The “Coming of Age” Film

The four necessary elements of a “coming of age” film are:

1. **Messages from adults to young adults or teens:**
   
   Things that the adults say or do that make the kids feel unimportant or diminished in some way -- in Rebel, the parents go out on Easter, Judy’s dad shows her no affection; in the Graduate they are always telling him to do something with his life ....

2. **Retaliation by the young adult or teen**
   
   Indicates restlessness or rebellion by the kids against the adult worlds messages (ex: you don’t like my boyfriend? I’ll run away with him ...)

3. **Relationship issues (usually with opposite sex)**
   
   Parent child, opposite sex, friendships -- how relationships serve as catalysts for the coming of age or self actualization

4. **Breaking free of something**
   
   the thing that makes the kid independent -- to come of age means to break free from (parents, society’s expectations, friends or relationships -- anything that holds a person back from becoming their true selves

**Themes:**

Usually involves independence, self-actualization, becoming the true self

**Motif**

It is always the journey motif -- can be metaphorical -- life is a journey -- or literal (Diane court goes to England with Lloyd-- or both. Important to note that in all of these films, the protagonists are still “journeying” at the end ... they are driving or riding -- basically continuing on with the journey.

**Symbols and metaphors**

One constant one is that the car, or vehicle, is seen as a symbol of independence .... Rebel, they pop his tires to get at him in the beginning, the chickie run. And Plato, the unempowered, rides a Scooter... In Graduate and Say Anything, cars are graduation presents .. in Breaking Away, the bike is everything

**Archetypal Characters**

Pretty much all observable -- Mrs. Robinson, archetypal predator in animal print, Elaine, archetypal college girl
Archetypal Plot Elements or Situations
Readily observable

Archetypal Settings
Readily observable

Montages
Again a montage is a sequence, or a collection of scenes that show the passage of time or development of a feeling or emotion.
None in Rebel, tons n the Graduate (“drifting montage”, “stalking montage”, etc.)
Breaking Away has the bike training and getting the bike ready for he race montages, Say Anything has the Falling in Love montage

Music
Readily observable, particularly important in Graduate and Say Anything;
Breaking Away uses Italian music, etc.

Transitions
Mostly simple cuts, as is fitting for the drama. the Graduate use lots of overlapping sound transitions which helps to show the “disconnectedness” of Benjamin.

Camera Work
There are some cool shots in all of the films -- notice in Rebel the one where his mother comes in the room, is upside down and turns 180 degrees as he sits up; the tilt downs on the dad cleaning up the dishes and on Plato in the pool; the tilt frame on Plato when he’s shot and Jim when he’s choking his dad. The Graduate has a lot too -- the POV sequence in the scuba outfit, the reflection shots of Mrs. Robinson in the hotel bar, the zoom out on Mrs. R when Ben leaves her ...

Power Shifts
the camera shows them in the examples above, but they are figurative as well -- the power shifts to the person coming of age, usually with a specific incident -- Diane giving her father the pen, Jim introducing Judy to his parents ....

Irony
Plato getting shot when his gun had no bullets; Ben falling in love with the daughter of the woman he’s having an affair with, the Italian team Cinzano being cheaters although Dave idolizes them, Diane’s father being a crook, all the while saying he and Diane are so much better than Lloyd
ADD

**Social Satire or Commentary...**

All the parents are made to look foolish at some point -- diminishing their stature. Jim’s dad in the apron, Ben’s parents with no sound making big faces at him when he’s in the scuba suit, Dave’s dad cheating the college kids w/cars and ranting on about Eye-die things, Diane’s dad in the bathtub ... Adults are portrayed as concerned about all the things that don’t matter to the kids, and diminish the problems of the kids (which are very real to the kids.)