



European Cinema Education
for Youth

EDUCATIONAL TOOL IN THE CAR

➤ **Symbolic**

Just like around the table (see bonus on this topic) where we barely eat, we often do something else than driving when we are behind the wheel of a vehicle in the cinema: casual discussions, confessions and twists, ferocious arguments, seduction games... The car can be a symbol: a symbol for the consumer society (in *The Happiest Girl in the World*, Delia goes to Bucharest to film an advert for a drink which made her win a car) or even a delusion or greed object (Uma pedra no bolso).

The car journey is a motor for the narration, it even is at the centre of it in *road movies* where the journey is at the very heart of the film – for example *Easy Rider* by Dennis Hopper (1969), *Route one USA* by Robert Kramer (1989). *Pierrot le fou* is partly a road movie; in the first extract, the aimless journey refers to the characters' yearning for absolute freedom: rules are subverted, roads are literally left to create new ones.

➤ **A transitional time-space**

In all these extracts, a feeling of length, wait and tension settle in for the spectators and the characters. In *The Happiest Girl in the World*, the impatient young lady dreams about autonomy and being able to escape – ironically in a car that only moves a few meters, pushed by technicians on the filming of the advert.

The car and the movement constitute pre-eminently a transitional time-space leading the protagonists and the narration to someplace else, effectively or symbolically. The opening sequence shot in *Shelter* sets straight away the film at the heart of the secret issues, the concealment, of the intimate space. The second extract of *Pierrot le fou* establishes a serious atmosphere: a night journey, without any off-camera, focused on the intimacy of the couple sat next to each other, in which it is as much about love confession than about death, danger linked to the speed and suicide.

➤ **Illusions, shams, games**

We have in mind the artifice of transparencies in classical Hollywood cinema where comedians grossly mimic driving whilst the car is static – in a studio – and where landscapes go past on a screen set up in the background. Several extracts presented here have something to do with shams, particularly in the second extract of *Pierrot le fou* where you can see the artifice – the filming of this sequence actually happened in a studio, the coloured light sources

in movement were obtained with a carousel. The extracts from *The Way I Spent the End of the World* and *Uma pedra no bolso* duplicate the sham, they drive in a properly imaginary way. The fake journey, for which the gestures are reproduced, is therefore both a dream and a promise for somewhere else, tainted with wistful daydreaming, desire, and tension.

In these mock scenes, no wind through the hair, nor rain on the windscreen, but stationary cars. The car embodies the adult world, which youngsters dream of. In *The Way I Spent the End of the World*, the van becomes the protective space, gathering family and friends, with kids driving, the time for a swop in roles. It is a pure object of fantasy in *Uma pedra no bolso*: Miguel goes in as to feel its reality. The teenager “plays at playing” the driver, reproducing all cinema archetypes, even those of an actor – he “plays at playing” the comedy.

➤ **Off-camera, viewpoint, inside/outside**

Car scenes naturally highlight the film off-camera (its filming) which is often interesting to question, especially here with the two extracts from *Pierrot le fou* where Godard enjoys playing with codes: Are the characters actually driving? Is the vehicle towed by another one or is it travelling on its own? Where is the camera?

Everything is a matter of viewpoint in each extract: Is the camera inside or outside the vehicle? Filming from the outside of a vehicle, in a fairly wide-shots scale enables to have a viewpoint on the car, then represented as a symbol, a beautiful object, before it escapes from the shot (the Ford Galaxy in the first extract of *Pierrot le fou*). Filming inside a car is difficult, because it is a very constraint space. Do we chose to film the passengers in the car all together or each in a different shot? What is the role of editing in defining and re-constructing this space?

One can also wonder about friction between the outside and the inside, more especially in *The Happiest Girl in the World*; the interior where we are is a fictional bubble surrounded by the uncontrolled reality of the town which scrolls through the windows. The latter are the frames within the frame, through which the teenager watches the urban landscape like a spectator.