Happiness in Film  
First year seminar – Spring 2021

Prof. Ludovic Cortade  
Department of French Literature, Thought and Culture, Associate Professor  
Department of Cinema Studies, Associate Faculty

Description:
This seminar investigates the representations of happiness in film, drawing on a variety of sources and disciplines including cinema studies, history, philosophy, positive psychology, ethology and cultural studies. We will be discussing the notion of “happiness” through the lens of different historical and cultural contexts, and how film techniques are used in those contexts to convey positive emotions. Topics include: the transformation and rebirth of heroes in myths and fairy tales in film; the building of the self away from social determinisms; “happy-endings” in classical Hollywood cinema, including comedies and musicals; the politics of happiness, race, class and gender in world cinema; happiness and the practice of frugality; the building of common ground across communities, nations and species. This seminar aims at helping students understand the cultural, ideological and artistic dimensions of the representations of happiness in film.

Learning Objectives:
- Discuss the diversity of the representations of happiness in the US and world cinema;
- Provide students with the methodological tools to analyze films in a critical way from the perspective of several disciplines including cinema studies, history, philosophy, positive psychology, ethology and cultural studies.
- Reflect upon the notion of happiness and designing personal happiness strategies in college;
- Conduct a personal research project in order to convey ideas and critiques in a clear, structured and compelling manner.

Mode of Delivery:
- Group discussion of the weekly readings and film(s) lead either by the instructor or by students who will have prepared the discussion leading beforehand.
- Analysis of short clips on the basis of small groups of students.

Instructor:
Prof. Ludovic Cortade is an Associate Professor in the Department of French and an Associate Faculty in the Department of Cinema Studies. His books include Le Cinéma de l’immobilité (Sorbonne University Press, 2008). His research fields include film history and theory. Prof. Cortade has previously taught at Harvard, the University of Toronto (Canada), Brown University, the Ecole normale supérieure and the Sorbonne (Paris, France). He is the recipient of the Harvard University Derek Bok Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (twice).
Office Hours:

Thursdays 2:00-4:00pm (Location: 19 University Place, 6th floor room #627), and by appointment.

Course Policies:

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating (adapted from the website of the College of Arts & Science, https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html): Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original.

Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).

Disability Disclosure Statement:

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Evaluation:

- Early assignment (due week 4): Short essay (4 pages): Designing and implementing personal happiness strategies with the help of the books listed in the bibliography: 15%

- Class attendance and participation: 10%
  Students are expected to attend all class meetings and to be punctual. Failure to do so and to present a certificate justifying the absence(s), if any, will affect the final grade. Participation designates in-class oral participation and meeting(s) with the professor during office hours.

- One oral assignment chosen by each student among one of the following options: presentation of the student’s research project; group discussion led by a student; oral presentation (8 to 10mn) based on a topic chosen from a list; report on the weekly reading: 15%

- “Lab Report” : preliminary work for the final research paper (5-6 pages): 25%

  The “Lab Report” must include the following sections:
o definition of the topic chosen for the research paper after consulting with the professor;
o justification of the choice of the topic chosen for the research paper (relevance to the seminar, personal interest);
o bibliography including a minimum of 10 sources (films, articles, book or book chapters pertaining to the topic chosen by the student for the research paper);
o summary of key points for 5 articles or book chapters (reverse outline), book or book chapter from the bibliography;
o definition of the key idea discussed in the research paper;
o questions that the student is asking him/herself about the chosen topic, and tentative answers to those questions;
o tentative outline of the final version of the research paper including 3 or 4 sections; the essay must clearly state what the key idea of each section is.

- Research paper final version (8 pages): 35%

**Film viewings:**
- The films are placed on the course reserve. They may be checked out for a limited time from the Avery Fisher Center (Bobst library, 7th floor) Link: https://library.nyu.edu/locations/avery-fisher-center-for-music-media/
- A few films listed are available online on Bobcat (see links indicated in the syllabus)
- A group viewing is set up only when the film is not available online. Location: “Immersion Room” (Avery Fisher Center).
Week 1 – Introduction

Film: Happy (Roko Belic, USA, 2011)

Readings:

Part 1 – Happiness Made in Hollywood: Stories of Resilience and Rebirth

Week 2 – The History of Happiness in American Film

Films:
You Can't Take It With You (Frank Capra, USA, 1938)
The Pursuit of Happyness (Gabriele Muccino, USA, 2006)

Readings:
- Zach Sands: Film Comedy and the American Dream (2008), New York, Routledge (1-21);

Week 3 – Myths of Initiations, Rites of Passage and Transformation

Film: The Karate Kid (John G. Avildsen, USA, 1984)

Readings:
- Joseph Campbell: The Hero with a Thousand Faces (2008), Novato, New World Library (20-51);
- Stuart Voytilla: *Myth and the Movies: Discovering the mythic structure of 50 Unforgettable films*. Studio City, 1999 (160-182);
- Christopher Vogler: *The Writer’s journey: mythic structures for storytellers and screenwriters*, Studio City, 1992 (64-89);

**Week 4 – Can Fairy Tales Characters Be Good Role Models?**

**Films:**
- *Cinderella* (Walt Disney, USA, 1950)
- *Cleo from 5 to 7* (Agnès Varda, France, 1962); available online: [https://nyu.kanopy.com/product/cleo-5-7](https://nyu.kanopy.com/product/cleo-5-7)

**Readings:**
- Michael Hartwell: *Gender and Sexuality in Disney Movies*. Children's Literature Review. 2018 (119-166);
- Asma Ayob: « *The Mixed blessings of Disney’s Classic Fairy Tales* » Mousaion, 2010 supplement, Vol. 28 (50-64);
- Alison Smith: *Agnès Varda* (1998), Manchester : Manchester UP (49-83);
- Janice Mouton: « From Feminine Masquerade to Flâneuse: Agnès Varda’s *Cléo in the City* » (2001) *Cinema Journal*, 40:2 (3-16);

**Week 5 – Hollywood Musicals: A “sugar”-coated Conception of Happiness?**

**Films:**
*The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, USA, 1965)  
*The Young Girls of Rochefort* (Jacques Demy, France, 1967); available online: [https://nyu.kanopy.com/product/young-girls-rochefort](https://nyu.kanopy.com/product/young-girls-rochefort)

**Readings:**
- Caryl Flinn: *The Sound of Music* (2015), London : Palgrave/British Film Institute (1-35);
- Darren Daldrong: *Jacques Demy* (2014) Manchester: Manchester UP (56-81);
- M. Lazen, “En perme à Nantes: Jacques Demy and New Wave Place”, *Studies in French Cinema* 2004 4: 3 (187–196);

### Part 2 – Happiness Between Traditions and the Building of the Self

#### Week 6 – Defining Success Beyond Traditions?

**Films:**
- *Always Be My Maybe* (Nahnatchka Khan, USA, 2019)
- *Crazy Rich Asians* (John M. Chu, USA, 2018) ; available online : [https://digitalcampus-swankmp-net.proxy.library.nyu.edu/nyu305164/#/play/2BE0781AA5E28B45?watch=1](https://digitalcampus-swankmp-net.proxy.library.nyu.edu/nyu305164/#/play/2BE0781AA5E28B45?watch=1)

**Readings :**
- Mieke Matthyssen: “Chinese Happiness. A Proverbial Approach to Popular Philosophies of Life” in Gerdan Wielander and Derek Hird (eds) : *Chinese Discourses on Happiness* (2019), Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP (190-208);

#### Week 7 – Coming to Terms with Traditional Rules

**Films :**
- *Yentl* (Barbra Streisand, USA, 1983)
- *Wadjda* (Haifaa Al-Mansour, Saudi Arabia/Germany, 2013) ; available online : [https://video-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/watch/wadjda](https://video-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/watch/wadjda)

**Readings :**
- Allison Fernley and Paula Maloof : “*Yentl* by Barbra Streisand” (1985), *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (38-46);
- Amrita Deb: “A qualitative exploration of positive psychology concepts in the film *Wadjda* and implications for future research” (2016) *Journal of Human Behavior in the social environment* vol. 26:6 (521–532);
- Libby Powell, “10 MINUTES WITH...Haifaa Al Mansour” (2012), *World Today* ; vol. 68 Issue 8/9 (50);
Week 8 – Going One’s Way beyond Class and Traditional Gender Roles

Films:
- *Billy Elliot* (Stephen Daldry, UK, 2000)
- *Mary Kom* (Omung Kumar, India, 2014)

Readings:
- Eleanor Roosevelt: *You learn by living*; chapt. 7: “The right to be an individual” (111-130);
- Pierre Bourdieu: *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste* (1979). Routledge (22-53);
- David Alderson: “Making Electricity: Narrating Gender, Sexuality, and the Neoliberal Transition in *Billy Elliot*, *Camera Obscura* 75, Volume 25, Number 3 (1-27);

Week 9 – Do Emotional Stories Inspire Us to Build a Better Society?

Film: *The Rainmaker* (Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1997)

Readings:

Part 3 – Building Common Ground

Week 10 – Building Bridges Across Differences

Film: *Like Stars on Earth* (*Taare Zameen Par*: Aamir Khan, India, 2007).

Readings:
- Ravi Vasudevan: *The Melodramatic Public Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (2011), New York: Palgrave Mac Millan (12-55);

Week 11 – Cultivating a Sense of the Humanity Through Food

Films:
- *Julie and Julia* (Nora Ephron, USA, 2009)
- *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (Lasse Hallstrøm, USA, 2014)

Readings:

**Week 12 – Understanding the Emotional Lives of Animals: a Path to Happiness?**

**Film:** *The Horse Whisperer* (Robert Redford, USA, 1998)

**Readings:**
- Marc Bekoff: *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (2008) New World Library (42-87);

**Week 13 – Happiness and the Practice of Frugality**

**Film:** *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things* (Matt D’Avella, USA, 2016)

**Readings:**
- Charles Wagner: *The Simple Life* (1902) New York: McClure, Phillips co (1-12; 20-38; 45-75);
- Ryan Holiday: *Stillness is the Key* (2019), New York: Portfolio Penguin (23-57)

**CONCLUSION**

**Week 14 – Designing and Implementing Personal Strategies of Happiness in College**

**Film:** *Good Will Hunting* (Gus Van Sant, USA, 1997)

**Reading:**