



European Cinema Education
for Youth

EDUCATIONAL TOOL AT THE TABLE

What do we do around the table? We eat of course, but we also talk, look at each other, negotiate, argue, and meet other people: the meal that gathers, in the same location at a specific time, is an inexhaustible source of narrative possibilities, and the filmmakers have to think carefully about the production and setup. As it has very strong symbolic charge (The Last Supper), the table unites but can also be a crystallising place – outbursts or problem solving – for conflicts, and in particular family conflicts.

➤ **Setting up the table, sitting at the table**

Who is doing the service? Who is being served? What do we eat and how? Sitting at the table is a ritual, where there are manners and social and cultural codes, differing depending on whether it takes place within the home intimacy or if it is in a public space (restaurant, refectory). If in *Il Posto*, the family meal takes the shape of an immutable ceremony (role of each person, who speaks when, choice of lights), in *Pierrot le fou*, Jean-Luc Goddard enjoys side-tracking it (no food, animals around the table, beer being poured in the plate, poetry being declaimed).

➤ **Cinematographic languages**

In action films, it is easier to control the setup and to establish clear choices before the shooting (location, cut, rhythm). In *Work in Progress*, a documentary film, they had to be very reactive during the shooting: in order to catch the entire conversation between the protagonists, even though the sequence was being filmed with two cameras, the cameramen had to adapt and they anticipated the changes of axis. Then the unity of the scene was built in editing.

➤ **Setup and space management**

With inherent constraints in setup, filmmakers embrace the idea in various ways based mainly on two movements: fragment the space or not, unite or divide the protagonists.

It is an important constraint of setup: filming every guests whilst some characters might have their back turned to the spectator in the foreground – the foreground is what is called “the fourth side of the stage”. In *Tall Stories (Uma pedra no bolso)*, the filmmaker chose to free this space and to adapt the characters layout. In *Shelter*, he first films the whole table, then he multiplies axes and viewpoints. In *Il Posto*, he favours oblique axes, sometimes slightly from a birds-eye view, which gathers nearly everyone around the table or establishes the silent complicity between the father and the mother.

➤ **Around the table: an indicator of each person's link and place**

- The choice of frame and frame value – wide-shot or close-up -, the editing (shot/reverse shot) reflects the union, the division, the isolation of one character or more (*The Spirit of the Beehive*), establishes a confrontation (*Blood*), or the feeling of being trapped (*Tall Stories*)
- Use of the sequence shot and/or of the editing rhythm, gives a notion of the state and the evolution of the protagonists relationships (deletion of the link, duel between the father and the punk in *Shelter*)
- Filming the glances games and facial expressions reveals alliances, the research for complicity (*Il posto*, *The Spirit of the Beehive*) or for breakups, the animosity rising amongst the guests.

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