FRENCH-LANGUAGE ROAD CINEMA

Borders, Diasporas, Migration and 'New Europe'

MICHAEL GOTT

FRENCH-LANGUAGE ROAD CINEMA

Traditions in World Cinema

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This book is part of a long and winding detour from what began as a single chapter on road movies in my doctoral dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin. As such, it is the product of many conversations with my committee members Hélène Tissières, Dina Sherzer, Michael Johnson and Madhavi Mallapragada. Although *French-language Road Cinema* deals with an entirely different corpus and is its own project, it grew from the seed of that dissertation topic. Another building block for this book was furnished by the collection of similar if not precisely identical scope that I co-edited with Thibaut Schilt, and everything in the following pages is part of an extended dialogue on French-language road cinema and its parameters that I have undertaken with Thibaut and the contributors to that volume. In the meantime, I have refined by thoughts on French-language road cinema in the course of numerous discus-

sions with students in my classes on the topic at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Cincinnati. Each group brought new perspectives and insights to the films that would make up my corpus. Rebecca Deaton, who was a MA student in one of those courses, later provided editorial assistance. Lastly, Chapter 3 first appeared in modified form in *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies* and a different iteration of Chapter 4 first made it to print as an article in *Contemporary French Civilization*. The anonymous input of referees for each of those journals and the support of the editors has played no small part in the final shape of my arguments.

ILLUSTRATIONS

TRADITIONS IN WORLD CINEMA

General editors: **Linda Badley and R. Barton Palmer**
Founding editor: **Steven Jay Schneider**

Traditions in World Cinema is a series of textbooks and monographs devoted to the analysis of currently popular and previously underexamined or undervalued film movements from around the globe. Also intended for general interest readers, the textbooks in this series offer undergraduate- and graduate-level film students accessible and comprehensive introductions to diverse traditions in world cinema. The monographs open up for advanced academic study more specialised groups of films, including those that require theoretically oriented approaches. Both textbooks and monographs provide thorough examinations of the industrial, cultural, and socio-historical conditions of production and reception.

The flagship textbook for the series includes chapters by noted scholars on traditions of acknowledged importance (the French New Wave, German Expressionism), recent and emergent traditions (New Iranian, post-Cinema Novo), and those whose rightful claim to recognition has yet to be established (the Israeli persecution film, global found footage cinema). Other volumes concentrate on individual national, regional or global cinema traditions. As the introductory chapter to each volume makes clear, the films under discussion form a coherent group on the basis of substantive and relatively transparent, if not always obvious, commonalities. These commonalities may be formal, stylistic or thematic, and the groupings may, although they need not, be

popularly identified as genres, cycles or movements (Japanese horror, Chinese martial arts cinema, Italian Neorealism). Indeed, in cases in which a group of films is not already commonly identified as a tradition, one purpose of the volume is to establish its claim to importance and make it visible (East Central European Magical Realist cinema, Palestinian cinema).

Textbooks and monographs include:

- An introduction that clarifies the rationale for the grouping of films under examination
- A concise history of the regional, national, or transnational cinema in question
- A summary of previous published work on the tradition
- Contextual analysis of industrial, cultural and socio-historical conditions of production and reception
- Textual analysis of specific and notable films, with clear and judicious application of relevant film theoretical approaches
- Bibliograph(ies)/filmograph(ies)

Monographs may additionally include:

- Discussion of the dynamics of cross-cultural exchange in light of current research and thinking about cultural imperialism and globalisation, as well as issues of regional/national cinema or political/aesthetic movements (such as new waves, postmodernism, or identity politics)
- Interview(s) with key filmmakers working within the tradition.

INTRODUCTION

Somewhere in the Balkans a father-and-son travelling duo scrutinise a map and argue over the former's preference for back roads and the latter's predilection towards highways. A French man studies a map of Sweden as he exits a ferry in his car; unsure of which route to take he decides to pull over and pick up a young Swedish hitchhiker to help navigate. A Belgian man and his young son arrive in the purported birthplace of the man's father, a hamlet in Ukraine, only to learn from the hand gestures of a local that the place they seek is actually an indeterminate distance down the road. A francophone Belgian woman meets a Flemish man on the road in France; he unsuccessfully attempts to draw a map that will lead her home down a complex series of one-way streets.[1] Getting lost is a virtually unavoidable aspect of cinematic travel. The inevitable failure by travellers to negotiate space – at least on their first attempt – is a necessary narrative ingredient. Voyagers squinting over dishevelled maps or struggling to comprehend directions given by locals are ubiquitous tropes in road movies. Yet within a contemporary European context such wayward travellers are more than a cliché. The voyagers from the aforementioned cases are all literally lost and also, to varying degrees, lost in life. In his influential work *Cartographic Cinema*, which theorises a number of links between mapmaking and cinema, Tom Conley has identified an ontological function in maps within films that encourages consideration of 'where we come from and where we may be going' (2007: 3). In her work on European cinematic mapping, Rosalind Galt observes that 'in the early 1990s, Europe became, as if it had not been so before, a question of space' (2006: 1). Various radical upheavals 'made

a collective demand on an idea of Europe as a psychic, cultural, or geopolitical location' (2006: 1). It is increasingly clear that this renegotiation of space is an ongoing process that affects not only how Europeans experience mobility but also the ways in which travellers from beyond the continent experience roads to and through Europe. From tourist to migrant, voyagers are faced with new routes to map and new ways of relating to space and to the people they travel with and encounter along the way.

Road cinema has increasingly become a privileged form of expression for European directors attempting to answer crucial questions about space and to pose ontological queries such as 'where are we?', 'who are we?' and 'where are we going?' Filmmakers have hit the road in order to come to terms with a protean landscape marked by shifting conceptions of identity and citizenship in the wake of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, European Union (EU) expansion, the Schengen Agreements, population shifts from south to north and east to west, evolving outlooks on sexual citizenship, continuing debates over postcolonial national identity, and a renewed focus on regional identities that often transcend national boundaries. Within these new parameters of contemporary Europe a diverse range of recent road films made since 2000 narrate quests of discovery, returns to origins, economic migrations, and the movement of goods and jobs. French-language productions from France, Belgium and to a smaller degree Switzerland account for dozens of road movies over the past fifteen years. Despite the popularity of the road format and the recent publication of two books in English focusing on French or French-language road movies, dozens of French films remain unexplored.

French-language Road Cinema aims to delineate the unique formal and thematic qualities of the contemporary French-language European road movie, which I argue should be situated in a space between traditional definitions of American and European road iterations. At the same time it explores the ways in which this cinematic form both serves as a barometer for, and contributes to, the process of remapping of French, Belgian and Swiss spaces and identities within the parameters of New Europe. Europe is changing (Ballesteros 2015: 4–7) and road movies furnish an ideal template for the discovery of new outlooks on self and citizenship.

Road movies are presently flourishing in Europe because they articulate a desire to come to terms with updated identity formations. However, as a cinematic format they have been more traditionally associated with the vast open spaces of the United States and other terrains that might be considered more 'uncertain' (Boer 2006). An example of this common conception is provided by Brazilian director Walter Salles, who is well known as the director of road movies such as *Diarios de motocicleta/Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) and *On the Road* (2012), set in South America and the United States, respectively. In an

interview for the 2006 documentary *Wanderlust* (Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini), Salles contrasted road movie nations – those whose identities have not yet 'crystallised' – such as Brazil, with nations that he argues do not make road movies, such as Switzerland. In subsequent chapters I will in fact address two road films from Switzerland. More broadly, however, I would like to emphasise that it is no longer accurate to classify road movies as an inherently American endeavour. Nor is the notion, until quite recently very prevalent, that French and European directors do not make road movies.

Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark suggested in the introduction to their 1997 collection on the road movie that American road movies 'form part of a potent cultural myth far more powerful than in Europe where all possible routes were mapped before their nation-states consolidated' (1997: 18). It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that Europeans feel the need to (re)map their post-Schengen and post-EU unification spaces and identities, a process that has led to the recent proliferation of road movies blazing new pathways on the 'old continent'. As Wendy Everett points out, 'European cinema is fundamentally concerned with questions of identity, and one fascinating aspect of the current road movie boom is the genre's ability to represent postmodern identity as essentially fluid and migratory' (2009: 166). In her study on diasporic cinema Daniela Berghahn makes a similar point about European road movies' critique of 'hegemonic and territorialised conceptions of identity and belonging' and 'emphasis on borders and border crossings – political, cultural, social and linguistic . . . [which draw] attention to the barriers that a territorialised understanding of nation and national belonging entails' (2013: 66). The popularity of European road movies as observed by Everett and others in recent scholarship (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2006; Archer 2013; Gott and Schilt 2013; Ballesteros 2015) is certainly not limited to French-language cinema industries. A diverse range of recent European road films narrate quests of discovery, returns to origins or economic migrations within the new parameters of contemporary Europe. Examples of this trend include *Pusinky/Dolls* (Karin Babinská, 2007, Czech Republic), *Vivere* (Angelina Maccarone, 2007, Germany/Netherlands), *Handlarz cudów/The Miracle Seller* (Boleslaw Pawica and Jaroslaw Szoda, 2009, Poland), *Avé* (Konstantin Bojanov, 2011, Bulgaria), *Italy: Love It, or Leave It* (Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi, 2011, Germany/Italy), *Tatăl Fantomă/The Phantom Father* (Lucian Georgescu, 2011, Romania), *Rabat* (Victor Ponten and Jim Taihuttu, 2011, Netherlands), *Vivir es fácil con los ojos cerrados/Living Is Easy with Eyes Closed* (David Trueba, 2013, Spain), *The Trip to Italy* (Michael Winterbottom, 2014, UK) and *Xenia* (Panos H. Koutras, 2014, Greece/France/Belgium).[2]

France and Belgium in particular are ideal starting points for an exploration of this European phenomenon because they – sometimes for different reasons – are European microcosms. Each nation exemplifies Wendy Everett's

observation that it is impossible 'to drive far in Europe without crossing borders', be they political, linguistic, cultural or social (2009: 168). Belgium has been a 'melting pot' of various cultural and linguistic influences. Factors such as the recognition of French, Dutch and German as official languages; the creation of a federal state in 1993; the presence of large numbers of civil servants from the wider EU; and postcolonial and Jewish diasporas and other post-war migrations have resulted in what film scholar Lieve Spaas terms 'a mosaic of different groups of people' (2000: 8). Belgian filmmakers are fond of citing this diversity as a creative influence. Actor–director Bouli Lanners, for example, has pointed to an instinctively diverse Belgian 'cultural subconscious' behind his work (Van Hoeij 2010: 88). Ursula Meier, who was born in Switzerland and studied film in Brussels, also points to a unique creative environment that inspired her to maintain a base in Belgium after completing her studies. While Belgian road movies are derivative of and tend to celebrate that nation's diversity, for French directors the road format offers the possibility of elaborating flexible, transnational and multicultural alternatives to a monolithic vision of France. Put differently, those who see French identity as 'crystallised' are not likely to make a road movie. France's history of immigration and internal diversity have provided the material for dozens of cinematic journeys to points of family origin abroad in addition to explorations of the borders within that have gained renewed resonance with the renaissance of regional identities within the EU. While the focus of this book is on French and Belgian cinema, films from Switzerland will also be covered. Given the small size of the French-language film industry in that nation, in pure numerical terms its road movie output is limited. Yet despite Salles' comments on the irreconcilability of Swiss outlooks with road movie production, Switzerland's French-language industry has experienced a minor 'boom' of sorts in road cinema. At the forefront of this tendency is director Lionel Baier, who is halfway through a proposed tetralogy of films (see Chapter 4) that venture in the four cardinal directions from Switzerland and in the process help 'align his native Switzerland more visibly and palpably with the geopolitical and sociocultural changes taking place in post-Wall Europe' (Van Heuckelom 2014: 49).

Objectives and Approaches

This book has three primary aims. The first is to assess the impulse to remap European space through the vantage point of French-language European cinemas. Secondly, I aim to delineate the parameters of the European French-language road format and identify a number of its narrative, technical and formal particularities. The third objective of the project is to expand the discursive parameters of 'French' cinema to encompass a wider realm of inter-

related spaces of narrative, film production and reception that I label 'French-language Europe'.

The first goal of *French-language Road Cinema*, to attempt to understand the ways in which contemporary Europe is being remapped, requires an interdisciplinary approach to our topic. In subsequent chapters film analysis is combined with cultural studies approaches because the contemporary French-language road movie's formal characteristics respond to specific cultural, political or economic contexts. Each chapter will analyse key formal characteristics of three to six films through the optic of a particular cultural issue related to cinematic the reshaping of contemporary European space and identities. Étienne Balibar suggests that 'borders' frame our notions of citizenship (2009: 190). My focus will be on how travel narratives reformulate borders within France and between France and bordering francophone nations as well as between those nations and Europe and the postcolonial world. Klaus Eder's distinction between hard and soft borders offers a conceptual starting point for my discussion of cinematic voyages in contemporary Europe. While hard borders are inscribed in law, the soft borders of Europe are 'encoded' in culture and indicate 'the reality of images of what Europe is and who are Europeans and who are not' (2006: 256). Building on Eder's definitions, Laura Rascaroli has argued that films can both represent and produce soft borders by creating 'images of what Europe is and is not' (2013: 23).

My theoretical exploration of borders expands on a fundamental division outlined in the collection that I co-edited with Thibaut Schilt, *Open Roads, Closed Borders: The Contemporary French-language Road Movie* (2013). Exploring an entirely new corpus of films, this project aligns 'positive' road movies with soft borders and, more provisionally, 'negative' road movies with hard borders. Positive films are more closely associated with open roads and by extension mobility, while those on the negative side are primarily concerned with the implications of closed borders and institutionalised restrictions on movement. These categories, while infrequently overlapping within a single narrative, do not represent contradictory impulses. As hard borders lose some of their consequence for European citizens, some of the road movies I address participate in the task of formulating 'soft borders', exploring the significance of national boundaries and cultural porosity in a unified Europe and postcolonial world. Yet as Balibar suggests, European borders are no longer situated at the frontier but have been dispersed within the nations of Europe in places of transit and cities, 'wherever the movement of information, people and things is happening and is controlled' (2004: 1). This shift comes into focus in negative road movies that map the dispersion of hard borders by tracking migrants as they cross Europe or following their restless quest for solid footing in European cities, societies and economies.

While I devote the final chapter of this book to negative films, the prevalence

of positive voyages in European road cinema compels us to rethink the common association of (cinematic) border-crossing with dispossession, discomfort and the loss of home due to (im)migration. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden observe, with Hamid Naficy's concept of 'accented cinema' (2001) in mind, that

> more often than not, transnational cinema's narrative dynamic is generated by a sense of loss. The lingering appeal of notions of cultural authenticity and normative ideas of 'home' prompts filmmakers to explore the ways in which physical mobility across national borders necessarily entails significant emotional conflict and psychological adjustment. (2006: 7)

The case studies in subsequent chapters often problematise this assessment because they generally involve voyages that construct new, more flexible ways of thinking of home. Rather than refuting the assessments of Nacify, Ezra and Rowden, and others, these films provide a generational update that certainly does not exclude depictions of the losses and costs associated with migration. The protagonists in many contemporary films of the positive variety are able to hold positive outlooks on travel precisely because their forebears struggled, while others react against imagined, totalising notions of home and homeland as immutable and immune to or endangered by outside contamination. Building on Rascaroli's theorisation of spaces such as ports, bodies of water and even trucks as 'borderlands' (2013), *French-language Road Cinema* considers the potential of road cinema as a conduit for 'borderland' exchanges in a variety of settings that promote what Balibar terms 'overlapping' spaces and 'multiple citizenship' (2009: 210). This belies the suggestion by Andrew Nestingen, in his reading of Aki Kaurismäki's road cinema, that 'travellers are by definition outsiders in the area through which they travel' (2013: 39). This is arguably not the case in all, or even most, contemporary European road movies, at least if we equate an 'outsider' with a foreigner. Nestingen's point is, however, valid if we apply a wider interpretation of 'outsider'; indeed much of the interest in exploring spaces stems from the novelty the landscapes and cultures represent to the voyaging protagonists. As David Laderman puts it in his influential study of road movies, 'borders' crossed in road movies can be more than official lines drawn to separate spaces but also the 'status quo conventions' of any society (2002: 2).

The second key goal of *French-language Road Cinema* is to delineate the parameters of the European French-language road format and identify a number of its narrative, technical and formal particularities. Continental films often have much in common with what is perceived to be the 'classic' American road template, from the tracking shot to recurring narrative tropes

of mapping, the random 'road event' and often parodic references to outlaws. However, French-language directors harness these elements in ways that are adapted to the European social and political context and indeed to distinctively different and varied landscapes found in each nation. The ways in which these films are embedded cinematographically in diverse European landscapes that encompass the industrial and the pastoral, the non-places of circulation and transit, public spaces and cities reveals a great deal about the social and political contexts of each nation. My intent is to take into account the different types of mobilities that have an impact on contemporary Europe (migration, flight, tourism, business and commerce) as well as the typical techniques (see below) and tropes of the road movie. In subsequent chapters I ask what happens when often well-worn road conventions are applied to narratives which engage with key issues facing Europe, from boundless and fluid identity quests within the Schengen zone to less overtly celebratory modes of voyage.

As a protean form with border-hopping inclinations, the French-language road movie is resistant to sweeping categorisations. I will argue that the films analysed do not conform strictly to a particular model or belong to a definable, univocal genre but rather start with a road movie template that is moulded to fit a particular type of exploration of self, space and community. Chapter 1 sketches out a brief history of European road cinema, starting in 1962 and touching on every decade through to the 1990s. Each of the following chapters reveals how the formal and thematic characteristics of the European road movie are adapted to the extremely diverse range of geographic, economic and social displacements that are part and parcel of the contemporary European experience characterised by new possibilities but also, potentially, by disorientation. Beyond the cinematic (notably transnational cinema and road cinema) contexts and theories and political backdrops that inform my readings of road movies, this book is also informed in a variety of ways by mobility studies and cultural geography. In the analysis of particular films I will draw on theorists such as Doreen Massey, John Urry and the French sociologist Jean Viard. Mobility studies not only sheds some light on the social, economic and political forces behind the voyages narrated in the films I consider, it also illuminates issues related to practical production choices and the forms of mobility represented in each film.

Massey's (1994) conception of place as a dynamic, unbounded concept is behind my third and final overarching objective: to expand the discussion beyond 'French' (that is to say 'French national cinema') to a wider realm of inter-related spaces of narrative, production and reception that are best, if imperfectly, classified as 'French-language Europe'. If places are fundamentally 'open' for many theorists of geography and mobility (Moores 2012: 76), so too are contemporary road movies. National cinema, to paraphrase Andrew Higson, suffers from limitations of imagination while 'borders are always

leaky and there is a considerable degree of movement across them' (2006: 19). Contemporary European cinematic production is characterised by 'fuzzy and flexible border crossings' (Iordanova 2010: 68–9) that have unmoored French cinema from its national context and cast it out into the 'transnational margins of filmmaking', as Catherine Portuges puts it (2009: 48). For these reasons I have sought to avoid geographic containment in the selection of my corpus. Road cinema is about crossing lines and forging (or at least attempting to forge) connections across boundaries whilst resisting binaries, so I have sought out examples of European French-language road cinema from beyond the Hexagon. Unlike Neal Archer, who intentionally limited his recent study of French road cinema, *The French Road Movie: Space, Mobility, Identity* (2013) – the only previous monograph on the subject – to French productions, I contend that road movies cannot be adequately studied within a purely national context.[3] It is within this context that I hope to redress the scholarly imbalance that has neglected the Belgian cinema, particularly the so-called post-Dardenne generation of directors that has emerged over the past decade (a list that includes Bouli Lanners, Olivier Masset-Depasse, Ursula Meier, Micha Wald, and Dominique Abel and Fiona Gordon, to cite directors that have made what could be classified as road movies or their close relatives). English-language scholars have generally overlooked contemporary Belgian cinema with the notable exception of the Dardenne brothers and Chantal Akerman. However, the work of the above directors and others account for more than twenty francophone Belgian road movies – often, though certainly not exclusively, co-productions with France – from the past ten years The latter figure is significant considering that on average only eleven Francophone feature films are made each year in Belgium as majority productions.

Both as an actor and a director Lanners has been at the forefront of a Belgian road movie 'boom'. In early 2015 he began filming his fourth feature – all of which are road movies – entitled *Les premiers, les derniers*. He has also acted in a number of road films, including *Louise-Michel* (2006) by French directing duo Gustave de Kervern and Benoît Delépine, whose 2004 film *Aaltra* (France/Belgium) is considered in Chapter 3. Lanners also stars in a film released in 2015, Guillaume and Stéphane Malandrin's *Je suis mort mais j'ai des amis* (France/Belgium), which follows a rock band on tour through North America (including Quebec) with the ashes of a deceased bandmate. Yolande Moreau is another Belgian actor–director who has both made and played in multiple road movies, including *Louise-Michel*, *Quand la mer monte* (Moreau and Gilles Porte, 2004, Belgium/France; see Chapter 3) and the recent *Voyage en Chine* (Zoltan Mayer, 2015, France). While Belgian cinema certainly merits consideration in its own right, due to the intersections and 'overlappings' (to borrow from Balibar) of the two national cinema industries evident in the above examples and to increasingly transnational trends in European cinema in general,

Belgian films are best explored in relationship to the French industry. At the same time this book does not relegate to the margins of French cinema studies the cinema of the smaller nations bordering France. Indeed it also holds true that French road films should also be considered in relationship to productions from beyond the boundaries of the Hexagon.

As one might imagine given its limited size, the most common trajectory in Belgian road movies leads beyond the borders of that nation. If Lanners' 2008 road film *Eldorado* (discussed in Chapter 3) is an exception to this, at least in purely narrative terms, in other ways it demonstrates the numerous points of contact and imbrication between the film industries of France and Belgium. To start with, Belgian francophone films take advantage of the much larger French market and many actors and directors such as Lanners and Moreau constantly cross the border. French-language cinema is itself a travelling commodity, with each nation's cinema traversing frontiers and to a large degree reaching common audiences. Indeed parts of *Eldorado* that were set in Belgium were filmed in France, just a few kilometres across an official national border that in many ways – though certainly not all – has lost its significance as a boundary. Yet many Belgian films do retain a certain specificity and this book will assess both the national particularities and transnational affinities in French, Belgian and also Swiss road cinema. French-language European cinema is a multilateral entity; while francophone Belgian films benefit from access to the larger French and global French-language audience, Kervern and Delépine – who have collaborated on five feature films – note a preference for what they describe as a 'Belgian approach' to filmmaking. Whether their films travel through Belgium en route to Finland or crisscross France, they have a distinctive, quirky feel that connects them to many Belgian productions. That such an eccentric approach to cinematic travel is both readily identifiable to some element of the public is demonstrated by the catchphrase used to market Jérôme Le Maire's 2011 Belgian production *Le grand'tour*: 'un very Belge trip'. Following the various threads in these films allows us to consider how the specificity of a small national cinema (Hjort and Petrie 2007) is retained and absorbed within a broader French-language category.

While the border-hopping inclinations of French-language road cinema and the cross-border, European continuity of the themes I address led me to avoid organising chapters solely around national film industries, I made an exception for Belgium. Several factors supported the choice to devote Chapter 3 to the Belgian cinema industry: that nation's prolific road movie output, the aforementioned lack of attention granted so far in English-language scholarship (and indeed in French-language scholarship) to Belgian filmmakers beyond the Dardenne brothers and the Belgian particularity identified by Kervern and Delépine. In keeping with my self-imposed charge to avoid discursive containment, however, I have included a those directors' 2004 film *Aaltra* in the

Belgian category. While it is officially a majority Belgian and minority French co-production, the directors – who also star in the film – are French and widely recognised as such. In short the film demonstrates that the 'Belgian' tag, like that of any national label, conceals a certain amount of ambiguity.

Categorising European French-language Road Cinema: The Road Movie Template

When it comes to road cinema, geographic parameters are inevitably flexible, as the above discussion of the intertwined Belgian and French industries' productions demonstrates. Likewise any categorical definitions of the extremely adaptable road movie model are destined to remain somewhat slippery. Nonetheless certain key tenets of European French-language road cinema can be outlined. Scholars have proffered a number of characteristics that typically mark road movies, from cars and tracking shots to wide open spaces and rebellious and (often troubled) masculinity. While the road movie form is protean and malleable, Jason Wood provides a good starting point for a basic categorical definition: 'In archetypal terms, road movies commonly entail the undertaking of a journey by one or more protagonists as they seek out adventures, redemption or escape from the constricting norms of society and its laws' (2007: xv). Road narratives are frequently driven by the 'road event', seemingly unexpected happenings that slow down and/or change the course of the journey. As Timothy Corrigan explains, 'unlike other genres, such as the detective film where characters initiate events, in the road movie events act upon the characters' (Corrigan 1991: 145). As for the makeup of those characters, road movies travel has traditionally been the purview of men (Cohan and Hark 1997: 11; Wood 2007: xix). In keeping with a highly gender-coded notion of the aforementioned 'adventure', those men might be on the road to escape the perceived constraints of domestic space associated with females or perhaps to meet, seduce and ultimately cast aside women encountered en route (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2006: 166–8).

Honing in on geographically based distinctions, David Laderman argues that while the classic American strain of the road movie espouses rebellion against cultural norms, the European variety tends to be concerned with travelling 'into the national culture, tracing the meaning of citizenship as a journey' (2002: 15). Mazierska and Rascaroli forward a similar distinction while maintaining some distance from what they consider oversimplified binaries between European and American road templates: American protagonists 'tend to be outcasts and rebels looking for freedom or escape' whereas European voyagers are more commonly 'ordinary citizens' (2006: 5). I will assert that French-language European road movies represent a hybrid of the two strains. As a group, the films I address follow the European model as defined by Laderman

by staging travel 'into culture'. At the same time these films do incorporate elements associated with the American strain of road movie: crossing boundaries and reacting against 'constricting norms', as Wood puts it. I argue that revolt in these movies, however, should not be seen as an attempt to travel outside of culture and society per se, but as symptomatic of a desire to evade certain dominant and restrictive conceptions of national or communitarian culture and identity. Citizenship in contemporary Belgium, France, Switzerland and Europe is reframed as inherently linked to mobility, a stance that rejects fixed, monolithic identity formulations and the closed spaces associated with national identities and conceptions of Fortress Europe. The contemporary European movies explored here are also much more likely to be driven by female protagonists and/or directors than in the traditional road movie model. Thibaut Schilt points out that in contrast to the rebellious, and often white, male protagonist that is the staple of American road cinema, French-language films have often featured characters with diverse national and ethnic origins as well as female travellers. In films such as *Drôle de Félix/The Adventures of Félix* (Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, 2000, France), *Le grand voyage* (addressed in Chapter 2), *Sans toit ni loi/Vagabond* (Agnès Varda, 1985, France) and *Western* (Manuel Poirier, 1997, France) the 'road leads to an exploration of the travellers' own sense of otherness (be it gender-related, religious, cultural or sexual)' (2007).

I propose a basic technical criterion for the French-language road cinema template that will be tested on the films addressed in the subsequent chapters: the 'travelling shot'. While it might seem self-evident that road movies would require images of movement, this particular criterion is useful for two primary reasons. First, it helps furnish a line of demarcation between films about 'leaving and arriving' and 'true road cinema' (Mazierska and Rascarli 2006: 25). Secondly, an expanded conception of travelling shots allows us to better account for the types of travel commonly seen in European road cinema. The 'travelling shot' has been theorised by David Laderman as a tracking shot intended to convey 'a visceral sense of traveling at a hyper-human, modernized speed' (2002: 15). Travelling shots might be from the driver's or riders' perspective, from a camera mounted on a vehicle looking inside or towards the landscape, mounted on another vehicle or even a helicopter. The many variations on these shots will be considered in the following chapters. First, however, it is worth pausing on the 'modernized speed' element of Laderman's definition, which would seem to limit such shots to motorised vehicles. Timothy Corrigan, in a relatively early piece of scholarship on road movies, argued that they are defined by the engines that propel their voyagers: 'road movies are, by definition, movies about cars, trucks, motorcycles, or some other motoring soul-descendant of the nineteenth-century train' (1991: 144). In a rare scholarly commentary published in French on the subject, Walter Moser suggests

that 'images of a vehicle in movement . . . preferably a private automobile' and the accompanying iconography of roadside infrastructure are crucial ingredients of road movies (2008: 21). While automobile travel in particular holds an important place in European road cinema, it is only part of the picture. Archer proposes the neologism 'autopia' to describe the road movie, synthesising 'auto' and Foucault's heterotopia to account for, among other things, a 'retreat behind the cinematic, hermetic space of the automobile's windscreen and dashboard' (2013: 34). Indeed most of Archer's corpus is auto-driven, running counter to the prevalent conception that European road directors generally prefer alternative modes of travel. As Mazierska and Rascaroli put it, the North American model tends to embrace automobile journeys, preferably in a convertible or on a Harley Davidson motorbike, in contrast to the European films that often stage movement by foot or public transport (2006: 5). The other only other book focused on French-language road cinema, *Open Roads, Closed Borders: The Contemporary French-language Road Movie* (Gott and Schilt 2013), considers a roster of films that are much less auto-centric. My project falls somewhere in-between, with approximately two-thirds of the films under consideration involving automotive conveyance to some significant extent. This encompasses different degrees of reliance on vehicles and my analysis will account for different ways of driving – Urry's distinction between 'inhabiting the car' and 'inhabiting the road', for example (2007: 125–6) – and discuss differences between driving in a car and riding in a motor home.

Although my selection of films acknowledges the importance of the automobile to the road movie template, I argue that the typical preference in European road movies for slower modes of conveyance such as walking or public transit demands a new and broader conception of Laderman's travelling shot as a tracking shot that captures at any speed, and depending on the film's positive or negative outlook, either the spirit or the disorientation involved in travel. In subsequent chapters I will analyse travelling shots that track movement in cars but also on foot, by bicycle, in trains and public transport, and by boat. Chapters 1–4 will consider the employment of travelling shots in a variety of films that could be classified as positive. Chapter 5 focuses on the disorientation and lack of vision typically involved in clandestine trajectories, whether towards points in Europe or within metropolitan areas after the initial trek is complete.

Although I will delve further into a number of examples in the following chapters, because the travelling shot is of fundamental importance to the analysis in each chapter I will first attempt to briefly illustrate my point here with a couple of pertinent examples not included in my subsequent case studies. In *Drôle de Félix* the titular protagonist sets off to cross France by foot. While he does at times hitch rides, he prefers back roads and aims to avoid fast trains, clearly the most rapid and efficient way of getting from one side of France to

Figure I.1 The protagonist walks joyfully across France in *Drôle de Félix/The Adventures of Félix* (Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, 2000).

another. Part way through his trek a sequence of three travelling shots track Félix as he walks joyfully through the French countryside (Figure I.1). The hand-held camera frames him in medium and medium-long shots at an angle that offers a clear vantage point on the verdant terrain that surrounds him. The sequence marks his movement as an act of pleasure; this is not a beleaguered trudge but a merry promenade. As he advances, Félix's pace quickens and he trots and skips to a soundtrack of his own creation (a song he conceived about his voyage to Marseille). With each cut the camera gradually changes perspective to reveal more of the road and the scenery behind him. Although it lacks the variety of perspectives and distances one often sees in auto montages, this sequence fulfils the role that Laderman ascribes to driving montage by sublimating 'travel to an idea or sensibility, in contrast with the linear, destination-oriented concept of travel' (2002: 16).

Another archetypal European travelling montage – in this case assembled from a more varied series of travelling shots – is found in Tony Gatlif's 2004 film *Exils* (France/Japan).[4] This sequence begins as the Algeria-bound protagonists Zano and Naïma hide the keys to their Parisian apartment by sealing them in a stone wall. They then set off to the unmistakable background sounds of unseen cars flying past on what is apparently a busy motorway. The first of numerous travelling montages starts with a high angle, aerial extreme long shot of the couple walking down a road that cuts through green fields. From this silent shot, the film cuts to a series of travelling shots that fuse music and movement. The next take looks upon moving tracks from the perspective of a train driver (Figure I.2), the rhythmic sound of the rails joined with the whishing of the windscreen wipers. The beat of the rails continues as the camera cuts to a close-up of Zano in headphones, bobbing his head rhythmically, and then to a close-up of Naïma's feet propped against the train window. She taps her foot against the glass as we see the beige hues of the Spanish

Figure I.2 One perspective from a particularly European travelling montage in *Exils* (Tony Gatlif, 2004).

countryside race by, still to the sound of train moving over rails. Before cutting to a medium shot of the travellers facing each other while looking out the window, the camera zooms in for a close-up of their music player, propped between them with a cable extending to each person's headphone. During the ensuing medium two-shot, the techno beat they are listening to takes the place of the rhythmic hum of the rails, which it resembles closely. This sequence demonstrates the dual purpose of travelling montages. It both, as Laderman describes, 'sublimates' travel into a process and exhibits a good deal of linear geographic progress; in ninety seconds their odyssey advances from the green fields of central France to the earth-toned olive groves of Andalusia. Both of the above examples represent characteristically more European forms of travelling shots and montages. Each also provides its own version of the 'vigorous music soundtrack' so common in American road films (Laderman 2002: 16). As I plan to demonstrate in later case studies, travelling shots are a fundamental component of road cinema and also a highly versatile element that can be adapted to a number of social and geographic contexts.

The above examples suggest that what Dimitris Eleftheriotis calls 'mobile vision' and 'panoramic perception' (2010: 15–16), crucial ingredients in road cinema, need not be solely the purview of automotive travel. Panoramic perception, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 for its presence and in Chapter 5 for its relative absence, often plays a key role in the 'knowledge acquisition' that transpires in road narratives (2010: 78). If panoramic perception implies a certain privileged, or at least open and unobstructed, vantage point, 'mobile vision' need not be limited to positive road cinema: 'the

dizzying experiences of mobile vision challenge established and traditional certainties as they push travellers out of the stability of home and into unknown and uncertain territories' (2010: 77). Limited mobile vision is a key element in the films that will be addressed in Chapter 5, which considers what negative iterations of travelling shots and montages look like. Often less visually appealing, they are generally limited to dreary points of transit and dark urban passageways, settings representative of the struggles of migrants to reach and find solid footing in Europe.

European and American Road Cinemas: Intertwined Traditions and Mutual Influences

Until relatively recently, the road movie format has primarily been linked in popular imagination and in scholarly literature to the geographic, cultural, political, historical and economic particularities of North America. Writing in 2001 and approaching the topic from a French perspective, Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet note that the road movie is 'generally considered an archetypal American genre' (2001: 228), which they consider 'a relatively rare phenomenon' in France (2001: 229). In *Driving Visions*, published in 2002, Laderman proposes that European road films offer a means of better understanding the American road cinema, for the former seem to be a 'reaction to, or reformulation of, the American genre' (2001: 247). In their edited volume simply entitled *The Road Movie Book* (1997), Cohan and Hark define the object of their study as a 'Hollywood genre that catches peculiarly American dreams, tensions and anxieties, even when imported by the motion picture industries of other nations' (1997: 2).

Such conceptions of the road movie as a 'peculiarly American genre' was widespread before being challenged in more recent scholarship by Mazierska and Rascaroli (2006: 2), Wood (2007), Archer (2013: 10) and Devin Orgeron (2007). For example, Orgeron's book seeks to re-evaluate the previous scholarly tendency to assume the 'inherent *Americanness* of the road movie' (2007: 6; original emphasis). Mazierska and Rascaroli argue that travel and road narratives have been made in Europe since the start of the cinema industry, perhaps even before catching on in Hollywood (2006: 4). In his *100 Road Movies*, which combines a succinct but highly informative introduction to the genre (or subgenre) with carefully selected short case studies, Jason Wood affirms that 'the road movie is by no means an exclusively American domain and has been historically embraced by filmmakers from across the globe' (2007: xix). His earliest European example is Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950), a film that predates the American road films commonly viewed as foundational. As the films addressed in Chapter 1 demonstrate, it is more accurate, then, to see American and European road movies as part of a continuum of shared inspiration.

A handful of examples should suffice to demonstrate the interconnected nature of US and continental road movie currents. Wood supports his assertion on the global nature of road cinema by following a number of interconnected threads and mutual influences. For example, Nicholas Ray's 1948 US production *They Live by Night* (1948) was informed by Italian Neorealism, marking it as 'one of the earliest examples of the European influence on the genre' (2007: xvii). Wood traces the lineage of Greg Araki's 1992 American film *The Living End*, which is produced more than forty years later, back to Godard's 1965 *Pierrot le fou* (2007: xix). Shifting influential directions, Archer points out in his study of French road movies that *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), a film that Laderman identifies as foundational to the crystallisation of an identifiable US road movie genre in the late 1960s and 1970s (2002: 4, 43) bears strong traces of imprints from Godard and Truffaut (Archer 2013: 13). Despite the fact that he situates road movies within a distinctly American context that relegates European films to a derivative category to be addressed primarily at the end of his book, Laderman's study at times also sketches a more complex and multidirectional conception of generic influences. An example of this is the inclusion of German director Wim Wenders' 1984 film *Paris, Texas* in an earlier chapter on postmodern road movies from the 1980s. For Laderman, however, this film set in California and Texas and written by American playwright Sam Shepard is less an example of a European road movie than a foreign inflection of the American road genre (2002: 142). Laderman draws a number of parallels between Wenders' film and American director Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise*, released the same year. The latter film both descends form the '1970s existential road movie' and brings a 'European perspective to the American landscape' (Laderman 2002: 144). Meanwhile an earlier chapter on 1970s existential films draws on Thomas Elsaesser's observation that the films of this era were characterised by numerous 'European qualities' (2002: 85).

On one level, it is tempting to conclude that following all of such strands to find their true 'origins' would be both a complex and ultimately unproductive undertaking. After all, the related question that is of primary concern to the following chapters is what, precisely, is the significance of traditional road movie tropes and iconography – be they American or European – when applied to the contemporary European landscape and political-social context. Yet in order to respond to this query it seems productive to begin with a cursory introduction to the roads already travelled by directors of European road movies. This in turn makes the task of understanding how the road movie format has itself 'travelled' between the two continents a necessary undertaking even if it does not require settling on a precise (and likely elusive) theory of the history of origins and influences. Because the issue of origins has been extensively discussed within the scope of existing scholarship on the European

road movies, I will not devote significant attention to this debate. Instead, I will take as a starting point the general theses of Mazierska and Rascaroli, Wood, Orgeron and Archer that the origins are intertwined and mutually influential.

The above outlines of the classification and history of road cinema establish some basic starting points that the subsequent chapters will return to. The origins of road cinema will be central to Chapter 1, which provides an introduction to European road cinema from 1962 through the 1990s. The films addressed, all of which have some connection to France or the French language, are *Il Sorpasso* (Dino Risi, 1962, Italy), *Le corniaud/The Sucker* (Gérard Oury, 1965, France/Italy), *Les petits matins/Hitch-Hike* (Jacqueline Audry, 1962, France), *Im Lauf der Zeit/Kings of the Road* (Wim Wenders, 1977, West Germany), *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (Aki Kaurismäki, 1989, Finland/Sweden) and *Lisbon Story* (Wim Wenders, 1994, Germany/Portugal).

The following chapters will be more concerned with how the criteria for road cinema laid out above, particularly the travelling shot, are applied to a number of contemporary European contexts. In selecting the corpus of contemporary films, I aimed for films that should be readily available on DVD or video-on-demand (VOD), often although not always with English subtitles. I also sought to avoid movies that were already covered in *Open Roads, Closed Borders* and generally eschewed those already well represented in English-language scholarship. Exceptions to the above ground rules were made in a couple of cases when I thought that a particular film was an ideal fit for this book. Chapter 2 assesses five diverse contemporary films from three different nations that respond to the Europeanisation of economies and identity formulations with a particular eye on how the passages through diverse landscapes are filmed: *Le grand voyage*, *Rendez-vous à Kiruna* (Anna Novion, 2012, France), *Saint-Jacques . . . la Mecque* (Colline Serreau, 2005, France), *Torpedo* (Matthieu Donck, 2012, Belgium/France) and *La vraie vie est ailleurs* (Frédéric Choffat, 2006, Switzerland).The parameters of Belgian road cinema, an issue already broached above, will be the topic of Chapter 3. In that chapter I consider *Eldorado* (Bouli Lanners, 2008, Belgium/France), *L'iceberg* (Dominique Abel, Fiona Gordon and Bruno Romy, 2005, Belgium), *Quand la mer monte, Les folles aventures de Simon Konianski/Simon Konianski* (Micha Wald, 2008, Belgium/France/Canada) and *Aaltra*. Chapter 4 examines what is likely the most common type of positive road films, the 'return to origins' movie. I begin with a discussion of how mobile and layered outlooks on citizenship fit into the conception of French republicanism and European identity frameworks before moving on to examples from France and Switzerland. *Voyage en Arménie/Armenia* (Robert Guédiguian, 2006, France), *Ten'ja/Testament* (Hassan Legzouli, 2004, France/Morocco) and *Comme des voleurs (à l'est)/Stealth* (Lionel Baier, 2005, Switzerland) furnish the examples. Chapter 5

changes directions to consider the flip side of the European mobility boom. In that chapter I analyse three films whose protagonists are migrants from beyond the EU: *Hope* (Boris Lojkine, 2014, France), *Illégal* (Olivier Masset-Depasse, 2010, Belgium/France/Luxembourg) and *Marussia* (Eva Pervolovici, 2013, France/Russia). In the conclusion I take the question of migrant travel a bit further and ask if migrant films and indeed European anxieties over the issue of migration might lead to the end of the road for ready mobility and by extension the road movie boom.

Notes

1. The following examples, which will be analysed in greater detail in subsequent chapters are, respectively: *Le grand voyage* (Ismael Ferroukhi, 2004, France/Morocco/Bulgaria/Turkey), *Rendez-vous à Kiruna* (Anna Novion, 2012, France), *Les folles aventures de Simon Konianski/Simon Konianski* (Micha Wald, 2008, Begium/France/Canada) and *Quand la mer monte* (Yolande Moreau and Gilles Porte, 2004, France/Belgium).
2. For more on European road cinema from beyond the French-language sphere, see Rascaroli (2003), Mazierska and Rascaroli (2006), Petek (2010), Georgescu (2012), Gott (2012) and Ward (2012).
3. Archer explains that his choice to focus on French films and to devote limited attention to transnational voyages is derived from the desire to consider the 'possibility of re-configuring space, rather than the relationship between two places (in terms, say, of the "adoptive" nation and the "home")' (2013: 7). Elsewhere he does admit that 'the road movie complicates received or essentialised notions of nation and national cinema' (2013: 13).
4. While both of the films that provided these examples would have fit nicely within my corpus, I set out to avoid any films that were already covered in the 2013 collection I co-edited with Thibaut Schilt, *Open Roads, Closed Borders: The Contemporary French-language Road Movie*. That volume features a chapter on *Drôle de Félix* by Florian Grandena and another on music in Gatlif's oeuvre by Sylvie Blum-Reid. *Drôle de Félix* in particular has already been the focus of numerous scholarly works in English. It is addressed in Archer's *The French Road Movie* (2013) and in articles by Joseph McGonagle (2007b), Thibaut Schilt (2007), and Vinay Swamy (2006).