

# QUIRKY CINEMA: WES ANDERSON (AND BEYOND)

## Session Three

### Quirky and The Hipster Audience

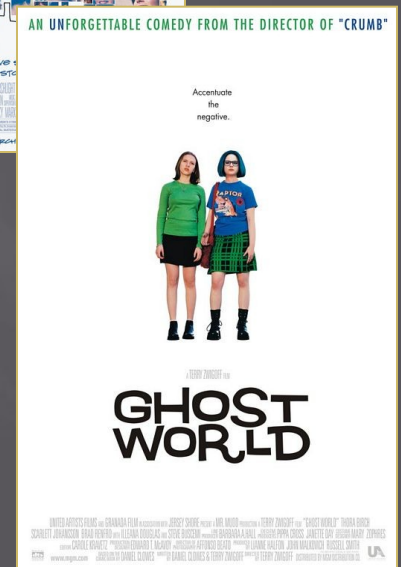
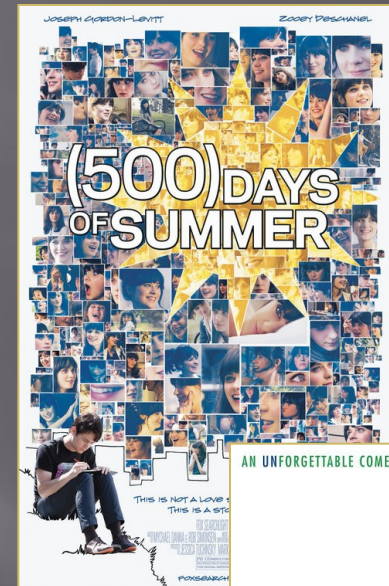
Department of Film & Audiovisual Culture,

Masaryk University

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# Agenda

- I. Quirky and Audience-Targeting
- II. The Hipster Mindset
- III. Quirky and Hipster Life Lessons



# **Today's Targeted Learning Outcomes**

To develop a demonstrable understanding of:

I. The Hipster Mindset.

II. The Hipster and Cultural Interests.

III. Quirky Cinema as Therapeutic Cinema

# **Quirky, Auteurism, and Audience-Targeting**

The Auteurism through which Quirky Cinema is often understood is used to offer an explanation for the films distinctive content and themes

However, as they usually bypass industry dynamics, such accounts do not address the role of audience-targeting in Quirky film assembly

Instead, they conjure the figure of the authentic, autonomous director to suggest personal preoccupations are the guiding force behind assembly

This discourse upholds indie values, but only by fantasizing Indiewood as a romantic neverland free of everyday corporate checks and balances

This coincidence of shared interests between filmmaker and audience overlooks the more calculated and strategic dimensions of assembly

# Indie Audiences

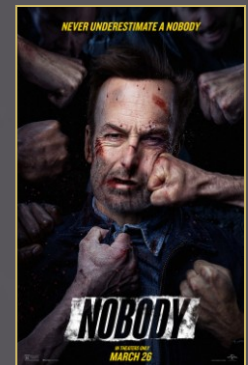
From Chick Flicks to Family Films and beyond, Hollywood cinema is usually envisaged with target audiences in mind

The risks of handling costly one-off goods is reduced if they are marketable and appealing to sizable market segments

This is the case with indie-branded products too, even if it is suppressed by stakeholders wishing to protect indie values

However, such products are consciously tailored to embody the perceived interests, values, and tastes of a targeted public

Attracting the ever-changing hipster psychographic has profoundly influenced the content and themes of quirky films



# **Michael Z. Newman (2013) and Hipsters**

In a 2013 paper, Newman considered how conceptions of the hipster audience shaped quirky cinema and other indie products of the 2000s.

In so doing, he provided an analytical framework in which we can imagine the type of audience to whom quirky is overtly addressed ...

1. How does Newman define the hipster?
2. What roles do maturation play in this subculture?
3. What roles do culture play in this subculture?



# **Hipsters: Or Quirky Indie Folks**

Newman uses “hipster” as a convenient shorthand for various historical youthful subcultures that have developed in the US (and beyond)

He suggests that the figure of the hipster is ambivalent about traditional adulthood; that they retain aspects of childhood well into adulthood

He suggests they use culture performatively, parading their vanguard taste to generate prestige within and from their imagined community

Hipsters are seen to prefer indie branded culture on the basis that such things truly are an authentic alternative to a devalued mainstream

Issues around personal development, the performative use of style, and the subscription to indie values, are also central to the Quirky format

# **Ironic Shell, Sincere Core**

Seen this way, the hipster is a fragile figure who uses culture as a shield behind which to repel fears about growing up

Herein lies the hipster paradox: their identity suggests they are prime candidates for emotionally supportive media ...

But their personae of ironic detachment makes them unlikely to accept such support lest doing so exposes their fragility

Quirky's irony affords hipsters an alibi so they can covertly process their pains by quietly engaging with its sincere core

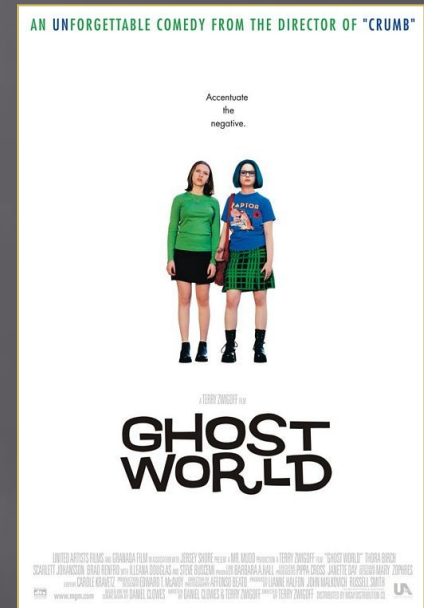
Hence why quirky cinema centralizes eccentrics coping with the social and psychological challenges of everyday life





# Screening 1: *Ghost World* (1999)

1. How does this film depict hipster characters?
2. What roles does culture play in their lives?
3. What roles does this suggest the film might play in the lives of real-world hipsters?



# Striking a Hip Balance Between Irony and Sincerity

This film encourages hipsters to integrate sincerity into their lives while maintaining a healthy dose of ironic detachment



It advances the spiritual and social rewards of sincere media connoisseurship, cast as a justified retreat from a tough world



It also suggests that a measure of ironic detachment is really needed in order to cope with life's trials and tribulations



But it warns against fully retreating into irony, suggesting it threatens self-absorption, emotional coldness, and arrogance



Hence Enid's personal maturation involves becoming less cynical, less judgmental, and open to wonder in the world



# **Tough Lessons from Old Hipsters**

Seen this way, the film positions itself as a roadmap for hipster identity, albeit one that offers some tough life lessons



It reminds hipsters that their pursuit of hip status is a fool's errand given the contested nature of what constitutes cool



It goes as far as to suggest that the fractured nature of cultural hierarchies may even lead to social ostracization



It also suggests a life of complete hipsterdom is out-of-reach given the practical need to secure housing and an income

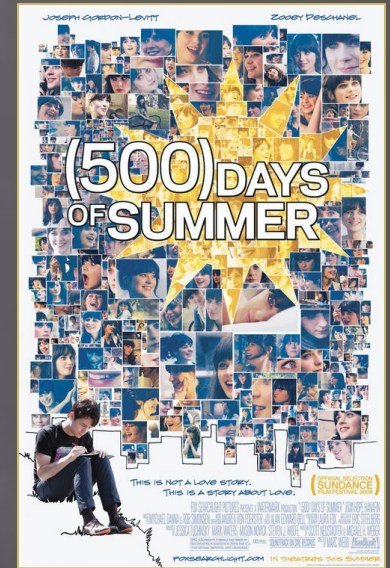


It suggests to hipsters that hipsterdom can morph into an avoidance mechanism impeding psychosocial development



# Screening II: 500 Days of Summer (2009)

1. How does this film depict hipster characters?
2. What roles does culture play in their lives?
3. What roles does this suggest the film might play in the lives of real-world hipsters?





# **Learning to Accommodate Irony**

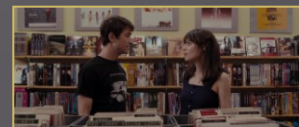
Newman discusses this film's attempts to secure the hipster audience, and its apparent failure to appear credible to them

He rightly discusses how the film positions cultural taste as the main force shaping the couple's relationship and breakup

This marks the film as made for people with such tastes and thereby suggests culture like itself builds a taste community

This predictably provoked a backlash from folks who felt it was an inauthentic attempt to piggyback "their" subculture

I propose, however, that this misses the point the film seems to wish to make about the cultural politics of hipsterdom



# **“No! I’m Sid”: Borderline Personality Disorder and Sociopathy**

Less a clumsy stab at a hipster-friendly romcom, this is a brutal satire of the hipster, as self-absorbed and narcissistic

Beneath its cutesy veneer, this film concerns one hipster’s unhealthy obsession with a manipulative sociopathic hipster

Apparent outward sincerity is presented in Tom as unhealthy idealization and devaluation, in Summer as cold indifference

It suggests a total embrace of sincerity risks us losing the distance we need to evaluate character and conduct

It positions itself like Tom’s buddies: a sage warning against losing touch with reality when seduced by hipster identity





# Be Afraid, Be Very Afriad...



# Hollywood and the Historical “Hipster”

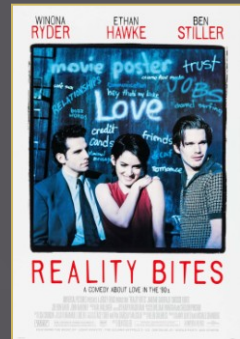
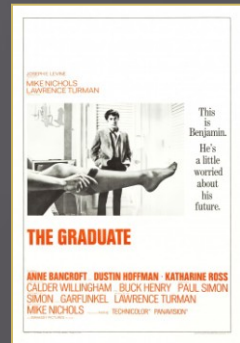
Conceptions of the changing nature of hip youth have driven efforts to secure this sizable, high-investor audience segment

The American movie business has been at the forefront of such efforts, seeking to retain the young people who drive its profits

US importation of European art cinema involved attracting and building an audience of permissive, spiritual leftist Beatniks

The Hollywood Renaissance involved attracting and building an audience of educated politicized left-liberal baby boomers

Smart Cinema and Gen-X Cinema involved attracting and building an audience of cynical media-literate Generation Xers



# Quirky, (Post)-Youth, and the Metamodern

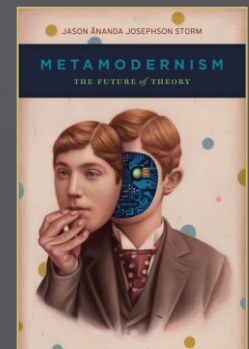
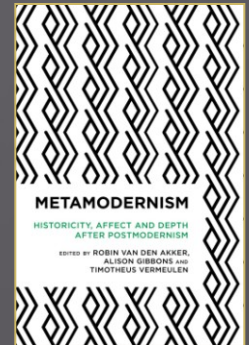
Quirky Cinema represents a newer example of audience targeting that straddles two distinct generational mindsets

Both exemplified the Metamodern Condition, a mindset in which cynical detachment coexists alongside a new sincerity

Theorists argue this perspective derives from a desire to find purpose amid existential crises, even if it seems hopeless

This Metamodern perspective is usually associated with the idealistic but ultimately self-serving millennial generation

However, it also characterizes Generation Xers who have moderated their cynicism as they grew older and successful



## **In Sum**

Auteurism's framing of content as resulting from directors' obsessions foreclosed consideration of quirky as an audience-targeting strategy

Yet, Quirky Cinema is part of a long history of major film companies aiming to attract young(ish) audiences by tailoring content to their tastes

Quirky Cinema is tailored for the hipster subculture, which pursues hip by using indie culture to project ambivalence about traditional adulthood

Seen this way, the hipster is a sensitive soul who hides behind culture as a means of coping with pressures of growing older in a challenging world

Quirky Cinema uses its ironic-sincere mode to covertly raise issues relevant to such audiences so as to offer them support without losing face



# Midterm Summary

The first half of this course sought to broaden understandings of quirky by addressing the key shortcomings of Auteurism



Through the figure of the all-powerful director, Auteurism can uncritically reproduce indie values, and sideline key aspects

In particular, we have seen how quirky can in fact be seen as a textual model that sells indie values to hipster audiences



This provides a textually, industrially, and culturally sensitive framework in which to consider issues relating to the format

In the second half, we examine quirky's preoccupation with father figures and its surprising socio-political engagement



## **Next Time...**

Before all this, we shall focus on what is perhaps Quirky Cinema's most controversial character-type, asking whether it really is that sexist

**Topic:** Manic Pixie Dream Girls

**Readings:** Vazquez Rodriguez, 168–201.

**Home Screenings:** *Submarine* (2009)  
*Ruby Sparks* (2012)

**[Preparatory Questions on MS TEAMS and in the Syllabus]**

**Meeting:** Thursday 3 November