The Happiest Girl in the World
by Radu Jude
Romania - 2009 - 100 min

The film
In Europe and elsewhere
The film and me
To go further

> The Happiest Girl in the World is part of a collection of European films: the CinEd collection, a film education programme for young people.

> This student sheet allows me to rediscover the film, to go through it in words and images, to know more about where the characters live and their time, to create and invent, to go further by discovering other works: films, books, music, photographs, paintings...

By participating in CinEd, I share the discovery of films with young people from other countries, all over Europe!
Frățilă family comes from a little town in Romania to Bucharest to receive a prize consisting of a new car and to shoot a testimonial promoting the juice company that organized the campaign.

Delia, the real winner of the prize, is pushed by her parents to sell the car and that becomes the source of big tension between daughter and parents.

The shooting starts and Delia discovers it's difficult for her to play a happy winner.

Besides, what sounded like fun turns out to be a boring process…

… and a continuous humiliation.

Delia’s parents, especially her father, harass her with violent insistence to sign the contract for selling the car.

Exhausted and disappointed with everybody, Delia hides in a toilet so that she could cry without being seen.

The girl finally signs the contract, but not before negotiating the terms.
Adrian Mihai: “Come on, smile! Wider! Like that! Great! Now, how can I put it to you? What you are doing here is very important for our company. We show that we help ordinary people to fulfill their dreams. Get it?”

Delia: “It’s the crappy car. The smell makes me sick.”

Mrs. Frătilă: “It has nothing to do with the smell.”

Delia: “It stinks of gasoline and whatever you use… stain remover.”

Mrs. Frătilă: “You felt exactly the same last month. This is the cross we, the women, have to bear. But it gets a bit better after giving birth. You’ll see when you’ll grow up.”

Adrian Mihai: “And now look at us. Smile. Not like this – wider, heartfelt.”

Dorina: “She’s fine. Anyhow, we don’t need a model. That’s why we use normal people and pay for testimonials.”

Adrian Mihai: “This juice looks fishy to me – it’s too yellow. Let’s make it a bit more orange.”

The director: “It’s your juice. This is how it looks like.”

Adrian Mihai: “I know, but let’s make it more appealing, so that one could really want to drink it.”

Mrs. Frătilă: “She’s rude.”

Mr. Frătilă: “Why do you interfere? If you had not spoken to her, the problem would have been already solved.”

Mrs. Frătilă: “What do you mean? I’m her mother and I have all the right to talk to her.”

Mr. Frătilă: “Shut the fuck up. Understand that: when I speak to her, you don’t interfere like a stupid.”
The film

It may seem difficult to summarize what Radu Jude's film is about. And this is because "The Happiest Girl in the World" is so rich in details that it may require a second or a third view in order to apprehend its many layers.

The director himself had a rather intuitive approach in the making of this film and followed some different interests at the same time and didn't want to gather all those in a coherent meaning. That's how the director described this endeavor in the film's press kit:

"Actually, I never knew for sure what's this story about. I thought it could be about many different things.

About how the people think about what's good for them. About compromises and lies. About the language of a film being used in order to cheat. About being a scared teenager and not having the guts to fight with your parents to the end. About what it is to be a parent who must take profit of his/her own child in order to fulfil the future plans. About happiness, sadness and consume. About capitalism. About the way the sun goes down in University Square during the summer."

Radu Jude

In Europe and elsewhere

How do you say The happiest Girl in the World in other countries?

- Finland: Maailman onnellisin tyttö
- United Kingdom: The happiest girl the world
- France: La fille la plus heureuse du monde
- Lithuania: Laimingiausia pasaulyje mergina
- Czech Republic: Nejšťastnější dívka na světě
- Spain: La chica más feliz del mundo
- Romania: Cea mai fericită fată din lume
- Portugal: A rapariga mais feliz do mundo
- Bulgaria: Най-щастливото момиче в света
- Italy: La ragazza più felice del mondo
The Happiest Girl in the World

Context: Hopes of a prosperous life

Radu Jude’s film is well anchored in the social context of the moment (the film was released in 2009). At that time, 20 years after the fall of the communist regime in Romania (a regime imposed after the WW2 to many Eastern and Central European states, which thus entered under the political influence of the powerful USSR), a strong middle class was consolidating especially in the big cities as the country had been registering a consistent economic growth in the past years.

This class is represented in the film by the people from the advertising agency and their client, the managers of the company that produces the juice. They all aspire to live in a society as close as possible to the Western world, unquestioningly trying to absorb all its values and its emblematic images. A generalized fascination for the objects of the consumer society, as the car, and the holidays spent in exotic places, with “oranges orchard” spread.

In the meantime, another part of the population – in Radu Jude’s film, Delia’s family, coming from a small town - was still struggling with financial lacks and desperately trying to find solutions to get prosperous.

The film and me

- In my opinion, the best ending for “The Happiest Girl in the World” would be this one: …

- In Radu Jude’s film I found this aspect I could (strongly) relate with / I found surprisingly rendered. (It can be something about Romania, about the relationship between a teenager and her parents, about the world of advertising, about the film making, or anything else.)

- If I had been an assistant to the director on the set of “The Happiest Girl in the World”, these would have been my advices for Radu Jude… (concerning a scene, the story, the evolution of characters, or any other aspect)

- If I could have played a character’s part in the film, that would have been… because…
With my camera, through collage (or otherwise) I create a new poster for "The Happiest Girl in the World" that I consider very suggestive for the film.

I make a portrait of someone I know or of someone I encounter in the street. What kind of features or emotions am I interested to emphasize? How do I attempt to reveal those through photographic means (choosing the frame, the position of the camera, the light etc.)?

I put images in interaction with one another: Do those close-ups of some characters from The Happiest Girl in the World make me think about other portraits I know (from other films, comic books, videos, magazines, photography etc.)?

I add a picture (or I make a collage) of my favourite star or public figure. What is that I like about her/him and the images of him/herself(s)he promotes?

I choose images from the film (using the Young Spectator Space) I choose several images and organise them in a sequence to form a complete new story from that of the film. I explain it in a few sentences.

I look for the images that attract me the most. Are there any resemblances in the way they've been composed?

To go further

On the Young Spectator Space, I discover extracts from The Happiest Girl in the World in the educational films "In the car", "Conflicts", "Reality / fiction".

If I liked The Happiest Girl in the World, I might also like:

Shelter (1961, Bulgaria) by Dragomir Sholev
(FILM IN THE CINED COLLECTION)
Both films show the tensions and hardships between parents and child and observe how the power relations are manifesting in the family as well as in the society. As Delia, Rado (Shelter), 12 years old, struggles for a little autonomy, for the right to do things in his own way – meaning spending a lot of time with his punk friends.
To go further

Pierrot le Fou (1965, France)
by Jean-Luc Godard (FILM IN THE CINEd COLLECTION)
This film also shows a society crammed with and spinning around advertising and money, but unlike the characters from the Romanian film that strive to fit in this society, Pierrot and Marianne try to run away from it and to invent for themselves a world filled only with art and nature.

Boyhood (2014, United States)
by Richard Linklater
Boyhood is a coming of age film in which the child-parents relationship is complexly depicted. Like in The Happiest Girl in the World, the parents in Boyhood act foolishly at times, not as responsible as one could expect. Still, Linklater’s film shows more sympathy for the characters, and the whole growing up period is seen not traumatizing as in the Romanian film, but rather with tenderness. What is impressing about this film is that it had been shot for over twelve years (a few weeks every year) and we can actually witness the physical changes of the boy (who at the beginning is six years old, and by the end of the film is eighteen) and of all the other main actors.

Also a film about the filmmaker profession, Oki’s Movie (Hong Sang-soo, South Korea, 2010) exposes humorously, but also sympathetically to same extent, the ridiculous of his characters, a film professor and his student caught in a nest of confusions and delusions. Most of Sang-soo Hong’s characters make a fool of themselves drinking until they vomit, lying and being caught and humiliated and so on.
To go further

At Montrouge, Rosa la Rouge (1886), by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
The French painter depicts women’s more authentic states, not in a very stylized fashion. In this painting, the woman is hunched and her lips are tight in an expression of maybe disapproval or vexation etc. We can also read on Delia’s face her emotions, her dissatisfaction and her revolt.

Young Dubliners (2016)
by Daragh Soden

The work of the Irish photographer Daragh Soden, who took some portraits of young teenagers hanging around. In some of them, they look bored, disenchanted or uneasy with themselves.

The author of this student sheet is Gabriela Filippi.