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MOVIES FOR HIPSTERS

Michael Z. Newman

Indie cinema and hipsters have long occupied the same milieu, and have been especially symbiotic in the early years of the 2000s. *Juno* (2007), *(500) Days of Summer* (2009), and the films of Wes Anderson represent and embody hipness and hipsterism, while discourses of indie cinema and hipster subculture alike frequently invoke indie films' address to hipsters. To some extent, to be indie is to aspire to hipness, and to be a hipster is to invest one's identity in the aesthetic legitimacy of indie. While it has always been true that alternative forms of film (in particular art and independent cinema) have appealed to vanguards, the indie era has seen especially close correspondence between some kinds of film and a specific, generational audience formation. By considering hipsterism in its recent and contemporary cultural construction in North America, we can better appreciate the terms on which indie films appeal to audiences, and the terms on which those audiences engage with and appreciate indie cinema.

After establishing the interconnection of hipsterism and indie cinema, this essay analyzes representative instances of two kinds of indie films: those seen as pandering to hipsters, and those seen as models for hipster ethos and style – if not by direct example, then in terms of sensibility. The former includes films such as *(500) Days of Summer*, whose indie authenticity is threatened by a sense of their striving at representing, and thereby courting the attention of, hipsters. An Amazon review of *(500) Days of Summer* describes it as 'the American Apparel of movies, in that it tries really hard to be hip – so hard it sometimes evokes an involuntary cringe' (Canny, n.d.). Discourses of indie cinema often disdain such efforts to court a fashionable audience through appeals such as indie rock soundtrack songs and quirky characters and style. The latter is most fully realized in the *oeuvre* of Anderson, whose *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou* (2004) will be analyzed in this chapter as a more potentially positive example of indie hipster aesthetics by the so-called quintessential hipster auteur.

Indie hipster cinema is both a sociocultural formation and a body of films with shared characteristics. As Jeffrey Sconce (2002) argues of the ironic/nihilistic 'smart'

film of a slightly earlier period, hipster movies appeal to a distinct audience that positions its taste in relation to mainstream Hollywood cinema. Its distinctiveness is likewise often realized in the realm of tone or sensibility, which cannot be reduced to style, since it is only in a given context that tone is intelligible and meaningful to audiences.

Hip and hipster are obviously related, but hipsters are not simply the hip people. In *Hip: The History*, John Leland observes that, as Leonard Cohen says of poetry, 'hip is a verdict, not an intention' (2004: 10). Hipsters are defined by their striving to be hip, but among the crucial components of hipsterism are frequent failure at hipness, and the rejection of hipsterism as inauthentic. Hipsters thus comprise a culture in pursuit of hip rather than a hip culture.

Considerations of the hipster often include indie cinema within a range of illustrative examples. Leland names indie auteur Jim Jarmusch as a hip exemplar: 'People who have never seen a Jim Jarmusch movie or an arty music video can recognize either as an articulation of hip. Specifically what they recognize is this: the elevation of style and background as narrative and foreground' (2004: 10). The cinema of hip is a cinema of aesthetic distinction, of outsider identities and cultish admiration. *The Hipster Handbook* begins a section on cinema by noting hipster disdain for Hollywood and its biggest stars, and then presents a 'hipster canon of essential film' (Lanham 2002: 132–136). This includes a range of types of cinema, including Hollywood classics of earlier eras (*The Apartment*, 1960), foreign films of indisputably artistic reputation (*8 ½*, 1963), and cult films (*Pink Flamingos*, 1972). But the most frequent type of film included is of the American independent scene of the Sundance-Miramax era, including *Down by Law* (1986), *Do the Right Thing* (1989), *Dazed and Confused* (1993), *Buffalo '66* (1998), and *Rushmore* (1998). The description of *Rushmore* identifies Wes Anderson as 'the quintessential Hipster director for today's savvy filmgoer', a designation echoed in many sites of discussion of Anderson, indie cinema, and hipsterism. In *What Was the Hipster?* Mark Grief (2010) defines 'hipster culture' by a short catalog of examples including Dave Eggers's fiction, *The Believer* magazine, Belle and Sebastian, and Wes Anderson's films *Rushmore* and *The Royal Tenenbaums*. The *Gothamist* blog names Anderson 'the annointed hipster auteur' (Wilson 2004). *Stuff White People Like*, the satirical blog-cum-book that skewers the cultural habits not of white people per se but of the affluent, urban, culturally elite circles that overlap to a large extent with hipsters, devotes an entry to the films of Wes Anderson (Lander 2008: 11–12). In a *Time Out New York* rant, Christian Lorentzen (2007) asks: 'Has the hipster killed cool in New York? Did it die the day Wes Anderson proved too precious for his own good, or was it when Chloë Sevigny fellated Vincent Gallo onscreen?' Hipsterism and its denial have found rich sources in indie cinema, and in particular in Anderson as an *auteur* and in his films as texts to admire or dismiss, depending on one's investments.

Lorentzen in particular seems to have invested Anderson with both the promise of being a singular force of hipster creative genius, and the responsibility for having declined artistically, signalling the fortunes of hipster culture itself. In an *n+1* review of *The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou*, Lorentzen (2010) laments: 'For a brief half

decade or so, [Anderson] seemed the voice of our generation, the hipster messiah. He took the ethos of the subculture and made it the governing principle in his films' every detail—their sets, costumes, characters, and neato conceits (one might even say, their metaphysics)'. Anderson is lionized (or chastised) not only for being the quintessential hipster *auteur*, but also for having inspired a wave of indie cinema that bears his influence, imitating his comical tone, visual sense, and narrative situations. In 2007 *The Onion A.V. Club* rounded up ten films influenced by Wes Anderson, more or less a list of essential viewing in the style of indie quirk about precocious young people (Hyden et al. 2007). These include *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004), 'a pale imitation of Anderson's most obvious mannerisms'; *The Squid and the Whale* (2005) and *Rocket Science* (2007), which are said to share Anderson's approach to choosing pop songs for the soundtrack; *Garden State* (2004), in which Zach Braff plays 'a stock Anderson character'; *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), supposedly inspired by Anderson's approach to representing offbeat families; and *Juno*, which, the authors argue, shows the influence of Anderson's approach to costuming characters. The authors of this feature are especially caustic on the films that they consider draw the wrong kind of inspiration from Anderson. For instance: '*Tadpole* [2007] is everything Anderson's detractors accuse him of being: smug, self-infatuated, utterly divorced from reality, and hopelessly in love with the sound of its own voice'.

Negation feeds hipsterism as overexposed, too-popular artifacts are left behind in a regular cycle of fashion and vanguardism. The kinds of negative examples above are echoed frequently in discourses of indie cinema and hipsters. A *Flavorwire* story names *Rushmore* in a list of 'movies hipsters need to get over' (Berman 2010). A listmania list at Amazon.com, 'hipster movies for wannabe hipsters', includes *Bottle Rocket* (1996) (Justin n.d.). Both of these lists are heavy with offbeat, indie titles. *Flavorwire*'s includes *Waking Life* (2001) and *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003), while Amazon's features *Clerks* (1994) and *Slacker* (1991). Both include *The Big Lebowski* (1998). It is notable that all of these are films that model lifestyles and world views. They are not just beloved – or despised – by hipsters, but potentially considered as mirrors held up to a desirable cultural scene, and as rough guides to living, to ways of speaking or dressing, to interests and habits and attitudes.

Negation of hipsterism and Anderson's hipsterish influence can be just as significant for the production of indie authenticity as affirmation, and so much of the discourse of indie hipsterism is negative that denial and de-authentication must be a key structuring principle of hipsterism as it is of indie culture more generally (Newman 2011: 221–246). If Anderson is essentially hipsterish and hipsterism must be denied, it follows that Anderson must be denied. Thus the inclusion of *Rushmore* (directed by 'the ultimate hipster auteur') in *Flavorwire*'s '10 movies that hipsters need to get over' (Berman 2010).

Anderson's work might inspire on the level of sensibility, of hipster world view, and though some of his films are judged more harshly than others, his work is generally held to a higher regard than some other films that are seen as cynically selling hipsterism to the hipsters. Other films and filmmakers are more likely to be disdained for their striving. The negative characterization of hipsterism in cinema extends especially

to those films that do seem eager to represent taste as a mark of character, such as *Garden State*, in which the musical preferences of characters are projected as central to their identities. Sam in *Garden State* promises Andrew that The Shins 'will change your life'. The negation of these films as hipsterish is itself a negation of hipsterism as a form of social striving.

The hipster has been a figure on the cultural scene at least since the 1940s, when Anatole Broyard (1948) wrote his essay 'A Portrait of a Hipster' in a wistful past tense. The hipster in this incarnation was a 'White Negro', as famously defined a few years later by Norman Mailer (1957). Outsiders rejecting square society by adopting the style and manner of jazz musicians, postwar hipsters drew much of their countercultural charge from identifying with a racial other. The hipster's nonconformity was a product of many social forces, including the atomic anxiety of the Cold War era and the postwar consensus and prosperity that we now think of as 'the fifties'. Neither the first nor the most rebellious counterculture, beat generation hipsters nevertheless solidified some of the most important conventions by which subsequent Western countercultural movements would function. Beats were a generational movement of young rebels who subscribed to the mass society critique and fashioned their identities in distinction to a perceived square mainstream. Dress, speech, and music have ever since been central to all subcultures. Drugs or drink, favored modes of transportation, and taste in literature, art, décor, or cinema, might feature more in some than other subcultures and countercultures. The marijuana, jazz records, and poetry books of 1940s and 1950s hipsters would later be supplanted by styles of popular music and cinema, by haircuts, brands of beer, and fashions in bicycles and body modification. Countercultural movements are by nature evanescent and mutating, emerging with new generations and finding their power of rebellious shock dissipating as styles grow familiar and participants age. Broyard observed in 1948 that the hipsters of whom he wrote had been 'bought and placed in the zoo, in the 52nd Street clip joints, in Carnegie Hall, and *Life*' (1948: 727). Indie hipsters of the 2000s are products of their own context, satisfying their participants' historically specific desires. The new hipsters have also found themselves bought and placed in the zoo – an indie zoo that includes Fox Searchlight releases heavily promoted on NPR (formerly National Public Radio) and in the *New York Times*.

As Dick Hebdige (1979) argues of punk style in the 1970s, countercultures depend, in complicated and contradictory ways, on their representation in media of the wider culture. The beat generation became a model of countercultural style and ethos by being profiled in the likes of *Life* magazine, which in its November 30, 1959, issue (114) illustrated to its readers how to outfit a real beat pad with Miles Davis records, a marijuana plant, and a hot plate for brewing espresso. Hipsters may resent publicity and the 'scenesters' whose countercultural style is learned from mainstream sources. Negations of hipsterism might deny the authenticity and legitimacy of styles gone mainstream, only to perpetuate the pursuit of the authentic and legitimate bleeding edge of hip. But countercultures can only exist in relation to a mainstream against which they can measure their opposition, even as the mainstream incorporates the styles and even the values of the counterculture. Indie cinema

functions effectively as both hipster source and style, akin to the poetry of the beats and the folk and rock music of the hippies, but also as a popularizer of hipsterism requiring its negation as mass-market, as pandering to scenesters, as a guide to wannabes. Negation thus functions to police the borders of legitimacy around indie hipsterism and protect it from the threat of incorporation.

The indie hipster is recognizable by a number of distinct features of identity. Outwardly, by fashionable items such as fixed-gear bicycles, ironic facial hair, mesh trucker hats, colourful 1980s-style sneakers, and thrift shop graphic T's. Such a catalog cannot help but miss the mark, as styles go out and in and out of fashion. The values of indie hipsters, of their signifying system, however, are fairly stable and informative. As members of what has become known as the Millennial generation born from the mid to late 1970s and sometimes known as "echo boomers," offspring of baby boomers, the indie hipsters are younger siblings or cousins of Generation X, the slacker and grunge cultures of the 1980s and 1990s. Generations are by definition broad; vanguard subcultures tend to draw from the ranks of culturally privileged, affluent white kids. Like earlier waves of alternative scenes, the indie hipsters constitute a habitus rich in cultural capital, and hipsterism is its means of reproducing this capital. Millennials come of age in a time of allegedly 'post everything': post-Fordist, post-industrial, post-consensus society, but also postfeminist, postracial, and postmodern culture. Theirs is a hypersaturated consumer capitalism and also a world of fluid identities and hyperconsciousness of cultural difference, meritocracy, and egalitarianism, especially within the privileged communities of white, elite cosmopolitan culture wherein educational institutions promote such ideals as received wisdom. Millennial indie hipsters are especially at home in neighborhood clusters of bigger metropolitan centers including New York City (in particular Brooklyn, NY), Chicago, Toronto, and Portland, and college towns rich in cultural capital like Madison, Wisconsin, and Austin, Texas. Indie cinema and indie hipsters are products of this context.

The styles of indie hipsterism are thoroughly nostalgic and ironic. Indie hipsters must be masters of authentic inauthenticity, embracing gestures of faux naïveté. Indie culture fully internalizes camp, the attitude of seeing an aesthetic dimension in everything, of celebration of excess, of snatching failure from history's dustbin. Indie hipsterism is thus often a culture of appropriation. Hipster style demonstrates the complex signification involved in any practice of cultural appropriation, with the 'in quotations' nature of hipster culture demanding an in-group, in-the-know 'reader' of cultural signs. Broyard refers to a 'second-removism' among hipsters, a distanced appreciation and practice of culture in which everything has a layer of meaning inaccessible to the 'squares'. He describes the hipster 'as keeper of enigmas, ironical pedagogue, a self-appointed exegete' (1948: 724). Hipster authenticity can be understood as 'showing doing' rather than 'doing' cultural practices. As Michael Mario Albrecht explains, hipster culture performs authenticity in such a way as to make apparent the performance, marking the distance between the origins of culture and the terms of its appropriation (2008: 198–213). In an ironic cover song, for instance, Albrecht argues, the recontextualization of a problematic cultural source (his example is Dr. Dre's 'Bitches Ain't Shit') is appreciated at once as an object for celebration and

as a subject of critique (in Ben Folds's hipster rendition). Showing doing rather than doing, Folds presents an authentic inauthenticity as the mark of indie sophistication. And although he covers black music in this instance, the avoidance of hip-hop style in Folds's cover - he sings and plays in a white singer-songwriter style far removed from the rhythms and vocal inflections of hip-hop, as if ironically to 'square up' a hip performance - accentuates its performance not just of misogynist, aggressive rap, but also of whiteness.

This dynamic surfaces in one of the most fundamental and revealing themes to be found in indie hipsterism: the questioning and challenging of adulthood and the sentimentalizing of childhood, realized as the hipster's refusal to grow up and articulated as a performance of juvenile identity. Countercultures are generally movements of liminal post-adolescents, between child and adult identities, struggling to negotiate a place in society distinct from their parents' culture without duplicating its ideological failures. In indie hipster culture, the prolongation of childhood, the unsentimental preservation of its style and ethos, is a way of perpetuating the consumer identities of youth into adulthood, and of rescuing the worthwhile consumption of the past from the becoming forgotten. The centrality of whimsy and quirk in indie cinema of this period is one example of this interest in the prolongation of childhood into adulthood, as James MacDowell (2010) has argued (see also MacDowell's contribution to this volume). The frequent idealization of childhood in Wes Anderson is a key example of this, as are the precocious teenage characters at the centre of indie films such as *Juno*, whose cleverness and taste, in combination with youthful innocence, are offered up as paragons of hipster style.

Even the twentysomething characters of *(500) Days of Summer* are childlike in their boy-meets-girl roles, their record-store courtship, their romp through the showrooms of IKEA presented as playing house, making believe they are a married couple having dinner in their kitchen and settling down on the couch to watch *American Idol*, though the film generally represents them as mature adults with jobs and apartments and grown-up ambitions. The childlike qualities of the characters and storytelling extend especially to the film's nostalgic and retro touches, like the use of ironically rescued 1980s pop music by Hall and Oates. Tom (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) is a romantic dreamer type, and the film's narration introduces his crush on Summer (Zooey Deschanel) to the non-diegetic accompaniment of 'She's Like the Wind', a boldly romantic cheesy love ballad sung by Patrick Swayze from 1987's *Dirty Dancing* soundtrack. The exuberant, fantastical musical number on the occasion of his falling in love with Summer is a dance sequence performed by a sizable troupe staged by an erupting fountain, with an animated bluebird landing on Tom's shoulder and a brass marching band materializing to root him on, set to Hall and Oates' 'You Make My Dreams'. These songs are tokens of innocent, romantic emotion, and of a young person's naïve appreciation of pop music, an earlier stage in the maturation of a learned hip identity as a connoisseur of more advanced styles. They are also presumably songs remembered fondly from an earlier time in the characters' lives (or those of the film's creators).

Summer's preference for Ringo among the four Beatles, and for 'Octopus's Garden' as her favorite Beatles song, is another hipster gesture at the celebration of youth and

innocence. Of the four bandmates, Ringo has the cutesiest name, the least musically sophisticated reputation ('Octopus's Garden' was apparently the second song Ringo ever wrote), and the most childlike vocal style. 'Octopus's Garden' is a silly song about a frolic among sea creatures, one of the Beatles' several absurd animal songs from their later stage of drug-aided imaginative exploration. The song makes clear its subject as an adult's ideal of a child's desire for secure amusement: 'Oh what a joy for every girl and boy/Knowing they're happy and they're safe'. It also expresses a typical child's fantasy: 'We would be so happy you and me/No one there to tell us what to do'.

But the prevalence of music in the film ranges even more widely, continually defining the relationship at the heart of the narrative. Popular songs and bands mark the characters by their taste culture, and signal the affinities and distances between them as the narrative moves from meeting through courtship to an inevitable breakup and ultimately a time for moving on. We admire the characters and are invited to share a taste culture with them (or aspire to do so). The introduction of Summer in a stylized flashback early in the film presents her quotation of the indie group Belle and Sebastian in a high school yearbook as inspiring a spike in their sales. She impresses Tom during a shared elevator ride when she recognizes that the song playing in his headphones is by The Smiths, and she dramatically sings a few measures of their song 'There Is A Light That Never Goes Out': 'To die by your side is such a heavenly way to die'. Later Tom plays The Smiths on his computer hoping she will hear when passing his work station. As their courtship develops, they go to sing karaoke and their choice of songs further confirms their compatibility in terms of musical taste. She sings 'Sugar Town' by Nancy Sinatra (she had hoped to sing 'Born to Run') and he sings 'Here Comes Your Man' by The Pixies. These choices impeccably mark the characters as appropriate romantic partners, and as objects for the hipster audience's admiration as well. In such representations of courtship through cultural consumption and preference, we find ample evidence for Bourdieu's observation that 'Two people can give each other no better proof of the affinity of their tastes than the taste they have for each other' (1987: 243).

The characters' expressions of taste also mark the painful disappointment of their relationship's demise. In a scene indicating that Tom and Summer are failing to sustain a true emotional connection and are likely to go their separate ways, he tells her, 'It pains me that we live in a world where nobody's ever heard of Spearmint'. When she says that *she* hasn't heard of this fairly obscure British band, he tells her that theirs was the first track on the mix he made for her. The failure of a relationship is marked by a failure to align cultural preferences, and a failure more pointedly of Summer to follow his lead in developing a common set of cultivated taste judgments. At one point post-breakup (the film is not presented chronologically) Tom is listening to 'She's Like the Wind' on his headphones in a crowded city bus, and is asked to leave when, reminded of Summer, he screams, 'I hate this song!' The kitschy irony of a bad old love ballad is only tolerable given its positive associations for the listener, and the colouring of cultural preferences by life experiences makes every expression of taste ultimately personal. This sense of the individuality of taste flatters the audience for

having its own tastes, which might include a taste for the film itself as a representation of cute and hip characters who they might see as similar to themselves.

The qualities of the characters – and especially of Summer, who is represented as an object for Tom's affections and by extension the audience's – as in some ways childlike, quirky, cute, adorable, and more generally desirable, are central to the film's address to its audience. These are qualities the audience presumably desires to possess itself, or to recognize in others of their own social circles. The ironic appreciation of kitschy retro culture, the taste for obscure indie rock bands and alternative classics of the past like 'Here Comes Your Man', the sense of style conveyed by their distinctive and personal home furnishings and outfits described by one blogger as 'vintage-y', all contribute to a sense of the characters as hipsters or as models for hipster appreciation (Shafrir 2009).

The film also flatters its audience by recycling the same abiding cultural hierarchies to which an elite vanguard is likely to subscribe. Tom's work creating greeting cards is represented as an instance of inauthentic pandering to the masses, less original and worthwhile than the profession of architect, for which he (and Summer) believe himself destined. In a key moment of courtship he draws an image of exquisite detail on Summer's arm of his vision for an LA cityscape, and this is positioned as superior to the kind of creative expression involved in his job. When he quits, he calls greeting cards bullshit that give people the wrong ideas. Summer believes Tom could be a great architect and although the characters are apart at the film's end, Tom's interview at an architecture firm in the closing scene indicates that he is pursuing a worthwhile creative goal in leaving card writing behind.

In sum, while the characters and situations of *(500) Days of Summer* may not be representations of any specific hipster subculture, they appeal to hipsters by representing their sensibility and style. This is accomplished in particular through musical choices discussed by characters and heard on the soundtrack, but also through other qualities of representation that are in some ways childlike and quirky, or aligned with patterns of elite taste. The film's indieness is of a piece with the larger construction of indie culture during its Millennial hipster iteration, and it performs this indieness in some way in practically every scene, whether through characterization, music, costume and décor, or dialogue. These appeals evidently made some critics and audiences anxious about being so obviously courted *as* a hipster audience. Discourses of reception were often keyed into this dynamic of representation, tagging the film as a hipster comedy, as though that were description enough to identify the film's characters and style. An NPR review under the headline 'Ephron for the Hipster Set' describes the characters as 'quirky, sexy, upwardly mobile and vaguely soulful—prime examples of a seductive species whose native habitat is the imagination of shallow yet *au courant* indie filmmakers' (Lee 2009). The cinephile site MUBI called the film 'perhaps the ultimate hipster date movie', (A Healthy Disdain 2010) asserting that it is 'so on-point with American Apparel's target demographic' that it would be appropriate to find it for sale at that retailer. A MUBI discussion thread on the film (largely derisive) is titled 'Hipsters Take Over the Cinema' (Nathan M. c.2009). One commenter there notes that the film is 'really going for that cutesy-indie feel' by its use of

The Smiths and other alternative artists. The thread is launched with the observation that 'It's a film that definitely caters to a very specific people group, and it trades in pop culture references meant for those people, and not for others'. Commenters dispute the point that Tom and Summer are themselves hipsters, but the general cultural reputation of the film remains as an artifact appealing to, if not directly representing, the hipster subculture.

All of this makes *(500) Days of Summer* problematic for some consumers of indie culture who see this as failed hipsterism and negate the film's authenticity and credibility. Negation and denial are especially likely when indie culture treads too closely to mainstream media and its representations of vanguard subcultures as the new cool thing. A similar dynamic also informs the reception of Wes Anderson's work, though a critical community generally treats him much more admiringly.

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou is the fourth major feature film by Wes Anderson, after *Bottle Rocket*, *Rushmore*, and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001). By the time of its release, Anderson had become a much beloved indie film figure, and his style had been codified by admirers in terms of its visual signatures such as symmetrical compositions and use of Futura Bold font in titles; thematic concerns such as precocious adolescents and childlike adults yearning for father figures; and meticulous, refined taste for popular music. By the time of *Life Aquatic*, Anderson had cultivated a signature of high-style quirk. It was both a good and bad feature, according to various responses to the film, that *Life Aquatic* is so identifiably Andersonesque, but what appeals to some viewers as glorious further development of the characteristics of this *oeuvre* seemed to others to be the calcification of style as a cluster of mannerisms marked by a pretentious failure to support a meaningful narrative.

The film is set on the vessel of Team Zissou, a film production unit in the Mediterranean Sea shooting underwater documentaries à la Jacques Cousteau. Its leader is an eccentric man-child played by frequent Anderson star Bill Murray. He outfits the unit in matching light blue uniforms and orange hats with pom-poms. The ship is a stylized set open at cross-section, in which décor and equipment are charmingly retro. The narrative is ostensibly focused on a quest to hunt the jaguar shark that devoured a team member and dear friend of Steve's, but Ned Plimpton, a pilot from Kentucky who might be Steve's son, appears seeking Steve out, and the film shifts focus from pursuit to interpersonal dynamics. Steve seems eager to have a son to groom as an heir to his life's passion of leading Team Zissou. Ned is a naïve and impressionable young man, and Steve quickly assumes a paternal role, giving him the name Zissou and showing him the ropes.

This is in some ways an ideal Millennial hipster film. It celebrates the childlike qualities of adults who refuse to grow up, who extend their sense of wonder and delight well into middle age. It presents a fully realized nostalgic world in which seemingly obsolete technology is fetishized. (Roger Ebert [2004] observes that Team Zissou's laboratory contains 'lots of equipment that looks as if it might have been bought at auction from a bankrupt high school in 1955'.) It extends the Anderson *oeuvre* already admired by the subculture, for instance by returning the Bill Murray type of *Rushmore* and *Tenenbaums* in an old-new role, and by continuing in the

same visual directions, but it also ventures into new territory of colorful visual expression in an underwater submarine scene and in the use of the cutaway set. It is also an ideal in particular in the way it was criticized for being excessively stylized and hipsterish.

The Life Aquatic revels in its own artifice. If hipsterism is about 'showing doing', this film appeals to a hipster sensibility by seeming to be an appreciation of aesthetic qualities, of surface charms of design, of classic sneakers and spa tiles and pinball machines. Little about it appeals on a level of naturalism, but much is offered for the audience's contemplation as well chosen for qualities of imagery and sound. Stephanie Zacharek (2004), reviewing for *Salon*, compares the film to 'a very elaborate diorama in a shoebox' and complains that it is 'far too taken with his own cleverness'. Michael Atkinson (2004), of *The Village Voice*, complains that the film 'is all absurd-ironic concept'. A reviewer for *Lawrence.com* refers to *The Life Aquatic* as 'Anderson's latest ode to ironic hipsterism' (Niccum 2004). A review in *Film Comment* identifies Anderson as 'a writer-director who matters most to the iPod set' (Agger 2005). It continues: 'just as those sleek rectangles provide a personal soundtrack for your life, his movies celebrate the cultivation of an idiosyncratic worldview'. In *The Life Aquatic* this includes a soundtrack of Portuguese covers of David Bowie songs, the characters' formal diction, the care with which costumes and sets have been chosen and constructed, and the emphasis on fine and eye-pleasing details such as the fantastical candy-striped seahorse given to Steve in the film's opening sequence. The film can be read as a carefully crafted toy set built by Anderson and his cast and crew as a space in which to explore and have fun, and the hipster audience is invited not only to engage with the narrative of quest and interpersonal affairs, but also to admire and appreciate the filmmaker's curatorial work of assembling perfectly ironic or beautiful or nostalgically charming images and sounds. As the *Film Comment* reviewer argues, Anderson's central characters 'tend to be malcontents who burrow into their own obsessions', which the critic compares to teenagers decorating bedroom walls. He observes that this is 'an attitude that suits the cultural moment' (Agger 2005). Numerous popular press reviews in addition to those quoted above found fault in the film's lavish attention to style, and it is hard to find one lacking the terms 'whimsy' and 'idiosyncratic' suggesting shades of negative meaning, but hipsterism is all about the fashioning of idiosyncratic personal identity within a subcultural milieu. As the *n+1* review quoted earlier asserts, the kind of attention to surfaces that we find in Anderson comes at the perceived price of 'a determined hostility to storytelling' (Lorentzen 2010). But the hipster sensibility is always one of emphasis on surface and style, as Leland describes referencing Jarmusch (2004: 10). It is just this emphasis that makes Anderson into a hero of indie culture. Thus even with a film widely regarded as a minor work or interesting failure, the confirmed status of Anderson as *auteur*, of a subcultural voice, an authentic representative of hipster aesthetics and sensibility, can make for a redeemable text. *The Life Aquatic* was released as a two-disc Criterion Collection DVD, a badge of cinephile value. It is an object of serious criticism in academic work on Anderson that takes him as an important expressive artist (Gooch 2007; Orgeron 2007). And it is evidence along with other entries in the Anderson

oeuvre of a consistent world-view and style, which endures as the inspiration for an aging hipster subculture whose identity is tied up with its affection for Anderson and also sometimes with the negation of this affection. Thus in *Stuff White People Like*, the author recommends that when discussing *The Life Aquatic* with 'white people', you try as your comment: 'I know a lot of people said they didn't like this film, but I thought it was fantastic' (Lander, 2008: 12).

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