BREAKING AWAY [1979]

The film, directed by Peter Yates, won the best picture award from the National Society of Film Critics. The script by Steve Tesich won the Oscar. He was born in the former Yugoslavia and moved to Bloomington, Indiana [where the film is set] when he was thirteen. Tesich actually won the bicycle race shown at the end of the film. One irony of watching the film NOW is that, recently, Americans have been among the best cyclists in the world. It is interesting that one critic noted the film’s “unsentimental optimism,” a rare quality.

In watching the film consider how the following issues or problems are addressed: the pros and cons of reinventing oneself [reinvention is a classic dilemma in American society]; the pluses and minuses of having a foot in more than one group in society; social class and relations between college students and Bloomington residents; parental hopes and expectations for children; possibly different perspectives of mothers and fathers; the tradeoffs of social mobility and moving up the economic ladder; the changing job picture in a community [we discussed “historical sociology” in class]; individualism and conformity; directions taken at the end of the film; changing roles in a family and elsewhere; what children learn from parents and parents from children. If you need reminders on the names of characters and the like, use the IMDB web site.