Our course will consider American and British music, movies, and other forms of popular media and culture that are called independent or "indie." Our primary concern will be to understand the significance of this categorization: where it comes from, what functions it serves, who it benefits and excludes.

Indie culture often goes by other names as well: alternative, hip, counterculture, underground. It is typically defined in relation to the Other of the mainstream. Our course will often be concerned with how and why the distinction of indie vs. mainstream is constructed. In a sense, we will be conceptualizing "mainstream" as much as "indie."

Some of our readings will directly address indie culture. Others will be theoretical or contextual. Bourdieu is not a scholar of indie culture but of taste. Since indie functions as a kind of taste culture, we need a way of thinking about taste, which Bourdieu offers.

We will consider the construction of indie culture from three main perspectives. First, we will consider indie as an economic category indicating a sphere of production and consumption of media separate from the major media industries (Hollywood studios, major record labels, big chain retailers). Second, we will consider indie as a social or cultural category, describing an experience of culture within social formations that seek to distinguish themselves from ordinary, mainstream culture and society. Third, we will consider indie as an aesthetic category, arising from distinctions in the forms and meanings of cultural products classified as either mainstream or alternative. These three perspectives are interconnected, so that economic, cultural, and aesthetic distinctions influence one another and are really inseparable from one another. Thus we will often consider these perspectives in combination with one another rather than separating them out into discrete discussions.

Our seminar meetings will be organized around careful consideration of assigned readings. There will also be regular discussions of items of indie culture (brief additional readings, websites, videos, music, etc.) which will be assigned informally week by week or shared in class. Seminar participants are responsible to attend every class having completed reading and other assignments and are expected to participate in discussions.

All of the reading, listening, and viewing assignments are available on reserve at the library or online. Books by Bourdieu, Hebdige, Thornton, Tzioumakis, and Wilson are for sale at the UWM Bookstore.

The course has a website (a blog), http://indiecultureseminar.blogspot.com/, which includes an online version of the syllabus with links to some assigned readings. The blog will be a utility for
all participants in the seminar to use. Anyone may post to the blog at any time. Weekly reading questions are to be posted in advance of each week’s seminar. Additional brief assignments may be posted to the blog. Students are recommended to check the blog regularly. One good way of doing this is by subscribing in an RSS reader such as Google Reader, My Yahoo, or Netvibes. Everyone in the seminar must have successfully become a member of the blog during the first week of class (you will get an email invitation to join).

Assignments:

1. Reading questions: each week approx 3 participants will compose approx 3 questions about the week's assignment, to be posted to the blog by 12:00 pm on the day of the seminar. Each of you will do this at least twice during the semester (a sign-up sheet will circulate the first day of class). These questions should be brief and succinct but substantial, about 300-500 words total for all three. Seminar participants are responsible for reading these questions before class. 10%

2. Report on a site of indie culture, to be shared with the seminar week 8 as a “show & tell”; publishing to the web encouraged but not required (details to follow). This should be a detailed description of a site of indie culture based on your personal encounter, which may be written as a traditional paper or presented using other media such as photos, audio, and video, with instructor’s permission. Study of local sites are encouraged but not required. Additional research (interviews, published sources) may be useful but is not required. Examples: a record store, movie theater, another kind of store (books, clothes), a website like a discussion forum or an online magazine like Pitchfork or indieWire, a television channel such as IFC or Sundance, a magazine like Filmmaker. 3-5 pages if written as a paper. 20%

3. Book review, to be done partially in groups. Each person writes their own review, but only after engaging in conversation with a few others also reading the same book. To be shared with the seminar week 13 as a “show & tell.” Books for review are listed below. 4-6 pages, 30%

4. Research paper, 10-12 pages (this is the length of the typical conference paper in the humanities). This paper may incorporate research/reading done for the earlier assignments. For instance, if you are interested in music, you can choose music topics for all three assignments and integrate the material. Most important, this paper must be something you could not have written without having taken this course. 40%

Assignments 3+4 will include the “show & tell” sessions weeks 8 and 13, which will be organized as panel discussions rather than formal presentations.

Papers (esp. assignments 3-4) must be formatted as follows:
- Times or Times New Roman 12 pt font
- 1-inch margins top, bottom, left, and right (note: this is probably not your default setting)
- Numbered pages
- Stapled pages
- Your name, my name, the date, the course number, and a title on the first page
- No extra space between paragraphs
-Chicago style, with endnotes (see the online guide linked from the online syllabus)

**Schedule:**

(screenings weeks 10-12 place + time TBA)

Week 1 9/3 *Course introduction*

Week 2 9/10 *Subculture* I, Hebdige; assigned listening TBA

Week 3 9/17 *Taste* I, Bourdieu (1-259)

Week 4 9/24 *Taste* II, Bourdieu (260-484)

Week 5 10/1 *Subculture* II, Thornton

Week 6 10/8 *Indie Rock*, Hesmondshalgh, Hibbet, Bannister; assigned listening TBA

Week 7 10/15 *Hip + DIY consumerism*, Frank (x2), Walker (x2); assigned websites TBA

Week 8 10/22 *Show & Tell* I (first assignment, **due in class**)

Week 9 10/29 *The Mainstream*, Wilson; assigned listening TBA

Week 10 11/5 *Indie Cinema* I Kleinhans, Perren, Levy; *sex, lies and videotape* screening

Week 11 11/12 *Indie Cinema* II Tzioumakis (1-166), Newman; *Happiness* screening

Week 12 11/19 *Indie Cinema* III Tzioumakis (169-284); online dossier (readings to be linked from the course website) + screening of *Juno*

11/26 No class: Thanksgiving

*** Saturday 11/29 Art vs. Craft, Humphrey Scottish Rite Masonic Center 790 N. Van Buren St. (relevant to week 7) ***

**Book review due Monday, 12/1, 5 pm**

Week 13 12/3 *Show & Tell* II (second assignment)

Week 14 12/10 *Cultural Omnivores*, Bryson, Peterson, Peterson & Kern

**Research paper due Monday, 12/15, 5 pm**

**Readings:**


**Book review titles:**


