in order to reflect their own medium.


23 This refers to the time until 1965, ending with Pierrot le fou.
Narrating with Images: Breathless

In Breathless (1959), paintings essentially play a role at two points in the narrative. In general, the film more obviously seeks to position itself in a particular film tradition. From the dedication (“This film is dedicated to Monogram Pictures”), via the iconic scene in which Belmondo tries to imitate Humphrey Bogart’s facial expression as accurately as possible, to the interview conducted by Patricia (Jean Seberg) with the director Jean-Pierre Melville, the film is pervaded by clear allusions to film noir and American cinema. However, while it is in line with auteur politics that Godard sides with the low-budget Hollywood movie, his recourse to French modernist painting is just as precise as his film-historical allusions.24

Early on, we see a reproduction of Auguste Renoir’s Mlle. Irene Cahen d’Anvers,25 for which Patricia is looking for a suitable place in her room. The scene can easily be read as a characterization. Alongside the Picasso and Paul Klee posters, and together with Patricia’s professed love of William Faulkner and Dylan Thomas, the painting establishes her as a young journalist interested in art and literature, and thus underlines the contrast between her and the philistine criminal Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo). Art versus life: this romantic opposition, from whose antagonism and attempted resolution the film derives much of its narrative motivation, is thus personified in the two protagonists. The polarity of interests marks both their attraction and incompatibility, which later leads to Patricia’s betrayal and Michel’s death. Yet even in this film, the use of painted images goes beyond conventional character drawing. When Michel brushes off Patricia’s wish that they were Romeo and Juliet—a blatant connection to the epitome of romantic love—as naive, a postcard of Picasso’s Les Amoureux26 appears in close-up without any narrative preparation. If we had paid attention to the room during the long series of scenes, we would have seen the postcard above the bed. The montage, however, takes it out of the narrative context and isolates it as an image. Placing these shots together (ill. 5–7) reveals the ambivalent effect of this simple operation:

24 Gerd Bauer also examines the art-historical themes in Breathless. However, he doesn’t discuss the materiality of the depictions and the internal relationships to other Godard films, which I will deal with later. See Gerd Bauer, “Jean-Luc Godard: Ausser Atem/À bout de souffle (Frankreich 1959),” Kunst und Künstler im Film, eds. Helmut Korte, Johannes Zahlten (Hameln: Niemeyer 1990), 111–119.
25 See Angela Dalle Vacche, “Jean Luc Godard’s Pierrot le Fou. Cinema as Collage against Painting,” Literature-Film Quarterly vol. 23 (1995), no. 1, 39–54: 46; Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Mlle. Irène Cahen d’Anvers (1880), oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm, Bührle Collection, Zurich, Switzerland.
26 Pablo Picasso, Les Amoureux (1923), oil on canvas, 130.2 x 97.2 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington.
the interruption of the visual flow by a still image causes a sense of discontinuity, which is countered by a series of similarities between the images.

Godard not only mimics the spatial disposition of the Picasso by placing Patricia on the left and Michel on the right; through the close-up of the postcard he also causes the figures in the painting to appear almost as large as Michel and Patricia. The convergence of size alone produces comparability and relationship.\(^{27}\) What are the consequences of this simple montage sequence? For one thing, the love story between Patricia and Michel is characterized as the adaptation of the literary and art-historical subject matter of Romeo and Juliet. The tragic end of the film is thus foreshadowed at this early stage in the film. For a fraction of a second, however, there is also a conspicuous synchronicity of film, painting, and literature. We immediately think of Shakespeare in connection with the names of Romeo and Juliet, but the visual level calls our attention to Picasso’s treatment of the motif without substantially interrupting the cinematic flow. This gesture, which can also be understood as a homage to the painter, specifically relates film to its precursory medium of painting. In view of Godard’s later films, the montage also suggests an autonomization

\(^{27}\) According to André Malraux, proportional alteration is one of the reasons why photography revolutionized the history of art: “There is another, more insidious, effect of reproduction. In an album or art book the illustrations tend to be of much the same size. Thus works of art lose their relative proportions; a miniature bulks as large as a full-size picture, a tapestry or a stained-glass window.” (Malraux, “The Museum without Walls,” 21.)
of the image which will become more pronounced in the films of the 1960s. However, even here image and narration tend to diverge, and numerous possibilities occur for the creation of theoretically productive tension from the gap between text and image.

One could ask whether the proximity of painting and film in Breathless implies a value judgment. Is film upgraded through the presence of a classic of modernist painting? In the context of Godard's first feature film, which plays out like an American gangster movie, the opposite is the case. For even though we seem to be confronted with canonical paintings, the images are shown as cheap reproductions, as posters and postcards. What we have here, although this can easily be forgotten considering the motifs, is strictly speaking not a painting by Picasso but its often-reproduced representation. This is why the place in which Godard shows the art is not the museum, neither in Breathless nor in his following films of the 1960s. On the contrary, he chooses banal everyday places like Patricia's bedroom and bathroom. As we will see, this notion of irreverently seeing painting (and much else) as material for a cinematic inquiry is central to Godard's work until well into the 1970s.

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28 Gerd Bauer's above-cited analysis is also flawed in this respect: he unconditionally interprets the posters in Patricia's room as art. He doesn't consider the difference between work and reproduction, which in my opinion is central to Godard's use of art-historical sources.

29 Band of Outsiders, from 1964, is no exception to this: though Odile, Franz, and Arthur visit the Louvre to fill the time until the evening, they do so purely out of the sporting ambition of running a race through its hallowed halls.
Shortly after the Picasso sequence, there is a place for the Renoir reproduction, which is once again closely associated with Patricia in the following scene. In response to her question “Do you think she's prettier than me?”, Michel describes Patricia rather than giving her an answer (ill. 8–10). “When you're frightened or astonished, or both at once, you have a strange reflection in your eyes.” Patricia shyly asks a further question (“And now?”) and earns the reply: “I'd like to sleep with you again.” The mise en scène is more important here than the dialogue, which is further evidence of Michel and Patricia's talking at cross purposes and throughout the film sustains the oppositions of beauty and desire, of insecurity and macho mentality. Where the unexpected montage of the Picasso postcard produces an ambivalence of (diegetic) discontinuity and (linguistic) correlation, here the parallelization of film and painting takes place within a single shot. Patricia's head movement should be seen as a literal convergence of cinematic and painted image that relates both media to one another through iconic similarity. In Godard’s film, Patricia and the girl portrayed by Renoir are both primarily image and thus occasion for questions of composition and pictorial representation.

There would be little reason to discuss these two sequences from Breathless in such detail if they weren't paradigmatic for the following films of the 1960s. The dialectical operation of establishing references to art as instances of rupture, but also of accentuating, sometimes exaggeratedly, what both media have in common, becomes a recurrent trope in Godard’s coming works. In almost every film up to 1965, art history is not only featured as a second large reservoir of images alongside the history of cinema but most notably acts as a reflective surface for the examination of questions of representation. For there is also a reference to the mediated character of visual representation in the approximation of Patricia and the motifs of Renoir and Picasso. Contrary to the direct, almost documentary aspects of film, which are usually emphasized as the decisive innovation of the New Wave, it is evident from the very beginning that Godard's films are in intimate dialogue with pre-existing images.

30 As in the short conversation about Paul Klee at the beginning of Le petit soldat—also based on a postcard, but this time at a newsstand. “It's a pretty Pau Klee,” Bruno exclaims, to which his acquaintance Hugues laconically replies, “Not as pretty as the girl I'm on my way to meet.”
Exploding the Museum: PIERROT LE FOU

“The commentary on the image forms part of the image.”
Jean-Luc Godard

Long before his films were shown in exhibitions or commissioned by museums, Godard had directed his attention to the visual regime of the museum and specifically to painting. The race around the Louvre by the three protagonists of BAND OF OUTSIDERS attests as much to this interest as the reproductions of Renoir and Picasso on the walls of Patricia’s room in BREATHLESS. Here a profanation of the hallowed halls, there a translation of art into the profanity of everyday life. If Godard’s embedding of classical modernist paintings into his films began selectively in BREATHLESS, it culminated six years later in PIERROT LE FOU: a film that ends with the central character painting his face Yves Klein blue, tying a string of Pop Art red sticks of dynamite around his head, and blowing himself up in a bright yellow fireball says clearly that its director is as much interested in color and the explosive power of images as in “story.”

It is necessary to make the chains of images fly apart, to blow them up; it is necessary that the images no longer connect up seamlessly, as in a chain of cause and effect, that two images permit the insertion of a third, different image between them. Godard treats this third in-between image, this explosion, as a fact; in PIERROT LE FOU he is less interested in the endless transition from the one to the other via the respective third [...] than in the objectivity of this third.

It is not without reason that Horst Bredekamp has claimed PIERROT LE FOU for art history, pointing out that Godard’s film should be “analyzed like a painting.” The allusions to and quotations from painting in particular are not only more frequent here than in BREATHLESS but also more complex and thus more challenging to the viewer. PIERROT LE FOU is often interpreted

as the conclusion and sum of Godard’s first, “Romantic” phase. His first feature-length film begins in 1959 with Jean-Paul Belmondo’s words “In the end, I’m a jerk,” while PIERROT LE FOU ends with the same Belmondo shouting “In the end, I’m an idiot,” before he blows himself up and the film slowly changes from the blue sky into the tabula rasa of a white screen.

Between these two almost identical sentences—they don’t suggest much of an intellectual development in the figure, but they certainly represent a clear frame—come ten films within a mere six years, from which numerous motifs and structural elements are recapitulated in PIERROT LE FOU: a short dance sequence recalls A WOMAN IS A WOMAN, Godard’s first film in color, in 1962, in which the two protagonists Belmondo and Anna Karina had already appeared together; the love-on-the-run plot, which ends with betrayal and death, revisits elements from BREATHLESS; a short torture sequence, in which Belmondo is interrogated in the bath, similarly took place in LE PETIT SOLDAT; and references to the other films can also be enumerated.

Godard himself sustained the impression of PIERROT LE FOU as a compilation of his previous films in an ad text published in various magazines: “PIERROT LE FOU is a little soldier who discovers with contempt that he has to live his life, that a woman is a woman, and that in a new world you have to form a band of outsiders in order not to end up breathless.” Almost all of Godard’s previous films are gathered together in this sentence. So, for the viewers who have followed him thus far, PIERROT LE FOU can be seen as a meta-reflection on his previous work as much as a new film. This brief description of the film contains an aesthetic program based on the combination of existing fragments rather than originality.

“Pierrot le fou must have been created in a feverish dream,” writes Martin Schaub about the film’s production phase. The film was shot in a very short time during the summer of 1965 and was first screened at the Venice Film Festival on August 29 of the same year. In a long interview with the Cahiers du cinéma that took place immediately after the premiere, Godard

34 In his Montreal lectures, Godard also situates the end of his “first phase” after PIERROT LE FOU. See Jean-Luc Godard, Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television, trans. and ed. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose 2014), 194.
35 For further similarities that make PIERROT LE FOU look like a remake of BREATHLESS, see Alan Williams, “Pierrot in Context(s),” Jean-Luc Godard’s Pierrot Le Fou, ed. David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2000) [Cambridge Film Handbooks], 43–63.
36 This only takes into account the full-length feature films, not Godard’s contributions to episode films.
38 Peter W. Jansen, Wolfram Schütte, eds. Jean-Luc Godard (Munich: Hanser 1979) [Reihe Film 19], 135.
emphasizes the haste and perplexity that both impelled and obstructed the film:

I can’t say I didn’t work it out, but I didn’t pre-think it. Everything happened at once: it is a film in which there was no writing, editing or mixing – well, one day! Bonfanti [the sound engineer] knew nothing of the film and he mixed the soundtrack without preparation. He reacted with his knobs like a pilot faced by airpockets. This was very much in key with the spirit of the film. So the construction came at the same time as the detail. It was a series of structures which immediately dovetailed one with another.39

It would be wrong to take Godard’s statement at face value. But apart from whether the shoot really was as he describes, the remark can be taken as programmatic for the structure of the film: the interconnection of detail and overall construction, of action and the structural reflection of it, is once again guided by the ideal of an interpenetration of theory and practice, of providing a theorization of the aesthetic act along with the act itself. The recourse to this Romantic structural element doesn’t occur by chance, and is supplemented with further references to early Romanticism. Godard himself sets up this relationship in his description of the story of Marianne Renoir and Ferdinand Griffon as that of the “last romantic couple,” and he then goes on, somewhat imprecisely, to call them the “last descendants of La nouvelle Héloïse, Werther, and Hermann and Dorothea.”40 Alongside the idea of romantic love, which is only fulfilled in the death of both lovers, the motif of the journey (to the south, moreover out of the city to the seclusion of the coast), or the Doppelgänger (Pierrot/Ferdinand) can be ascribed to this historical pattern.

Apart from these narrative elements, the film is also affected by the legacy of the Romantic utopia at another level: in its permanent attempt to combine the individual arts—in this case, first and foremost, literature and visual art. The image of “combination” is misleading here, however, as more than in Godard’s earlier works the film’s interlinking of painting, literature, and film doesn’t lead to a synthesis but is staged as a hard collision of different registers. This can be understood as an allegorical doubling of the narration: the interplay of film and painting remains as utopian as the relationship between Marianne and Ferdinand. Dissociation and

39 Godard, “Let’s talk about Pierrot,” Godard par Godard I, 217.
40 Ibid., 216.
rupture repeatedly take the place of reconciliation and unity. One of the most famous images from the film is a wide-angle shot of Anna Karina with a disproportionately large pair of scissors and summarizes two of the film’s central motifs: the scissors as a murder weapon and as the prerequisite for cinematic montage.

A reading of this sequence as an allegorical self-description brings out the different logics of correlation by which Godard—and his editing assistant Agnès Guillemot, who worked almost as closely with him as the cameraman Raoul Coutard—relates his images to one another: on the plot level, the distorted view of the tower block is an indication of where Marianne is held captive by the gangsters; it is a conventional “establishing shot,” which gives the viewer an orientation in the action. The image with the scissors follows a similarly wide-angled shot of a dwarf threatening her with a pistol. In the final shot we see Ferdinand hurrying to her aid pursued by two other gangsters (ill. 11–13). The image of Marianne is conspicuously out of line with the spatial logic of the sequence; for reasons of narrative flow, the usual convention of the “invisible cut” would demand a cut from the long shot of the building to Belmondo in the stairway. Godard, however, subverts the method of parallel montage, a familiar trope since Griffith, with which suspense could easily be created here—as in the classic “last minute rescue.” And at the same time he ironizes his contravention of traditional editing by placing the motif of cutting at the exact point of the narrative break. “Cutting” can thus be

41 For Agnes Guillemot’s collaboration with Godard, see the conversation with her in Jansen, Schütte, eds. Jean-Luc Godard (Munich:71–82). An anthology on Raoul Coutard appeared to mark his being awarded the Marburg Camera Prize in 2001: Michael Neubauer, Karl Prümm, Peter Riedel, eds. Raoul Coutard – Kameramann der Moderne (Marburg: Schüren 2004).
read on at least two levels: as a part of the narrative and as a metaphor for authorial intervention through montage. Anna Karina’s frontal look into the camera also suggests that this cut is directed to the viewer’s horizon of expectation.

Apart from this break with cinematic convention, the three shots also exemplify how much the composition and montage of the entire film are determined by criteria of coloration. The painterly principle of linking colors replaces a logic of narration here. The fact that the three images go together despite their apparent lack of connectedness lies not least in the recurrence of the primary colors of blue and red, which are attributed throughout the film to Ferdinand (blue) and Marianne (red), starting with the letters in the opening credits and ending with Belmondo painting himself before his character’s suicide. The autonomy that Godard attributes to color turns film into a medium of expression rather than impression and brings it close to painting: “Godard never used color realistically or mechanically, but always as selectively as a painter, with a deliberately reduced palette,” concludes Frieda Grafe.42

As in Breathless, Godard has two different characters collide against one another in Marianne and Ferdinand—but this time the roles are reversed:

These two beings, in fact, want to be in two different sorts of art works. Marianne wants to live in a crime drama, a film noir in fact (with herself as the femme fatale). Ferdinand wants to be in a minimalist, modernist narrative (it is he who speaks to the film audience and initiates other Brechtian gestures of self-reflexivity). To place them in the broadest categories that emerge from the director’s first period, she is an outlaw, while he is an intellectual.43

This contrast doesn’t only take place on the level of the action; it is repeated in the media allocated to the two main characters. Marianne Renoir, whose name itself is a synthesis of painting (Pierre-Auguste Renoir) and film (Jean Renoir), is repeatedly associated with the female portraits of Renoir or Picasso. The name of Ferdinand, however, alludes among other things

43 Alan Williams, “Pierrot in Context(s),” 49.
to the narrator in Louis-Ferdinand Céline's novel *Guignol's band*, from which Belmodo reads several times during the long sequence of scenes on the French Riviera. With some simplification, it can be said that Marianne is not only modeled on images from film and painting; she is also the one who looks (and is looked at). Ferdinand, on the other hand, whose origin is derived from a text, is the one who reads and writes. This antagonistic model doesn't head for a victory of one medium over the other and remains unresolved at the end of the film. At most, the existence of the film itself could be an indication of the cinematic medium as the victor in the *paragone* between image and text. For in *Pierrot le fou*, the final impression after the detonation (ill. 13–16) is of both an image and a poetic text: the blue sea; the slow and steady pan into the sun which blurs the line between sea and sky and causes the image to pale; and the voice-over dialogue of Rimbaud's poem *L'éternité*:

Marianne (off). Elle est retrouvée.
Ferdinand (off). Quoi?
Marianne (off). L'éternité.
Ferdinand (off). C'est la mer allée
Marianne (off). Avec le soleil.

45 Godard, “Pierrot le fou,” 108 [“Found again. What? / Eternity. / The sea gone / With the sun.” Arthur Rimbaud, “Eternity”, ibid. *Collected Poems*, trans. Martin Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford UP 2001), 183. Rimbaud’s text is one of the four poems he published in 1886 under the title *Fêtes de la patience*. In a slightly modified form he took the poem into the “Alchemie du verbe” section of the collection *Saison en enfer*, a few pages after the famous correlation of the vowels to individual colors to which Godard alludes in the opening credits of his film. In this publication it reads:
What survives the film is a blank screen, a white canvas—the bases of film and painting—upon which the closing credits appear. The film ends with a gesture that is both destructive and constructive, and also silences the voices. Godard in fact gives his film a utopian ending, in which the three media of literature, film, and painting conjoin, with the loss of their respective specificities. The explosion not only destroys Ferdinand but also the visual regime of the museum that had provided the model for Breathless.46

But what does the film say about the relationship between film and painting before it ends in this media implosion? Certain paratexts, advertising copy written by Godard, and the trailer of the film also reflect the film’s inherent collision of different media:

PIERROT LE FOU is: – Stuart Heisler reworked by Raymond Queneau / – the last romantic film / – techniscope as the legacy of Renoir and Sisley / – the first modern film before Griffith / – the wanderings of a solitary dreamer / – the intrusion of the crime thriller into the tragedy of cinema painting.47

Two elements in this list—which show Godard’s interest in advertising jargon48 and his tendency to create friction and internal contradiction49 rather than completeness through a catalogue-like series of allusive descriptions—are of particular interest here: “Techniscope as the legacy of Renoir and Sisley,” and “the intrusion of the crime thriller into the tragedy of cinema painting.” If Godard postulates a chain of inheritance that designates the technical procedure of wide-screen projection as the legitimate


46 Antoine de Baecque points out that in Godard’s films the museum was always the target of polemic: “[F]rom the outset, Godard has always entertained an initial polemical relationship with museums; to him, they are derisory sites of great learning, which is inherited, defunct, and conservative.” Antoine de Baecque, “Godard in the Museum,” For Ever Godard, eds. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, Michael Witt (London: Black Dog Publishing 2004), 118–125: 118.

47 Godard, “Pierrot le fou,” 111.

48 In the second half of the 1950s, Godard worked in the PR department of Fox Studios and devised advertising campaigns for Hollywood films. See Colin MacCabe: Godard, 87f.

49 An early indication of Godard’s interest in Jorge Luis Borges is the extended Borges quote that opens The Carabineros. Borges is also often mentioned in the long discussion with the Cahiers du cinéma to mark the release of PIERROT LE FOU. See Godard, “Let’s talk about Pierrot,” Godard on Godard, 224 and 230.
descendant of painting, this genealogical model is then immediately questioned in favor of the crime novel. Despite his emphatic subsumption of film into the canon of traditional painting, cinema is thought of as an impure form, as a reservoir of competing media and concepts. It isn’t necessary for Godard to decide between painting and film because both can be integrated quite easily into his aesthetic system. “Everything should be put into a film” was how he formulated his categorical imperative a little later.

The film’s two-minute trailer confirms this impression. Without explicitly referring to painting, the cinematic structure is presented as a debate between film and literature, the media allocated to Karina and Belmondo. “It was a love story,” Karina’s voice repeats to short clips that seem to be immediately identifiable as images from the film, alternating with “It was an adventure story.” The two phrases can be understood as an ironic reference to two common genres of American cinema, which Godard both takes up and undermines. PIERROT LE FOU can be interpreted in terms of both, depending on whether the relationship between Ferdinand Griffon and Marianne Renoir is emphasized or their joint flight to the French Riviera.

In one of the first scenes in the film, Jean-Paul Belmondo lies in the bath and reads to his daughter (as we later find out) from a book. Moments in which characters read to one another occur in almost every one of Godard’s

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50 Jean-Luc Godard, “One Should Put Everything into a Film” [1967], Godard on Godard, 238–239: 239.
51 Unlike many other filmmakers, Godard puts his trailers together himself, making little “Godard films” out of them, as Vinzenz Hediger has explained: “As befits trailers which are also auteur films, Godard trailers are more than just trailers. Apart from announcements for coming attractions, they are usually also presentations of the poetics of the film. Furthermore, they can be read as a critique of the trailer; they are about what the trailer is about. And finally, and crucially, they are a laboratory for the aesthetics of the films.” Vinzenz Hediger, “A Cinema of Memory in the Future Tense: Godard, Trailers, and Godard Trailers,” For Ever Godard, eds. Temple, Williams, Witt (144–159: 149). Hediger gives Godard’s updating of early Romantic poetics a surprising theoretical turn in his understanding of trailers as the fulfillment of the Romantic dream of a multiplication of possible beginnings: “Trailers are the only reliable manifestation of the Romantic idea of infinite beginnings within the commercial logic of cinema, a logic which Godard has, if not always closely adhered to, then certainly always been acutely aware of.” ibid., 155.
52 In fact, many of the images shown don’t come from the film but are outtakes or shots not used in the final cut. The film doesn’t show Belmondo being hurled against the wall in the fight with the gangsters, nor does the picture by Paul Klee, accompanied by the words “Landscapes of winter,” appear in the film.
53 It is also not difficult to spot the association of these genres with “male” and “female.”
films and illustrate his technique of citation and appropriation of texts by other authors. At the presentation of the Adorno Award of the city of Frankfurt to Godard in 1995, Klaus Theweleit gave a deliberately exaggerated definition: “Godard's films are films in which people read to each other from books.”54 Different temporal systems collide at the resulting narrative breaks. Reading aloud opens up a parallel space, a diversion of the cinematic discourse that involves a change of level. To overstate the matter: the film carries on, but in the text; the cinematic progression continues, but in narrative stasis.

In this sense, the repeated gesture of reading aloud that is so typical of Godard’s films can perhaps be seen as a model: for the delayed, anachronous workings of perception (here of reading), for the interruption of the action and chain of events by something asynchronous, through a quotation, a look to the side, a cut to the page. Reading creates a distance, a separation from the time of the surroundings, an alienation from one’s own perception in the moment, a gap and a slowing down, a contact (now, here)—at arm’s length.55

Similar reading scenes, which are a structural interlacing of fictive levels, have occurred in Godard’s films from the very beginning; one thinks of the postcards that Michel Ange and Ulysse send home from the war in THE CARABINEERS, or the lengthy Faulkner passage in Breathless. But something more happens at the beginning of Pierrot le fou. For here, in contrast to the Faulkner quotation, it is a non-fictional text about painting that is read out, making the operation more complicated. The step from film to text is linked to the change in content from film to painting. The book Belmondo reads is Élie Faure’s history of art, the first volume of which was published in 1909. The paperback edition, whose back cover can clearly be seen in the film, appeared in 1964. The reference to Velazquez is thus not—or not only—a gesture of return to the artistic past but one of the inclusion of the art historical present. As with Breathless, the scene has to do with the incorporation of art into everyday life (the bath, the rotating stand in the bookshop where Belmodo

54 Klaus Theweleit, ONE + ONE. Rede für Jean-Luc Godard zum Adornopreis, Frankfurt, Paulskirche 17.9.95 (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose 1995), 9.
buys Faure’s book), with a gesture of de-museification which makes it possible to integrate the painting into a heterogeneous series of images. This impression is underpinned by the previous sequence, which gives the bathroom scene a narrative motivation, but does so with a paradoxical temporal overlap. For the bathtub shot turns out to be a resolution of the enigmatic opening sequence, in which it is initially unclear what is being described and who is speaking. Towards the end of the film’s first image—the black screen that fills up in alphabetical order with the red and blue letters of the opening credits, which then disappear (ill. 17) and leave a pair of Os behind—an off-screen voice recites the following text:

Vélasquez, past the age of fifty, (ill. 18) no longer painted specific objects. He drifted around things like the air, like twilight, catching unawares in the shimmering shadows the nuances of color that he transformed into the invisible core of his silent symphony. Henceforth, he captured only (ill. 20) those mysterious interpenetrations that united shape and tone by means of a secret but unceasing progression that no convulsion or cataclysm could interrupt or impede. Space reigns supreme. (ill. 21) It’s as if some ethereal wave over surfaces soaked up their visible emanations to shape them and give them form and then spread them like a perfume, like an echo of themselves, like some imperceptible dust, over every surrounding surface. (ill. 22) The world he lived in was a sad one.57

56 That this is a reference to Rimbaud and his programmatic statements on the coloration of vowels is confirmed later when a portrait of Rimbaud is inserted, and certainly by the already quoted end of the film.
57 Subtitles from Pierrot le fou, F 1965, director: Jean-Luc Godard.
Only after several shots—of two tennis players, Belmondo choosing a book from a stand at a bookshop, and a nighttime view of a river (probably the Seine)—during which the commentary continues, can the off-screen voice be associated with Belmondo reading in the bath.

In retrospect, the opening scene reveals itself as a flashback, since Ferdinand is already reading aloud from a book he has just bought. As frequently occurs in Godard’s films, sound and image dissociate to create a gap and multiply the possible references between the two levels: Is Godard (with Velazquez) speaking about his film in a heterodiegetic discourse from “outside the film,” or Belmondo (within the cinematic narrative) about Velazquez? Or is Faure’s position on Velazquez being quoted in a detached and neutral manner? The answers to these questions will determine the level on which one interprets the commentary: as a self-referential statement about filmmaking, as a reference to Velazquez, as an homage to Faure, or as an allegorical description of the bourgeois society about to be introduced into the film. But these questions can only be posed with such exactitude at the end of the sequence. At the beginning of the film there is simply a voice to listen to and images to watch, to which—whether deliberately or not—the spoken text represents a commentary. The link between them is not causal or temporal but follows the logic of the AND which Gilles Deleuze has described as characteristic of Godard’s method: “What counts with him is not two or three, or however many you like, it’s AND, the conjunction

58 The ambivalence that Godard frequently brings into his films through the linkage of written words and images can also be seen here: The name of the shop, Le Meilleur des Mondes, and its address, Médicis, can be understood as a concrete reference to the opening setting of Paris. But the Voltaire quotation can also be read as an anticipatory interpretation of the pessimistically colored story of Marianne and Ferdinand, who, like Candide and Pangloss, go from adversity to adversity.
AND.\textsuperscript{59} The AND, Deleuze goes on to say, shifts the focus from the essence of things to the relationship between them. The occasion for these remarks was the television series \textit{Six fois deux}, which Godard made for French television in 1976, but the loosening of causal montage towards that of an AND can essentially be seen in the opening sequence of \textit{Pierrot le fou}.

Meaning can only be allocated in the back and forth between image and text, in the in-between, as an effect of intermediality. In this specific sense, Godard later maintained that Faure’s distinctiveness as an art historian lay in veering away from art history to treat art in a literary manner: “If Elie Faure moves us, it’s because he talks about a painting as if he were talking about a novel. Somebody should finally get around to translating the twenty volumes of Eisenstein that nobody’s read: he’ll have dealt with it all in very different terms.”\textsuperscript{60} The jump from Élie Faure to Sergei Eisenstein, from art historian to film practitioner and theorist, may surprise us, but it is consistent against the background of the later film \textit{Passion}. For here the Russian theorist takes on a mediating function between film and art history. “The twenty volumes of Eisenstein” is an allusion to their writer’s extensive reflections on art history—including the cinematic in El Greco. Faure speaks here as an art historian who emphatically wishes to open up his subject to film.\textsuperscript{61} Eisenstein is brought in as someone who schools the cinematic eye in its background in visual art.\textsuperscript{62}


\textsuperscript{61} In 1934, Faure wrote about the relationship of painting to film as follows: “Painting can pack its suitcase, at least as the dominant art. That there are still some real painters today I regret the less so because most of them love the cinema in particular, are influenced by it, and even help it on its way by what they are trying to do. Could one not say that by pursuing in flowing contours the continuity of projection and surface movement, the great masters of sculpture and painting—the Hindus, the Khmers, and the French sculptors of the Middle Ages, among others, and nearer to us Tintoretto, Michelangelo, Rubens, Goya, Delacroix—invented the cinema?” Élie Faure, “Introduction à la mystique du cinéma,” \textit{Fonction du cinéma. De la cinéplastique à son destin social} (Geneva: Gonthier 1963), 48–68: 52. For Faure as a “militant thinker of cinema,” see Jean-Paul Morel, “Élie Faure, militant du septième art,” \textit{Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque de Perpignan}, no. 70, October 1999, 33–42.

\textsuperscript{62} Some of Eisenstein’s writings were indeed translated in the early 1980s and immediately became an important inspiration for \textit{Passion}. See Joachim Paech, \textit{Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard}, 30–38.
If Élie Faure speaks about painting in the style of a novelist, Godard does so cinematically in Pierrot le fou. The logic implies that the filmmakers of the New Wave—apart from their references to film history—saw themselves more as the successors to the art critics than the artists of the nineteenth century. This becomes most explicit in Godard’s Histoire(s) du cinéma but was formulated earlier:

The only criticism of art that exists in the world was written by the French – Baudelaire, Malraux, etc., and we [i.e. the filmmakers of the New Wave] are the inheritors in the cinema – the art of our times – in other countries there are university teachers who speak of cinema and painting but there are no art critics like Élie Faure, who tells of the old age of Rembrandt or Malraux, critics who for all their exaggeration also convey a feeling of creating something.63

If we consider the names gathered here—Godard also includes Diderot elsewhere—it is striking that none of them are art critics in the usual sense of the word. The theoretical-critical deliberations of Diderot, Baudelaire, and Malraux go hand in hand with their extensive practical work as writers and cannot be separated from it. The genealogy invoked by Godard is one of an “in-between” of self-reflexive artistic creation. Pierrot le fou belongs in this tradition as a metafilm that reflects its own creation in images while also presenting this as a hybrid of various media:

The film constantly mixes its forms of portrayal, which are familiar from crime movie, adventure film, musical, and newsreel. He quotes, without regard for classification, Élie Faure alongside the Pieds Nickelés—Faure from a cheap paperback, the Pieds Nickelés from a luxury volume. At every moment, the film performs the act of its creation by confronting its story’s intuitive experience of reality with the empirical one from books, paintings, and advertising copy. This results in a position exactly in between objectivity and subjectivity that has the consciousness of its own rootedness in the world over a merely empirical observation of it.64

This mixing of different levels can lead to disorientation for the viewer. In theoretical terms, it marks a departure from the traditional concept of the work as an enclosed capsule towards a fragmented, porous form put together from individual parts. Roland Barthes, in his insistence on shifting from “work” to “text,” has pointed out the convergence of reception and production that this involves: “This means that the text requires an attempt to abolish (or at least to diminish) the distance between writing and reading, not by intensifying the reader’s projection into the work, but by linking the two together in one and the same signifying practice.” 65 An example of such a linking together of reading and projection is Godard’s use of images. With Godard, the production of images is always simultaneously their reception, which derives not only from painting but also from comics or advertising. In the course of Pierrot le fou, the moving image is repeatedly stopped in order to observe paintings from various historical eras. This mostly occurs without any obvious connection to the plot:

Pierrot le fou was studded with elements such as colors, drawings, or paintings, which were not related to the plot but which could be linked together because they shared some similarities. Godard used them to suggest that many combinations, many texts dealing with various aspects of art, were to be found in a film. 66

A closer look corrects the impression that the images are not related to the plot and enables a number of connections to be made. For one thing, Ferdinand, similarly to Patricia in Breathless, is introduced at the beginning of the film as someone who is interested in visual art; on this level, the use of painting is somewhat psychologically motivated in terms of the character. The images could be paintings Ferdinand remembers or that mean something to him. But in the rest of the film it is rare to find as clear a link to the character of Ferdinand as the opening scene implies. If the paintings were to be assigned to any kind of authority, it would have to be to a superordinate narrator who organizes the cinematic material, the music, and the images.

The paintings\(^{67}\) (or details of them) are generally filmed in close-up and fill the screen. They are more than a constituent of the film; they replace it (as at other points it is replaced by texts or individual panels from comics), bring it to a halt for a moment, and comment on the action. The cinematic medium reveals itself in this suspension of cinematic narrative: a shift from narration to the materiality of film can be observed. In this case, film and painting collide heavily; a diegetic integration usually only occurs on the soundtrack, as when Ferdinand’s off-screen voice says the name “Marianne Renoir” and the painting *La petite fille à gerbe* (ill. 23–25) is cut in between two shots of Anna Karina on the word “Renoir.”

This procedure can be seen as a further development of the parallelization of a visual motif and a protagonist already at work in *Breathless*. But there is a difference: While the paintings became part of the dialogue and were narratively embedded in the earlier film, they come abruptly and without warning in *Pierrot le fou*: Renoir’s painting, in terms of its composition and Impressionistically blurred background, replaces Anna Karina, and Godard implicitly becomes Renoir—a Renoir, however, whose work is not filmed as a painting but as a consumer item, a postcard. Louis Aragon referred to this in his eulogistic review of the film: “And certainly the large number of Picassos on the wall does not manifest any desire on Godard’s part to show off his talents as a connoisseur, certainly not when Picasso can be bought at your local

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\(^{67}\) Some of the paintings shown are Henri Matisse, *La blouse roumaine* (1940); Pierre Auguste Renoir, *La petite fille à gerbe* (1888); Pablo Picasso, *Les Amoureux* (1923); Vincent Van Gogh, *Café de la Nuit* (1888); two further paintings by Picasso (*Jacqueline aux fleurs*, 1958, and *Portrait de Sylvette au fauteuil vert*, 1954).
Picasso’s images—like the Renoirs—have at least two functions, corresponding to two levels of value. They serve as icons of modern art, yet as such they can be purchased at any time as reproductions and are only one visual element among many.

The transposition of a painting into a film is a complex procedure involving changes of scale and framing. As André Bazin emphasized in his seminal text on “Cinema and Painting”: “Finally and above all [...] space, as it applies to a painting, is radically destroyed by the screen.” Pictorial space is fundamentally different from that of the cinema, and the adaptation of a painting for the screen can be understood as an aggressive modification of this space. It is worth noting that Pierrot le fou—unlike Godard’s films from the 1970s or the video production Histoire(s) du cinéma, is shot in wide-angle Techniscope. In comparison to the canvases of Van Gogh or Renoir, the size of the projected image is gigantic. In this case, cinema is an almost excessively exaggerated enlargement of the painting, which can have an equally emphatic or caricaturing effect. Bazin also pointed out the crucial difference that painting and film are characterized by two fundamentally different forms of demarcation. In painting, a frame (“cadre”) has the function of isolating the image from its surroundings and has a centripetal effect in that it directs the concentration of the viewer inwards. In contrast, the cinema screen has no frame but simply a hidden covering (“cache”), so that the forces at work tend to be centrifugal:

The outer edges of the screen are not, as the technical jargon would seem to imply, the frame of the film image. They are the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality. The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal.

Bazin made these observations on the release of a series of “artist films” from the 1950s. So there is still a step to be made from his concept of “cadre” and “cache” to Pierrot le fou. For the paintings in Godard’s film have a different
function from the ones in Alain Resnais’s *Van Gogh* or Henri-Georges Clouzot’s *Le mystère de Picasso*, for example. Obviously, Godard doesn’t undertake a monographic approach to the work of a single artist. Instead, he selectively collages the work of different painters as one possible reference point among many other visual sources, which are granted the same status as the cinematic plot. Where Resnais skillfully uses film to explain painting, Godard uses painting to transform it into film. Where Resnais’s film leaves the classical concept of the work intact, or even amplifies it by concentrating on a single painter, Godard seeks to dissolve it.

Bazin’s proposition that the screen has an explosive outward potential is illustrated in *Pierrot le fou* by the fact that the film generally only shows details of paintings, which can evidently be extended beyond the edge of the screen and, the film implies, are narratively extended into the cinematic plot. If the screen is the place where the transition between painterly space (art) and cinematic space (life) is repeatedly depicted, this gesture is also extended into the auditorium. Just as the gap between painting and cinematic diegesis can be easily crossed in a single cut, the boundary between cinematic narrative and movie theater is permeable. This is particularly addressed when Ferdinand replies to Marianne’s question about who he is speaking to with the words: “Au spectateur!”

The sequencing and repetition of some of the film’s visual motifs links them without establishing a hierarchy of images. The Picasso painting

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71 This too clearly goes back to Romantic patterns of thought; Ludwig Tieck made the most excessive play with the mutual reflection of stage and auditorium when he extended the number of interlocking levels into the potentially infinite in *The Land of Upside Down*. See Ludwig Tieck, *The Land of Upside Down* [1800], trans. Oscar Mandel (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 1978).
familiar from *Breathless* (*Les Amoureux*) or a panel from a comic have the same validity as a Total sign in a gas station (ill. 26–28). Several aspects of Godard’s concept of the image during the 1960s can be seen in this montage: if the word has taken on pictorial qualities (as in the way Ferdinand’s handwriting is repeatedly used as a decorative motif in the scenes on the coast), it can also be understood as representative of the gesture of totalization with which Godard takes up the most diverse images and makes them suit his purposes.

Marjorie Perloff has described this type of paratactical co-subordination of individual fragments as a central element of collage: “In collage, hierarchy gives way to parataxis—one corner is as important as another corner. Which is to say that there is no longer a central ordering system.”72 While it is tempting to apply this concept, which Louis Aragon also emphasizes in his analysis of *Pierrot le Fou*, to Godard’s film, this risks disregarding the specific temporality of the medium. Film, in the end, can only present coexistence successively—unless it makes use of multiple exposure and other forms of superimposition, or redefines the relationship between image and sound—necessarily creating a narrative structure as it does so. Even the rupture of classical narrative patterns remains (or creates) narration. In this respect, what Perloff describes as a collage effect would more accurately have to be described as the result of montage, which levels hierarchies through the consecutive arrangement of shots of similar framing. Montage, it should be added here, is nothing but a temporalization of the collage principle that transfers the spatially organized individual items into a chronological sequence.

Such a leveling does not mean that Godard incorporates random material into his films, however. His quotations from art history reveal similarities and show how carefully he picks his references: On the one hand, the inserted images are almost without exception portraits, most of them of women, otherwise of couples. So it is easy to identify the two main characters of Ferdinand and Marianne in the depicted motifs; the film changes from a genuine narration into a commentary, a rearrangement of well-known visual topoi. On the other hand, in Picasso, Van Gogh, and Renoir, Godard chooses three painters who are representative of the innovations in modern painting since Impressionism. They invented new forms of abstraction and a new

72 Marjorie Perloff, “The Invention of Collage,” *Collage*, ed. Jeanine Parisier Plottel (New York: New York Literary Forum 1983), 5–47: 42. In the context of his exhibition *Voyage(s) en Utopie* at the Centre Pompidou in 2006, Godard distanced himself from the concept of collage and associated it with his earlier films: “I’m not going to speak of collage any more. It was a beginning for me. We needed to bring things together that hadn’t been seen together before and to find others that were opened up by this convergence.” Jean-Luc Godard, “Le cinéma ne se joue pas à pile ou face: entretien avec Jean-Luc Godard,” *L’Humanité*, May 20, 2004.)
kind of coloration but still retained the concrete object and did not—like Kasimir Malevich with his black square or Yves Klein with his monochrome paintings—abandon figuration for pure geometry or color. It is tempting—particularly against the background of the above-quoted homage to Lumière as the last of the Impressionists—to describe Godard’s film-historical position as analogous to that of the Impressionists in the history of art. His break with conventional narrative doesn’t turn away from narration, as with the abstract filmmakers of the 1920s (Ruttmann, Richter, Eggeling), but extends the plot through light, coloration, music, or text. This also entails a tendency to expose the method, as Enno Patalas has observed in Pierrot le Fou: “Though Godard does not fully reproduce the mechanism of epic narration, he does not abandon it either; instead, it is opened up, turned outward, made visible, subverted.”73 The white screen that remains after this act of subversion and the final detonation prefigures a different white surface. It is both the result of an explosion and a precondition of the new approach to painting that Godard takes in Passion; this is why Scénario du film Passion, the “visual screenplay” made after the film, begins with a white screen, which Godard links to a bright seaside beach and Mallarmé’s white sheet of paper: “To see a script. See, and you find... I find myself... and I find myself seeking... You find yourself faced with the invisible. A vast, white surface, a blank page... like Mallarmé’s blank page... A beach in a blinding sun...”74

Arranging Things: STILL LIFE

“A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”
Karl Marx75

Seen against the heterogeneous and often confusingly edited structure of Pierrot le Fou, Harun Farocki’s film Still Life76 is based on a simple and consistent montage strategy that not only juxtaposes two types of image but

74 Scénario du film Passion (1982), dir: Jean-Luc Godard.
76 Still Life (FRG 1997), dir: Harun Farocki.
also two different times: classical still-life painting from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and contemporary commercial photography. At first glance, the two films seem to have little to do with one another, only sharing the reference to painting. *Pierrot le fou* is a fast-paced, collage-like story of a couple on the run, *Still Life* a sober, almost cautious documentary of paintings and working with images. What both films share, however, is the theoretical concern.

*Still Life* is one of the seven films commissioned by the *documenta X* in Kassel in 1997. After the installation *INTERFACE*, it represents a further step away from Farocki’s traditional context of film and television towards that of visual art, where he has become increasingly present ever since. *Still Life* therefore moves in the direction of art in two ways, even though it doesn’t take the form of an installation but that of the classical (television) film. One motivation for Farocki’s involvement with still-life painting, as he emphasized in a discussion after the film’s first broadcast, was the similarity of this type of image to the documentary film. This initially applies in terms of content: still lifes, as the film’s commentary underlines, can be read as historical documents and give precise information about the commodity world of their time. The commentary describes the painting of a market, in which various fruits and vegetables can be seen, as a historical source for research into seventeenth-century Dutch eating habits. Because

77 *INTERFACE* will be dealt with later in this book. See “What an Editing Room Is: Schnittstelle” in chapter 4.

78 The major exhibitions in which Farocki has participated include Catherine David’s group show *L’Etat des choses* in the Berliner Kunst-Werke (2000), a solo exhibition at the Kunstverein and Filmclub Münster (2001), *Things we don’t understand* at the Vienna Generali Foundation (2001), and *CTRL SPACE. Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* in the same year at the ZKM in Karlsruhe. For Harun Farocki’s work in museums and galleries, see Christa Blümlinger’s text on his installation *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* in the special issue of the journal *Texte zur Kunst*, “Was will die Kunst vom Film?” [What Does Art Want from Film?]: Christa Blümlinger, “Mediale Zugriffe,” *Texte zur Kunst*, September 2001, 166–170. Since the publication of this book in German in 2006, Farocki’s solo and group shows have become too numerous to list.

79 The film was co-produced by 3sat, ZDF, and other sources. It was first broadcast by 3sat on August 17, 1997.

80 “Arbeit mit Bildern,” discussion between Harun Farocki and Christa Blümlinger, 3sat, August 17, 1997.

81 See Norbert Schneider, *Stilleben. Realität und Symbolik der Dinge. Die Stillebenmalerei der frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne: Taschen 1989). “Above and beyond the primary historico-cultural function of the depicted objects, still lifes are testimony to a change in consciousness and mentality” (p. 18). Here, Schneider takes up an idea he had developed in the catalogue for a large exhibition of still lifes in Münster in 1979/80. See Norbert Schneider, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichtliche
of the precision of its depiction, the painting is an informative document rather than just an autonomous aesthetic object. But the exactness of depiction can also elicit another reading that gives plausibility to Farocki’s juxtaposition of painting and photography. In a controversial reinterpretation of art history, Svetlana Alpers has coined the term “art as description” to capture the distinctiveness of seventeenth-century Dutch art—in contrast to the “narrative” art of Italy and other southern countries. She not only emphasizes its technical precision but explains this exactness through the general use of optical apparatuses such as the camera obscura, which helped artists to delineate their motifs. Alpers writes, in relation to the paintings of Vermeer: “Instead of being tantamount to seeing the world, the camera obscura becomes a source of style. Further, the artist is seen attending not to the world and its replication in his image, but to copying the quirks of his device.”

The realism of Dutch painting must therefore be understood as the effect of specific technical innovations. It is oriented as much to the apparatus used as to “reality.” As Alpers argues, Dutch painting was already a “photographic” art:

Many characteristics of photographs—those very characteristics that make them so real—are common also to the northern descriptive mode: fragmentariness; arbitrary frames; the immediacy that the first practitioners expressed by claiming that the photograph gave Nature the power to reproduce herself directly unaided by man. If we want historical precedence for the photographic image it is in the rich mixture of seeing, knowing, and picturing that manifested itself in seventeenth-century images.

Alpers analyzes a very wide range of images going well beyond the still life, but the paintings examined by Farocki are very convincing examples of an “art as description.” In their general lack of human figures and their exact reproduction of the world of things, they are evidence of the particularly close connection between vision, recognition, and depiction.

Farocki’s decision to bring together still-life painting and photography is only implicitly indebted to Svetlana Alpers’ proposition. Working in the

83 Ibid., 43.
84 She elucidates and verifies her theory with particular reference to the work of Vermeer and Rembrandt.
medium of film, he is more interested in a similarity between the documentary and the still life that has to do with the marginalization of both genres in the official discourse: the documentary is overshadowed by the feature film, just as the still life has traditionally been marginalized by more prestigious kinds of painting. In 1753 William Hogarth expressed a now generally held view in his Analysis of Beauty: “Let us begin with a description of what is termed still life, a species of painting in the lowest esteem because it is in general the easiest to do and is least entertaining […] Landskip painting, ship painting &c. must be rank(ed) with still life, also if only copied.” According to Hogarth, there are two reasons why the still life, together with animal painting and the landscape, rank behind historical painting and the portrait: on the production side, it is the lack of difficulty; the mastery of the artist in copying inanimate objects is less estimated than the representation of historical events or individual physiognomy. And Hogarth criticizes the still life—this time from the viewer’s point of view—for its low entertainment value.

This critical neglect is offset in the 1980s at the latest by a theoretically oriented new interest in the still life. In Looking at the Overlooked, a collection of essays on still-life painting, Norman Bryson argues against traditional reservations about the “least theorized of the genres.” Since the remoteness from theory is not only typical of the critical discourse on the still life but also seems to characterize the genre itself, the connections between the still life’s empiricism and the theoretical possibilities internal to the image seems particularly ambiguous. Farocki’s film suggests an exploration of potential connections by unfolding the theoretical potential of the still life. Bryson points out a characteristic of the still life that can seem trivial but which has an analogy in one of the most far-reaching changes in cinema history. The still life is “at the furthest remove from narrative,” and for this very reason it has continually evaded critical and theoretical discourse, which has largely been restricted to narration and

85 Reprinted in the commented source book Eberhard König, Christiane Schön, eds. Stilleben (Berlin: Reimer 1996) [= a history of the classical visual genres, vol. 5], 152. See also Joshua Reynolds’s proliferation of this position in his influential Discourses on Art, which concedes a limited status to the painter of still lifes owing to his accuracy, but warns students against turning to this genre before having studied the great works: Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art [1797], ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven, London: Yale UP 1998), 52.
character psychology.\footnote{Bryson, \textit{Looking at the Overlooked}, 9 and 60.} This too can readily be applied to the medium of film, as “narration” became dominant early on, pushing aside other possible modes and procedures. In its recourse to narrative patterns that had characterized the literature of the nineteenth century, film not only limited itself to persons but also to particular themes and conflicts: “In complete contrast to their claim to represent the whole of society, the visual media have tied themselves to a relatively narrow range of themes—people, love, crime, and politics.”\footnote{Hartmut Winkler, \textit{Docuverse. Zur Medientheorie der Computer} (Munich: Boer 1997), 208.} Attempts to extend and supplement this range were varied and numerous: the so-called \textit{Querschnittfilme} (cross-section films) of the 1920s, with their objective interest in urban spaces and narrative interconnections;\footnote{This particularly applies to Walter Ruttmann’s film \textit{Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Grossstadt} (D 1927) and comparable urban films, and also on a small scale to the lost film \textit{Adventures of a Ten Mark Note} (director: Berthold Viertel, D 1926), for which Béla Balázs wrote the screenplay.} experimental and avant-garde cinema, which was often conceived as an exploration of the specific possibilities of the medium; and it makes sense to include Farocki and Godard in this series, as they reveal at least as great an interest in the image and its possibilities and limitations as the cinematic narrative into which this is interwoven.

In contrast to \textit{Pierrot le fou}, \textit{Still Life} has no real protagonists\footnote{In 1929, Sergei Tretjakov—in a radical dismissal of the classic person-centered fable—called for a “biography of the thing”: “Thus: not the individual person moving through a system of objects, but the object proceeding through the system of people—for literature this is the methodological device that seems to us more progressive than those of classical belles lettres.” Sergei Tretjakov, “The Biography of the Object” [1929], \textit{October} 118, fall 2006, 57–62: 62.} but relates objects and images to each other in multiple ways: images \textit{of} objects, images \textit{as} objects. The film revolves around art-historically and religiously loaded motifs—fish, glasses of wine, loaves of bread, and so on—both in their relationships to one another and in the symbolism attributed to the depicted objects. Farocki highlights the symbolic charge of the images (in the paintings) as well as the production of this symbolic value in the act of representation (through photography). Lasting just under an hour, the film contains four long passages devoted to still-life painting in which an off-screen commentary interprets and contextualizes details singled out by the camera. \textit{Still Life} is thus an example of Farocki’s technique of “reading from and speaking into the images,” as he has explained elsewhere.\footnote{In the German version, the commentary is spoken by Hanns Zischler, with whom Farocki has collaborated since the 1970s (in 1978, for example, on a joint production of two plays by Heiner}
about Pieter Aertsen's *Market Woman at a Vegetable Stall*: “What is involved when inanimate objects become the focus of a painting? Does it have to do with the objects themselves, in a first reading at least?” 92 This poses the question of representation: Do things stand for themselves, or should they be understood as representatives, as references to something else, something abstract? How much transcendence do the depictions contain? How magically, metaphysically, religiously charged are they? Or are they conversely a painterly attestation to the renunciation of transcendental ideas? The commentary seems to suggest this:

The grand era of the still life, the seventeenth century, saw the rise of modern natural science. It eschewed the symbolic and allegorical modes of expression previously cultivated by the alchemists. It is difficult for the art of depiction to avoid allegorical and symbolic expression—or such interpretation. Centuries later, the objects in these paintings are scrutinized as if they were ciphers of a secret writing. Like ciphers of a hidden code, a code which doesn’t wish to be recognized as such, and whose signs are meant to appear as non-signs. A drinking vessel qua drinking vessel. A loaf of bread qua loaf of bread. 93

The situation is complex: the profanity of the objects, their refusal to stand for anything but themselves, can be seen as a red herring if the non-sign is interpreted as a sign. Meaning—above and beyond symbolic, iconographic determinations—is always negotiated between image and eye, and even the most representational depiction cannot prevent its allegorization by the viewer. If natural science and art history are directly related to one another in Farocki’s film, this also makes sense since both deal with the same questions. As different as the discourses and operations are, they are concerned with an understanding of the world of things; they recreate the world in formulae, texts, and images. Cinema, which follows up on both disciplines as a further representational technique, adds one more element to this conceptual parallelization. On a basic level, cinema is inconceivable without scientific knowledge; it is the direct result of discoveries in optics, physics, and chemistry. But filmmaking is also intimately linked to the tradition

Müller in Basel) and who is a further link to Godard as one of the two leads in *Allemagne Neuf Zéro*.

93 Ibid., 334/335.
of painting—and not least to its alchemical aspects—via the concept of the “image.” That image production (and contemplation) continues to be an enchanting process is evident in both the still life and commercial photography, although the magical charging of the images follows different considerations in each case. Where Farocki reveals the theoretical aspects of the image, the aim of the commercial photographers is to point the eye in a single direction—that of the purchase. Contemplation of the image is not the focus here, but its translation into desire and consumption.

Farocki’s film can be read theoretically on several levels. As in other films of his, it provides an explicit interpretation and analysis of the images in the commentary, a method that has repeatedly provoked the description “essay film.” The analytical potential of the images is taken up by a text that makes suggestions, directs the viewer’s eye, and, always proceeding from concrete observation, arrives at general statements about the relationship between image and reality. Moreover, the decision to partner the still lifes with a contemporary image practice should be understood as a catalytic act that releases theoretical potential on both sides of the cut.

Farocki observes four photographers at work in their studios: a banknote, cheese, beer, and a watch are elaborately staged and prepared for shooting in lengthy and patiently documented scenes. While the still lifes are shown as finished products (which themselves portray produced goods), the contemporary scenes focus on the production of images. The two levels, which span four centuries of culture and history, are linked by the depicted objects themselves. The aim in the photographic studios is also to represent commodities or the abstract dimension of “time”—here in the form of a Cartier watch. The similarity between the items portrayed enables match cuts to

94 For a discussion of this concept, see chapter 3 (“Deviation as Norm—Notes on the Essay Film”).
bridge the centuries between two images: a cut from a cheese painstakingly draped in a Paris studio for an advertisement to Hans van Essen’s painting *A Laid Table*⁹⁵ (ill. 29–30) feels like a small step. The sequence of the photo shoot still reverberates when we see the painting, just as two images might superimpose in a slow dissolve.

Farocki’s montage inevitably provokes questions about the relationship between the two systems of representation: If the still life lives on in the commercial photographers’ studios, does it do so as its counterimage? As its continuation or negation? When the voice-over gives way to live sound (and thus to the pragmatic and banal conversations between photographer and assistant), the ideas developed in relation to the still lifes echo into the present-day sequences:

> These blocks of documentary scenes stand uncommented opposite [the still lifes], and the hope is that one projects the art-historical ideas onto the advertising and notices the differences. And conversely that one can see such still lifes differently when the peculiar cultic effort put into these productions is transferred to the sacred act of art realization.⁹⁶

Two conflicting theories may be read out of the juxtaposition of these two spheres: commercial photography, in the vanishing line of still-life painting, could be thought of as the apogee of profanation. It carries what began in sixteenth-century painting to an extreme: the product is entirely separated from its religious context. On the other hand, this apparent profanation can equally be described as a form of re-sacralization, only that the sacred has changed places and now appears in a new religion of consumerism. Farocki’s film follows these two lines of interpretation without opting for the one or the other. It keeps the space between them open.

A third theoretical level, aside from the commentary and the conceptual division into two, becomes apparent with a more exact analysis of the paintings Farocki discusses, when it can be seen that the selection and arrangement of the images sets a precise art-historical framework. The film opens with two paintings by Pieter Aertsen that also stand for two different aspects of what interests Farocki in still-life painting.

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⁹⁵ Hans van Essen, *A Laid Table (Still Life with Herrings)*, oil on wood, 56 x 67 cm, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. The authorship of Hans van Essen has since been contested and the painting declared “anonymous.”

Vegetable Stall, from 1567 (ill. 31), is a sumptuous display of the fruits and groceries that became available to Dutch society in the second half of the sixteenth century thanks to new methods of cultivation; the painting, as the commentary acknowledges, isn’t a still life in the strict sense but a precursor of the genre, yet it is evidence of the economic boom and the prosperity of the time. The cosmos of things is exhibited in excessive abundance, and pushes two smaller scenes of activity—a farmhand with a cow and a kissing couple—literally into the background. The painting bears witness to an excessive expansion of commodities, which replace people on the center stage. The world of consumer goods, whose distribution and commercial exploitation is the work of the twentieth-century photographers, is visually glorified here at an early point in time.

A stronger structural argument is connected to the second painting shown, also by Pieter Aertsen. Butcher’s Stall, from 1551 (ill. 32), is regarded as a founding work of the Flemish still life and thus opens Farocki’s investigation together with the market scene. More important than its chronology, however, is its theoretical potential, which unfolds within the image as a commentary on different visual levels. The painting is an example of the so-called “inverted still life” in which the portrayal of a Christian scene is combined with the depiction of inanimate objects. The “inversion” occurs through the objects pushing into the foreground at the expense of the religious iconography—a hierarchic reversal that together with the painting’s almost grotesque abundance and voluptuousness recalls Rabelais’s Gargantua and Pantagruel, written at more or less the same time.  

Butcher’s Stall is not only one of the founding works of still-life painting. Together with other similarly structured canvases, it stands at the beginning

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97 Farocki never gives the titles of the paintings discussed or their painters, and the final credits only list where they were filmed. Farocki’s intention is not an examination of painterly style or a precise art-historical interpretation but a reading of the images as images.

98 Pieter Aertsen, Butcher’s Stall (1551), oil on wood, 124 x 169 cm, Uppsala, University Art Collection.

of a theoretical development that Victor I. Stoichita has called the “self-aware image.” For Stoichita, a self-aware image—a concept based on the same anthropomorphization as Godard’s credo that it is the film itself that “thinks”—is one that through an accretion of different visual spaces creates complex internal levels of commentary that turn the image into a “theoretical object”: “Appraising them today, over four centuries later, from a position where we can appreciate exactly how they conflicted with the norm, we see the paradigmatic value of these works. They are genuine ‘theoretical objects,’ paintings whose theme is painting.”

Stoichita describes this transformation of an image into a theoretical object in a detailed analysis of Christ with Martha and Mary, whose structure is identical to Butcher’s Stall. He sees in it a “realization of the role, power, and language of image and its impact.”

The reflection inherent in the image is set in motion through its division into several clearly demarcated visual spaces that comment on one another and recall William J. T. Mitchell’s ideas about the metapicture and Farocki’s concept of “soft montage.”

Just as in “soft montage,” we are confronted with a simultaneity of several images, none of which replaces or negates another in the sequence but initiates an interaction. To elucidate this in relation to Butcher’s Stall: a richly draped table can be seen in the foreground with a bloody ox’s head as an eye-catcher. Individual motifs can be discerned in the background, each framed by beams and views through the roofed stall: a farmhand pouring water into a pitcher, and, as if distorted in a concave mirror, the biblical scene of the flight into Egypt. This composition displays a confusing relationship between the sausages, fish, partridges, pig’s trotters, and all the other victuals and the small scene in the background. The contradiction between the two levels is further accentuated

101 Pieter Aertsen, Christ with Martha and Mary (1552), oil on wood, 60 x 101.5 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.
102 Stoichita, The Self-Aware Image, 10.
not only by a contrast between the animate and inanimate worlds but also by a sharp collision between the sacred and the profane. In Farocki’s interpretation of the painting, the reorganization of the visual priorities indicates a fundamental shift in the relationship between religious and secular discourse:

This framing demonstrates how, in laying claim to the foreground, commodities press the religious manifestations into the background. If we read this image the way we read advertising today, we are given to understand that commodities obstruct our view of the religious scene. There, the flight to Egypt—in front of it, pig’s ears. In another reading, although the produce claims the principal space, still it leaves open a window onto the religious background.\(^\text{104}\)

In the still life, Farocki discovers the germ of an aesthetic of commodities that doesn’t negate the religious pictorial space but rather displaces and recodes it. Where the religious motif moves into the background,\(^\text{105}\) the religious and symbolic charge is transferred to the goods in the foreground. This evokes a kind of misdirected and epidemic transubstantiation that affects every commodity, not only bread and wine. At this point, the film looks at the consequences that could arise from this recoding of the relationship between the sacred and the profane:

Painting, first in Flanders and the Netherlands, turns away from religious motifs in order not to degrade the lofty things. Painting seeks not to degrade the sublime, yet can hardly avoid elevating the quotidian. Painting seeks not to anthropomorphize the divine, yet it can find itself deifying man-made objects. The unimaginable shall not be posited in false images, yet it can happen that products of human beings are lifted into the unimaginable.\(^\text{106}\)

\(^{104}\) Farocki: “Still Life”, 334.

\(^{105}\) Here, Farocki is in agreement with art-historical arguments: “For the dominance of the trivially representational over the grand motifs charged with meaning can only be understood in the context of the outlined social and economic upheaval. In his book about Mannerism, Arnold Hauser has rightly emphasized the aspect of defamiliarization. One could go a step further and—with Georg Lukács—speak of ‘reification,’ meaning that the relationship between people takes on the character of a ‘materiality,’ that things, that is commodities, fetish-like, determine the ‘metabolism’ of society and all its manifestations of life and forms of consciousness. To the extent that a ‘demythification’ (Max Weber) of religion first began to take place in Western society, commodities took on a particular aura; they became almost (and sometimes indeed actual) libidinously charged fetishes that seemed to have a magical effect.” Norbert Schneider, *Stilleben*, 27f.

The concept of deification also brings an aspect into the discussion for which the film later introduces the word “fetish.” The production of an image—through painting or photography—itself contains the danger of fetishization, of giving the depiction a quasi-religious charge. This not only applies to the things that are aesthetically glamorized in the image but also to the painting itself, whose exchange value can spectacularly exceed its utility value. Especially in regard to Godard’s staging of the paintings as the consumer detritus of a blown-up museum in Pierrot le fou, it is important to note that Farocki doesn’t show the still lifes as reproductions but visits the museums to film the paintings where they hang. This decision brings a symmetry into the work. The film Still Life, which was produced for exhibition in a museum in Kassel, likewise finds its motifs in museums. It is not only a film about paintings or (implicitly) about filmmaking but also about the fetishization of the image through its exhibition in a museum.

Comparing the two levels of Still Life, we find that in formal terms they are characterized by as many differences as similarities. While Farocki always shows the finished paintings in the still-life sequences, in the photographic studios he films the painstaking and minutely detailed act of bringing about the fetish through image production. Furthermore, the product aimed for in the studio work (the photograph being produced) is not shown to the viewer in its final form. The complexity of the relationship, which goes beyond simple ideas of “equation” or “contrast,” is also reflected in the formal decisions in Still Life. Though the similarities predominate in terms of content (representation of things, upvaluation of the commodity, fetishization of the object), in the studio scenes the stasis of the paintings, whose details are rendered in close-ups, is replaced by various camera positions. The flexibility of the voice-over commentary is translated into the camera movements. The dialogues between the photographers, assistants, and studio staff are determined by a sober pragmatism that rules out theoretical deliberations. What a photograph should look like seems to be self-evident, and its success or failure are decided by purely strategic considerations. Whether something “functions” or not is a question of evidence, not of argument or discussion.

107 In this respect, the film recalls Godard’s One plus One (1968), which principally consists of studio footage of the Rolling Stones recording their song Sympathy for the Devil. Godard also concentrates on the difficult rehearsals recording all their interruptions, and omits the complete song. This scandalized the producer so much that he put it into the film for its American release and earned himself a slap in the face from Godard.
In these sequences, STILL LIFE evokes a film Farocki made in the early 1980s with the sober title of AN IMAGE. The title refers to the shooting of a photo series for the magazine Playboy. For just under half an hour, the film shows the model being moved into new poses, adjusted, differently lit, re-draped, and made up again. Farocki has emphasized that he was not interested in denouncing the work of the Playboy editors. Rather, he was fascinated by the way in which “self-reflection becomes possible through this prolonged, almost symbolic act of work.” What applies to the nude photographers is also shown in Farocki's observation of the food photographers: continuously sidling around the object, gradually approaching the photographic act, the photographers act as if they were performing a ritual. What Marx said about the commodity “reflecting back” to people the social character of their labor applies here to the images:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labor as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers.

The sequences that take place in the advertising agencies have particularly to do with this correlation of image and work. What we see is the grotesque imbalance between the high degree of artificiality and the desire to create as simple and spontaneous an image as possible—of a glass of beer, for example. Creating an image that awakens the desire to consume and turns the depicted product into a desirable object has become the sole occupation of an entire industry of “image makers,” who have shifted from the production of goods themselves to the production of representations of them.

The birth of the still life, however, also represents a historical point in time in which the commodity in the modern sense was to a certain extent “born”—as something that can be moved, exchanged, converted into money,
and removed from the religious context on a global scale; something that becomes a *sign* and circulates as words do. In Farocki’s film, this context is addressed via the concept “fetish”:

The word fetish, a Portuguese coinage, came to the Netherlands in the 17th century, during the grand era of the still life. Sailors returning from the coasts of Africa told of cults in which randomly chosen objects were worshiped as deities. Fetishes. Objects which are something divine—and do not just signify. Three centuries later, in 1906, Marcel Mauss writes: “The concept fetish must finally be abandoned; it correlates with nothing determinate.” Thus it would seem that the Europeans invented a religious practice, one which they immediately cast away, as far as the farthest reaches of their trading world. But the word *fetish* has returned and can now haunt any object.112

Although Farocki refers to an anthropological text by Marcel Mauss instead of the economic deliberations of Karl Marx on the “fetishism of the commodity” or Freud’s text on fetishism, a third point in history is introduced here along with the image of a “return of the suppressed.” Between the world of the painting (the seventeenth century) and that of commercial photography (the late twentieth century), the concept of fetishism provides a terminological hinge that casually slips the nineteenth century into the argumentation as the genesis of the “system of things.”113 Harmut Böhme has analyzed the career of the fetishism concept as a key to the nineteenth century, tracing its pathway from theology and anthropology to the discursive center of European society. In the nineteenth century, the term broadened from the colonial and anthropological discourse to that of a more general cultural relationship that could potentially describe everything: “*Everything* could be suspected of being a fetish and *everyone* of being a fetishist, irrespective of whether they were religious believers, sexual perverts, psychopaths, collectors of all kinds, mindless consumers, obsessive artists, children […], tyrannical factory owners, dandies, sons of the middle class, or housemaids.”114 The reason for this astonishing exten-

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sion of the term is the fact that “fetish” potentially become a synonym for “sign”:

“Fetish” is the formula for the sum of all semiotic processes articulating and portraying the process of capital. Fetishism is the garment of signs which the capital process wraps around the naked materiality of the exploitative labor process. The “fetish” is the formula of the quid pro quo, the transformation of everything into something other and yet the same, the formula of a universal metamorphosis and metamorphotics.  

The hegemonization of the fetish concept took place in the nineteenth century, during which industrialization caused a rapid increase in both commodities and images. The photographic studios and still lifes in Farocki’s film thus mark the beginning and potential end of this historical line.

There is yet another aspect to the development Farocki shows us. For what took place in the four centuries between classical still-life painting and commercial photography also has consequences for the concept of exchange. Just as commodities increasingly became separated from a concrete practice of barter and were exchanged via the neutral, a-semantic conversion medium of money, the signs themselves were detached from ritual and religious practices. The term “fetish,” which no longer denotes a particular practice but interchangeable economic, sexual, or pathological conditions, evokes the decontextualizations to which commodities and speech acts are equally subject and that demand continual reinterpretation. “The abstraction of exchange value, just like the arbitrariness of signs, is not simply given. It is the result of a historical process that takes hold of both signs and acts of exchange/commodities and releases them to context and overdetermination.”

Although commodities and speech acts are equally floating within the economic system, as Hartmut Winkler describes, this doesn’t mean that they are randomly produced and distributed. On the contrary, the photo shootings that interrupt the still-life sequences show the time-consuming and precise work that goes into producing the fetish called the commodity. A banknote is ironed, a piece of cheese cut into shape, a watch polished; the lighting needs to be adjusted, muted, brightened; a huge camera is aimed at the object through a cardboard sheathing. In these sequences, it

115 Ibid., 461.
116 Hartmut Winkler, Diskursökonomie. Versuch über die innere Ökonomie der Medien (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2004), 88.
becomes clear why Farocki resorts to the anthropological context of the fetish concept and allows its economic and psychological elements to resonate implicitly. For these preparations do in fact remind one of archaic rituals, and the matter-of-fact camera eye echoes the “participatory observation” of anthropology. If the photographs are meant to establish a psychological bond between the customer and the object, and if in the end they are subject to the diktat of the central fetish of capital, their act of production initially follows that of a religious ritual, in which the photographed object is laid out on a kind of altar and prepared for the redemptive photograph through various liturgical measures—cleansing, dusting with a tiny brush, and so on. Alchemy, superseded by rational science in the seventeenth century, returns here on the level of image production: “The new natural science abandoned the attempt to produce gold. The art of depiction—not. It seeks truth in appearance,” says the voiceover to a series of details of paintings showing the golden hue of flame, before the film cuts to experiments of a modern, enlightened alchemy in the service of photographing beer (ill. 33–35)

A tilted beer glass and a filler are held in a metal frame like the structures used in teaching chemistry or physics. A yellow-gold solution, the “beer,” is blended tediously often; the beer glass is repeatedly moistened with water in order to look fresh and cool, until the liquid can at last flow and the shutter release clicks. An image is made, a central link in the chain between production and consumption.
In the course of the working process, the interim results are regularly checked for sharpness and the cropping is modified. This “work with images” recalls the numerous and ambivalent other examinations of images Farocki has shown in earlier films. *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* is about a military expert who checks aerial photographs for camouflage. Here, the landscape itself is an image that can be altered and encoded: an airplane hangar becomes a field; the world becomes a *trompe l’œil*. But we also often see Farocki himself bent over photographs with a magnifying glass, examining and deciphering aerial views of Auschwitz taken unknowingly by the Allies in 1944. Although these types of “work on the image” look similar, they pursue quite different aims. The gesture is the same, but it can be made in service of clarification and experimental research or of destruction.

Image production against this background becomes an ambiguous act that is always at risk of exploitative appropriation. The sphere of art, into which context Farocki enters as participant in the *documenta* and by taking up the tradition of the classical still life, is as much affected by this as commerce. However, it makes a decisive difference to know about this limitation and have the film reflect it.

**Processing Images: PASSION**

“The rendering of movement, light and texture had been mastered; the technique of foreshortening (like that of chiaroscuro and painting velvet) had been discovered, and each successive discovery had promptly been incorporated in the common stock of knowledge—as in our time the device of *montage* and the tracking shot have become the stock-in-trade of film directors.”

André Malraux

It is quite possible that Farocki thought of Godard’s film *Passion* when he made *Still Life.* Though the distance between the two films is great in

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118 In 1993, a discussion about *Passion* between Harun Farocki and Kaja Silverman appeared in the American journal *Discourse*. It differs from the one published later in *Speaking about Godard*. At one point, Farocki describes Godard’s treatment of paintings and compares it with the way an artist would paint a still life: “The plot is not important, but rather the gesture, the way it is handled, just as in a *nature morte* painting it is not important if the tin can lying on a table contains sardines or some other kind of fish. What matters is how it is painted and how
In bringing together a film production and factory work, PASSION also juxtaposes two spheres whose relationship only becomes clear in the course of the film. Here, too, it would be possible—as in Farocki’s film—to describe both with the terms “work” and “art”; in PASSION, the place of the still lifes is taken by the reconstructed paintings in the film studio, that of the commercial photographers by the factory. However, this superficial analogy doesn’t take us very far, as the art-historical material and the labor in both films are very different. PASSION—as the title indicates—is not devoted to the world of things but to the relationship between people and images, to the productive and destructive forces (“passion” in its sense of enthusiasm and suffering) that are generated in the intervals between the images themselves and between images and their viewers. The paintings on which PASSION is based therefore come from a different art-historical tradition—primarily from Romanticism and the Baroque—and without exception focus on human figures. They are, to take up Svetlana Alpers’ differentiation, examples of an Italian-influenced “narrative art”—and the problem of cinematic narrative is indeed at the film’s core.

PASSION is two films. It is the one Godard produced in Switzerland in 1982 and can be seen in the cinema. But PASSION is also the title of the film-in-film that the Polish director Jerzy (Jerzy Radzilwilowicz) is trying to make at the same time and place, and which is the subject of Godard’s film. The theme of doubling is therefore part of the structure; a doubling that cannot be conceived as a dichotomy or as a dialectic relationship of thesis and antithesis but which in many ways is a contemplation of gaps and superimpositions. Both films, Jerzy’s and Godard’s, are difficult to distinguish from the very beginning. They converge, at times almost merging into one, but are by no means identical. Jerzy’s discussions with the team and the factory worker Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert), for example, and the love story between him and Hana (Hanna Schygulla), belong to Godard’s film, but they take place on the periphery of Jerzy’s television production, which strictly speaking we almost never see, except on the second level of observation. There are overlaps between the teams—Raoul Coutard, for example, is obviously the cameraman for both productions (and bears his own name, like most of the other “actors”)—but
the filmed paintings that make up half of the film are not seen through the television camera but through the one assigned to Godard's film.

The basic construction, within which the film develops a wide range of entanglements and complications, is simple, even though its retelling is radically beside the point, as PASSION is a “picture film,” which only presents narrative by continually failing to do so.\footnote{120} Despite this, as inappropriate as it may seem, a few words of orientation as to content and structure: Jerzy, a Polish director who, as must be supposed, has had to go into exile because of the political situation in his country,\footnote{121} is working near an unspectacular, sleepy Swiss village on a film that literally consists of paintings. Whether these images are linked by a conventional plot is one of the film's central issues from the beginning and is a question Jerzy tries to ignore in favor of working on the images themselves. Some of the most famous paintings in European art—including (in order of appearance) Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, Goya's *The 3rd of May in Madrid* and three further paintings by him, Ingres's *The Little Bather*, Delacroix's *The Taking of Constantinople by the Crusaders* and *The Struggle with the Angel*, El Greco's *The Assumption of the Virgin*, and finally, only fragmentarily and outside the studio, Watteau's *The Embarcation for Cythera*—are reconstructed and filmed as tableaux vivants using numerous actors and extras. The overall framework into which these individual sequences will be placed, and whether there is such a framework at all, remains unclear at first, but it soon emerges that “narration/story” are understood here more as the effect of the images in sequence than as a written starting point.

The production context in which Jerzy's staged paintings take place is filmed by Godard's camera. None of the paintings are seen in pure form, however, but always in conjunction with other images or framed by the paraphernalia of the television production. And the point at which we see the paintings (as in the photographic studios observed by Farocki) is never that of the “finished canvas”: they are usually being assembled or disassembled, different lighting is tried out, and there is often little distinction between rehearsal and shot. An initial observation can be made that the (re)production of the paintings, the process involved, is obviously more important than the end result. It is never clear when a tableau is ready to be filmed; the camera

\footnote{120} One must agree here with Joachim Paech in his reference to the inseparability of image and narrative: “The film Passion cannot be introduced independently of the fact that it is a ‘film’, because it only exists as this film.” Joachim Paech, *Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard* (7.)

\footnote{121} The film takes place during the time of the Solidarnosc movement, which is continually alluded to, for example through the motif of “oppression” (in the factory, in Goya's execution painting, etc.).
movements, individual props, or actors never come to a complete standstill. So the title “Moving Pictures,” which Harun Farocki and Kaja Silverman gave to their discussion of PASSION, is less trivial than it sounds, as it describes one of the decisive elements that Godard introduces into his historical models. Pascal Bonitzer has also emphasized the aspect of movement:

In Godard’s Passion, for example, the great Romantic or Baroque tableaux are partially reconstructed in the form of tableaux vivants. They are shaken up, penetrated, dislocated by the vigorous movements of the camera or the models themselves (who are unable to remain in place, who shake or rebel against their enforced immobility). It is as if a struggle were taking place within the film between the cinema and painting.

Asking, as in PIERROT LE FOU, which of the two media might be the victor of this struggle, the answer seems likely to be film, as a framing discourse that can incorporate both painting and music. In the agonal structure of PASSION, Fredric Jameson particularly sees a means to strengthen the medium of film: “Godard’s strategy is to raise the strongest objections to the medium—to foreground its most urgent problems and crises, beginning with that of financing itself, omnipresent in these later films and above all here—in order the more triumphantly to surmount them.” For this reason, the conflictive search for a link between the film’s various themes is central here too: factory work and art, love and labor, film and painting. The aim is “to keep them [the artworks] alive as efforts and experiments that fall into the world and the past when they succeed, but stand out with something of their agency still warm and palpable in them in their very failure.”

The fact that the paintings are only shown in the process of being staged and not as a product automatically leads to the problem of narration as a succession of cinematic images. The producer in particular, and not without alarm, demands a “story” with increasing urgency: “Mademoiselle Loucachevsky, what kind of a story is this?” is one of the film’s first lines of dialogue. Is a story being told here? And if so, what? Is a story indispensable

125 Ibid., 163.
126 The film script to which I refer in the following appears in L’Avant-scène cinéma, 1989, no. 380, 6–82: 10.
to the making of a film? What do the paintings themselves “narrate”? Can “story” also be understood historically, as the history of the paintings? As art history? What is the relationship between story and painting? Does a painting illustrate a particular narrative sequence, or does narration emerge from the linking of two paintings? Godard’s approach—just like Eisenstein’s—is without doubt to take the image as the starting point and to conceive the narration from this image (and counter-image). In this, PASSION is a further example of Godard’s insistence on doubling, which contains the seed of endless multiplication. As he succinctly put it in 1980 during the preparatory phase of PASSION: “Cinema is not one image after another, it’s one image plus another out of which is formed a third.” This view, which for Eisenstein and Godard represents the pivotal axiom of their understanding of cinema, is also shared by Harun Farocki. In BETWEEN TWO WARS, a few years before PASSION, he put the following credo into the mouth of one of his characters, who could be described as an “image researcher”:

I’ve started taking photographs. But one photograph isn’t enough. You need to take two pictures of everything. Things are so much in motion that you need at least two pictures to establish the direction in which things are moving.

In Farocki’s film, this necessity of basing an analysis on two images arises from the mutability and ephemerality of the analyzed conditions themselves. Despite this difference, the essential idea—that critique (in the sense of differentiation) and theoretical opinion can only be gained from the difference between two elements—is equally true for Godard. There is, however, a difference in scope, for Godard’s concept of the image tends to encompass the entire process of film production and to aim beyond the cinematic image in a narrow sense. For Godard, “image” can also mean “image and sound”; the concept is more strongly associated with the aspect of doubling than with the strictly visual:

Jerzy is looking for his art. There is a kind of double image here. Cinema is two images: sound and image; the two belong together. They are always

127 Godard did in fact proceed from individual paintings and initially tried to “see” the film instead of writing it as a screenplay.
128 Godard, “Sauve Qui Peut... Godard! (Fragments),” 10.
together [...] But in fact Jerzy is looking for himself. He is double. The whole film consists of double images: passion, the factory, the house, work, love, work. He struggles with himself, but actually struggling with oneself means struggling with the angel.130

If it is possible to refer this “double image” to the two film productions within the film PASSION, the tableaux vivants that are created for the television film are themselves already assembled, doubled images. Their meaning doesn’t reside in the image itself but derives from its divergence from the original. In many respects, the image is staged as a place of conflict and friction.

In PASSION, the lines of confrontation can be found on many different levels. To start with the film’s basic division into two: near the hall containing the improvised and “most expensive studio in Europe,” as it is once described in the film, there is a factory in which a strike is being planned. Jerzy hires a number of its workers as extras for his film. Isabelle is also a possible actress. Numerous connections arise between both areas of work but also between the characters in the plot, between diegetic “reality” and the reality of the paintings, which continually open up the respective framework and cause the world of work to merge into that of art: Goya’s Tres de Maio,131 for example, with its central figure of the rebel being executed, becomes linked via the concept of oppression to the hierarchical situation in the factory, where a patriarchal boss dictates the working conditions to his female workforce. Harun Farocki has compared the conjunction of these two spheres to a nautical knot, which looks lightly bound but is in fact extremely tight.132

Apart from these analogies, the two locations in PASSION can be associated with the poles of “practice” and “theory.” If the factory is the place of practical work and political action in which a strike and other measures to improve the situation need to be organized, the realm of the film production—that is, art—is apparently set against it as a place of visual perception and reflection. But this opposition is blurred by interlinking characters and a shared concern with economic constraints. Much as echo and feedback effects come about between the photographic studios and the paintings in STILL LIFE, here too the factory conflicts continue in the film studio—and vice versa.

130 Godard, “Scénario du film Passion,” 86. Here Godard refers to the scene in which Jerzy fights with an extra dressed as an angel in an echo of Delacroix’s Jacob’s Struggle with the Angel (1856–1861).
131 Francisco de Goya: The Third of May 1808 (1810), oil on canvas, 345 cm x 265 cm, Prado, Madrid.
In **Passion**, the romantic utopia of a crossover between life and art is both taken literally and linked to the realms of labor and life: art as labor. The basic question, which **Passion** raises more than it answers, is whether—and if so, how—painting can be transferred to the medium of film at all. The television studio is a research laboratory in which visual relationships are tested, discarded, and reconceived without coming to any real conclusion. There is no explosion at the end of **Passion**, as in **Pierrot le fou**, but a temporarily or perhaps finally discontinued television production, whose personnel take leave of one another and drive off in different directions.

What happens in this contradictory progression, which initially reconstructs and “vivifies” a static painting as a tableau vivant, only to be frozen on the level of the motif and translated into a camera movement? What (theoretical) statement is made about the medium of film in this multiple process of translation? These questions imply that here—more than in other films by Godard—the “in between” has become a decisive principle to which the individual shot is subordinate. This applies to the space between film and painting as well as to the gap between the factory and the film production. And here too is one of the lines that connects **Passion** to **Pierrot le fou**. If Godard had quoted Elie Faure’s interpretation of Velazquez as a painter of the “in between” in 1965, in **Passion** he takes this relationship as his actual theme. Ironically, this leads to a destruction of the paintings in the moment of their reconstruction. In Godard’s own words: “I make films in which the shots no longer exist, in which only the combination of shots exists, where the connections as such become the shots. The subject of **Passion** was relationship.”133 The French word *liaison* has as many different meanings as the English “relationship,” and in fact relationships between the two locations develop that are as close as those between the people involved with producing the images. Jerzy stands between Hana and Isabelle; Hana between her husband, the factory owner Michel (Michel Piccoli) and Jerzy; Jerzy is undecided about Switzerland or his home country of Poland; and one of the places where these “in betweens” come together is the hotel in which the film personnel are accommodated.

Beyond these “interstices” within the film, **Passion** as a whole is temporally situated between two image productions: there are the paintings on which the diegesis of Jerzy’s film of the same title is based; and there is the video film entitled *Scénario du film Passion*, which can be described as an “after image” and was produced by Godard for television a year later. This temporal sequence is associated with a series of quite different types of image: from *painting* to the *television* production, which Godard deals with in the medium

133 Jean-Luc Godard, in Leutrat, *Des traces qui nous ressemblent*, 60.
of the *cinema* film, to the *video* version produced for television. In this sense, *Passion* makes an extensive survey of the cosmos of image production. With all this heterogeneity, it will be seen that an aim of the film is an examination of filmmaking itself. Here, too, the medium of film is refracted in the different visual levels and to a certain extent only becomes visible in the various processes of translation. Jean-Louis Leutrat outlines this as follows:

Because of this subtlety it is preferable to speak of translation: a gap between two “languages” is measured, and the effect of similarity can be said to be incidental, as Godard uses painting to demonstrate the innate strengths of cinema. The reconstruction of the paintings is a pretext for displaying what cinema can do.134

If *Passion* is “really” talking about cinema, the question remains as to how this reflection on the possibilities of cinema functions. An initial point can be made that *Passion* redefines the concept of narration, displacing it from told (and tellable) story to seen (and visible) art history. In *Pierrot le fou*, cinematic image and narration had been recurrently interrupted and suspended by shots of reproduced paintings, and in *Passion* the paintings have a similar function. The shift from moving to unmoving image is linked to a breach of the illusionistic principle, according to which fictive and “real” action can easily be set off against one another. This breach can be linked to Brecht’s concept of alienation and his concept of epic theater as a series of “images” or “tableaux.” Roland Barthes placed Brecht’s praxis and Eisenstein’s film theory in a line with Diderot’s theory of theater, and considered all three concepts in the light of what can be called the reflexive, “theoretical” image:

The tableau (pictorial, theatrical, literary) is a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible, and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view. Such demiurgic discrimination implies a high quality of thought: the tableau is intellectual, it has something to say (something moral, social) but it also says that it knows how this must be done; it is simultaneously significant and propaedeutical, impressive and reflexive, moving and conscious of the channels of emotion.135

134 Ibid., 23.
The concept of the “intellectual image” reframes Eisenstein’s idea of “intellectual montage” into a process within the individual image. In order to embed this tradition into PASSION, however, it should be said that strictly speaking the film has no individual images. The tableaux, at least—as quoted images—already consist of an identifiable original painting and its sometimes more, sometimes less divergent re-enactment in the television studio. They are in a sense “internally” edited and bring two different levels together. What appears to be self-evident, namely that every film consists of a sequence of images, is taken literally here, in that these images are exhibited and continually called into question. Much of the discussion Jerzy has with his team relates to basic issues: questions of lighting and composition. The confusing thing about PASSION is the consistency with which Godard proceeds from the paintings and only considers the story as an effect of them; as something that would have to emerge from them. This is a complete reversal of the usual film production process, which generally proceeds from a written screenplay. The story which is “told” here cannot be conceived of without its painted models, and what story there is unfolds between these models and in their interaction with the world of work.

It is possible to uncover the singularity of PASSION by distinguishing it both from PIERROT LE FOU and Farocki’s STILL LIFE. In PIERROT LE FOU, Godard has the paintings of Renoir and Picasso flash up as short splinters of everyday life. The paintings—or rather their reproductions—both interrupt the story and continue it through correspondences of form and content. Both cinematic levels—film and painting—thus come into focus as elements of a more extensive cosmos of images, to which any kind of image—including printed texts and comics—belongs. The film propagates an equalization of these levels, which are indiscriminately utilized and related to one another as “material.” The utopia of PIERROT LE FOU is that the film is able, despite its heterogeneity, to keep its different levels together, albeit no longer within a consistent narrative. The development inherent in PIERROT LE FOU is that of replacing the principle of narrative with that of the image; not finding images to illustrate the written word but to tell a story from images. The inserted paintings, in particular, are like a wrench thrown into the normally smoothly running works of narration and regularly knock the action off course. PASSION, by contrast, no longer has a primary narrative needing to be irritated and diverted by inserted images. The relationship between image and narrative has been reversed.

PIERROT LE FOU also deals with the problem of framing differently from PASSION. It is in the nature of the tableau vivant to transcend the boundary between the artwork and its surroundings. It is only possible to reconstruct
the painting for the camera by “de-framing” it. The tableau vivant therefore has as much affinity to the theater as to film and painting.136 The centripetal force that Bazin ascribed to the frame in painting, and which turned outwards in PIERROT LE FOU to break through the boundary between image and (filmic) life, takes yet another direction here. For the programmatic dissolution of the frame, which causes the individual paintings in PASSION to merge into one another, leads to an act of reconstruction by the viewer, who is continually involved with reformulating potential frames:

This continual isolation of the paintings from their surroundings is particularly important because the scenes with the tableaux vivants and the film production in the studio, in the end the entire pre-film reality as opposed to the film camera, are on the same level, which often leads to such a strong interpenetration of the different areas that they can hardly be distinguished.137

This is quite different in STILL LIFE. Here, the unnamed paintings that Farocki visits in museums give rise to thoughts about the order to which the objects in the painting are ascribed, and they are the background for an analysis of contemporary practices of image production in the advertising industry. In the museum, the central question is how the paintings should be read and understood; in the photographic studios, the main considerations are what is put into the photographs.

PASSION is also interested in a complicated mixture of everyday life and the visual realm, though not through liberating the paintings from the museum and transferring them to everyday life but by reconstructing the museum space in the studio and having the paintings literally communicate with one another. The fact that the tableaux vivants are staged by actors who have been recruited from a nearby factory turns the realm of art into one of work. The television studio and the factory are mutually exclusive, but each continues the other within it. If we take Godard’s general statement about the primacy of montage, connection, and relationship seriously, then these conditions should be able to be found and described on many different levels. The decisive thing is that here—unlike in PIERROT LE FOU—the montage is often shifted to the individual shot and in this respect can only be described as the superimposition of several images in the mise en scène. The utopia of bringing two images together in such a way as to produce a

136 See Paech, Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard, 45.
137 Ibid., 46.
third, invisible image is joined by another ideal: that of actually “being in the picture.” Apart from the phase in the early 1970s, in which he took his leave of the cinema and turned to video, Godard has always aspired to the utopia of “penetrating the image” in order to find a place “within the image,” whence thoughts “about the image” might be articulated. In 1967 he put this as follows:

What I wanted was to get inside the image, because most movies are made outside the image. What is an image? It’s a reflection. What kind of thickness does a reflection on a pane of glass have? In most film, you’re kept on the outside, outside the image. I wanted to see the back of the image, what it looked like from behind, as if you were in back of the screen, not in front of it. Inside the image. The way some paintings give you the feeling you’re inside them.\footnote{138}

In the 1960s, however, Godard had not yet answered the question as to how such an immersive “being in the picture” could be produced cinematically. But there are a few indications that already point to \textsc{Passion}. Godard already names painting as one of his important examples, because it is able to take a perspective on the image “from within the image.” One can only suppose which paintings Godard had in mind, but it is quite likely that he meant those of Delacroix, to which he often referred during the 1960s.\footnote{139} Measured against this aim, it must be said about \textsc{Pierrot le fou} that the film didn’t come close to this utopia. It gives the “image” its due in a general sense by linking up painting, comics, adverts, and texts. But this tends to boil down to a side-by-side of differing images, which highlights the image as an adaptable surface that can be cut, rearranged, and displaced as material. In \textsc{Pierrot le fou}—as the examples discussed above show—the image is defined more as surface than space. In \textsc{Passion}, by contrast, the ability of the camera to absorb the image as a spatial structure and to move through the various levels of the image is decisive.

This can be observed for the first time in the Goya sequence, which is clearly introduced as an “extension” of the work in the factory and is closely linked to what is going on there: Isabelle discusses the working conditions with her colleagues. They talk about the effort of having to remain in the same position for hours on end (also a problem of the tableau vivant), the bad

\footnote{138} Godard, “Struggle on Two Fronts,” \textit{Godard par Godard I} 32.
\footnote{139} For example in conversation about \textsc{Pierrot le fou}. See Jean-Luc Godard, “Pierrot mon ami,” \textit{Godard par Godard I}, 259–263: 263.
pay, and the question of whether the factory owner Michel will call the police in order to prevent a labor dispute. When they decide to draft a joint declaration, Isabelle is asked to move the lamp a little closer (ill. 36 and 37).

Isabelle, whose face is illuminated by the floor lamp, draws its shade towards the camera and lowers it slightly, then there is a cut to the television studio: here too a lamp is being lowered in order to bring more light onto the painting being staged. In a cut like this, as Farocki observes in conversation with Kaja Silverman, it is possible to see a linking of categories that are usually thought to be incompatible. “Again, terms which are generally assumed to be discrepant are shown to be in a generative relationship to each other: factory production and artistic creation.” Beyond the montage there are further links between the two: just as Jerzy laboriously attempts to recreate the sublime classical painting through film, in the scene with the workers Godard is concerned with the development of an art of cinematographic portraiture through the use of backlighting and silhouette—an adaptation, or rather a transfer, of painterly methods into film.

The Goya scene, which immediately follows the spotlight sequence, then stands as an example of the layering and concentration of various model canvases. Four of Goya’s paintings can be seen projecting into one another, superimposed on one another, their figures related to one another in a relatively short tracking shot. The downward pan, which begins with the studio spotlight, touches on a female figure, passes a kneeling man, and reaches the lantern that is the central source of light for Goya’s 3rd of May 1808. The camera then moves upwards along the body of one of the soldiers and pans to the left along the barrels of their rifles. We can see one of Jerzy’s

heavy blue television cameras gliding along in the background, and a sudden gap in the composition reveals another of Goya’s paintings, his *Nude Maja*,141 who lies outstretched on a divan with her arms behind her head. Once again, a large camera can be seen, being pulled through the tableau from right to left by two technicians, obviously filming a woman with a parasol and a dog. A movement of the dog, which pulls at its lead and escapes forward, prompts a pan by the non-diegetic camera: the dog sniffs a man on the ground, whom we quickly recognize as one of the rebels from the *3rd of May*. The following movements are devoted to this painting, which takes up the foreground of the scene. If the perspective of the original painting has hitherto largely been respected, the camera now enters the pictorial space, tracks frontally along the rifle barrels, and looks directly into the faces of the soldiers taking aim. In comparison to the painting, this tracking shot constitutes a “counter-shot” to the direction of fire. What can’t be seen in Goya’s painting now becomes an image in close-up: the faces of the firing squad.

These three different visual levels—the execution, the reclining woman, and the walking woman between them—can be assigned to the different thematic complexes that structure the film *Passion* (ill. 38–40). On a small scale, the construction of the film repeats itself in the layering of the visual space:

141 Francisco de Goya, *The Nude Maja* (1789–1805), oil on canvas, 97 x 190 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.
Each of the layers, and therefore each of the individual scenes, represents a thematic area: the foreground the theme of conflict, oppression, and violence (later also extended by work); the background the theme of sexuality and desire (later extended by love); the middle ground the movement that mediates between these two levels and gives rise to a dramatic, epic, or otherwise coherent structural context: narration itself.\textsuperscript{142}

The mobility of the camera and the resulting possibility of directing the eye of the viewer have a further important consequence in the Goya sequence: while one quickly grasps the situation in Goya’s painting, because the lighting immediately indicates the execution victim in his white shirt, it is only towards the end of the careful tracking shot that the rebel comes into our field of vision. The scene is interrupted once, and only after a second pan along the barrels of the rifles is there a cut to the defenseless man, whose posture resembles that of a crucifixion. In contrast to painting, film is able to create tension through gliding movement and a successive scanning of the image. It can spatially dissolve the decisive moment of the painting and translate it into narrative. Film is thus highlighted as an art of duration and temporal sequence, while painting (like sculpture) reveals its subject matter to the eye synchronously and must appear in Lessing’s “fruitful moment.”\textsuperscript{143} Godard’s impulse is to translate part of the painting into a cinematic movement—“I observe, I transform, I transfer, I smooth down what remains. That’s all,”\textsuperscript{144} as Jerzy describes his function in this scene. Both directors, Jerzy and Godard, are searching for the inner dynamic of the image, which is predetermined by line, light, or composition—a motif that will later culminate in the staging of the El Greco.

Comparatively little has been written about Godard’s selection of paintings. In contrast to \textit{Pierrot le fou}, in which the paintings are largely restricted to Impressionism and its twentieth-century successors and are emphatically allocated to the cosmos of everyday images, in \textit{Passion} Godard goes further back in history and embraces several centuries of Western art. The works that Jerzy tries to reconstruct in his film are undoubtedly classics of art history, “masterpieces.” Furthermore, most of the paintings already contain a germ of movement and narration in that they record the decisive

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{142} Paech, \textit{Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard}, 179.
\item \textsuperscript{144} Godard, “Passion,” 20.
\end{itemize}
moment of a course of events. This applies to Goya’s *3rd of May*, Rembrandt’s *Night Watch*, and particularly so to the finally staged painting, El Greco’s *Assumption of the Virgin*. This work is not only the most elaborate of the reconstructed paintings in terms of drapery, costumes, and the arrangement of the figures; it is also characterized as a reflection on the sublime in art through the upward movement of the camera and the sacred music on the soundtrack.

With the El Greco painting, the idea of being able to “penetrate” the image, already present in the Goya reconstruction, is brought together with the defloration of Isabelle. Peter Wollen has interpreted the penetrative visual praxis here in terms of the problem of the frame:

> The frame of a painting is not simply a rectangle inscribed round it, separating it from the plane surface of the wall. There is a second, virtual frame which demarcates imaginary from real space, co-extensive with the picture surface itself, a kind of veil or hymen, to use Derrida’s favored term. Whereas movement of the look (the camera’s look) outside alters the first frame, the margin, movement of the look inside is an act of penetration, a metaphoric tearing of the veil.

In contrast to Bazin’s remarks about the function of *cadre* and *cache* in painting and film, Wollen points to the boundary between observer and visual content. Nowhere is this boundary so substantially breached than in the El Greco sequence. The filming of this painting could be considered the climax of the film, as—in combination with Fauré’s *Requiem* and the parallel narration of the love story between Jerzy and Isabelle—it brings the two plot lines and the accompanying music closer together than anywhere else. The shoots in the studio and the deepening intimacy between the director and the worker are portrayed as two sides of the same coin. On the set, one of the performers walks up some steps onto a pedestal; in the hotel, Isabelle climbs the stairs to Jerzy’s room. They talk about Isabelle’s dismissal from the factory and about the correlation between the gestures of work and those of love. Jerzy abruptly asks Isabelle if she is still a virgin and strokes his hand over her dress. A cut leads back to the television studio, where the camera is beginning to film the El Greco. “The film culminates

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145 Rembrandt, *Night Watch (Militia Company of District II under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq)* (1642), oil on canvas, 359 x 438 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
146 El Greco, *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1577), oil on canvas, 401 x 229 cm, Art Institute of Chicago.
with the defloration of a virgin, intercut with the camera’s movement into and through the tableau of El Greco’s *Assumption of the Virgin Mary*. This is the moment when interior and exterior non-story and story most converge and inter-penetrates.”\(^{148}\) The parallelization of defloration and ascension once again implicitly associates the scene with the motif of the “fruitful moment,” which Lessing, in his discussion of the Laocoöon group, saw as decisive for the immobile arts of sculpture and painting. So the aspect of movement and dynamic is incorporated in *PASSION* through structure and covert allusion, and via the narration.

After these remarks on the conflation of two plot lines, a small diversion is necessary before coming to speak about the theoretical potential associated with El Greco. For it is not only narrative logic that leads Godard to this painter here but also his rediscovery of the writings of Eisenstein.\(^{149}\) Eisenstein’s deliberations on the “cinematic” in painting, which were published in French in 1980,\(^{150}\) during the preparatory phase of *PASSION*, introduce the concepts of the “elastic” and the “pathetic,” both of which are equally applicable to Godard’s treatment of painted imagery. In his discussion of El Greco, Eisenstein is less concerned with ennobling painting as the prehistory of cinematography than with better understanding paintings through a knowledge of cinema and its possibilities. He principally develops his concept of the “cinematic” in the text “El Greco y el Cine.” In the paintings of El Greco, whom he declares a “cineaste espagnol,”\(^{151}\) Eisenstein sees a concentration and perspective that points beyond the painting spatially, that breaks up the *temporal* cohesion, and—at least virtually—takes the image from stasis to movement. For Eisenstein, the inner dynamic of an occurrence that can be found in El Greco is more important than the painter’s depiction of several phases of a narrative in a single canvas: \(^{152}\) “To speak in dynamic terms, it [the work of El Greco] succeeds in conveying the inner dynamic of a portrayed ensemble, which is given its own temperament by recasting the elements through montage.”\(^{153}\) Eisenstein’s concept of montage

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148 Ibid.  
149 This has been pointed out by Joachim Paech, whose deliberations I refer to in the following: Paech, *Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard*, 30–38.  
151 Ibid., 59.  
152 As in *The Martyrdom of St. Maurice and the Theban Legion* (c. 1578–1579), various versions in the Escorial and the National Gallery, London.  
153 Eisenstein, *Cinématisme*, 17.
is thus not restricted to the confrontation of several images. It also includes the collision of complementary colors within a painting and the explosive potential resulting from their contrast, which he associates with the concept of “ecstasy,” of going beyond the self. Here, ecstasy means that the motif does in fact seem to break the bounds of the frame, as can be seen in El Greco’s *Assumption of the Virgin*.

The fact that Eisenstein describes and analyzes ecstasy as the essential cinematic element shows that he does not find the traces of cinematography in the *depiction of movement*, but in a *moved depiction*, in a particular kind of artistic productivity, which is brought about through different means and portrayed in different forms.154

In this sense, the “ecstatic” that Eisenstein notes in El Greco should not only be interpreted as a stepping out of the individual painting but also, in an overall sense, as a stepping out of the medium of painting. The change of medium, which Godard carries out in the opposite direction in *Passion* through bringing painting back into film, is already inherent in El Greco’s paintings. But it is only through the possibilities of the tracking shot, music, and lighting that what Eisenstein conceives theoretically actually becomes film.

With Godard’s staging of the El Greco painting, his impulse—also recognizable in the other films analyzed here—of simultaneously bringing painting and film into convergence, and of distancing them from one another, reaches its climax. In the double gesture of freezing the moving images of film in tableaux vivants and of drawing on paintings that in themselves portray the potential of movement in compelling constellations, there is a superimposition of film and painting that both reveals and transcends the boundaries of the media.

154 Paech, *Passion oder die Einbildungen des Jean-Luc Godard*, 33.