

# A Companion to American Indie Film

Edited by

Geoff King

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# Introduction

## What Indie Isn't... Mapping the Indie Field

Geoff King

All things are defined as much by what they are not as by what they are. If this applies widely, to all cultural phenomena, it seems a particularly useful starting point for our understanding of a concept such as indie film that only ever really has an meaning as an essentially *relative* quantity. So, to begin with, what is indie *not*? What is it defined *against*, in the manner in which the term – one that is often contested – will be employed in this volume? This is one way of easing towards a consideration of what it might be.

Indie is not Hollywood, its clearest point of negative reference (as is the case for many other nonmainstream forms of cinema). But neither is it the avant-garde or the experimental, or the most exploitation oriented of non-Hollywood American film. It is not “independent,” either, in the broader use of this important cognate term – not in the usage intended here, although this is likely to be a more contentious statement. This is, clearly, a major issue for any understanding of the definition of indie.

Indie and independent have often been used more or less coterminously, the former serving as shorthand for the latter. However, the two can also have more specific resonances, implying distinctions that – while far from absolute, exact, or unanimously agreed upon – are helpful to a more nuanced charting of this terrain. Indie is sometimes employed in a manner that highlights, or plays upon, its diminutive status, as a contraction: as something of lower status than the perhaps more rigorous sounding “independent.” The different resonances implied here are far from neutral or accidental, but can be situated as part of a hierarchical process of discursive positioning. Indie, in this more negative sense, suggests a falling away from the higher standards and demands implied by independent. If independent is taken to mean something fully separated from the industrial mainstream – usually, in this context, identified simply as Hollywood – indie might suggest something less so, in various ways.

Indie, in this sense, might be taken to mean something that claims some of the virtues of independence while having some attachment to Hollywood institutions or values, or a more general sense of softening, compromising, or “selling out” certain values and principles associated with independence. In some such approaches, indie signifies an overly commercial or commodified version, or imitation, or an attempt artificially to *confect* something that poses as, but never really is, independent. This kind of understanding is associated particularly with certain strains of indie that developed from around the mid-1990s and afterwards, viewed as a watering down or cooptation of the kinds of difference associated with independence.

In this volume, however, indie is used in a more neutral and inclusive sense (although such a term can never escape any such connotations of one kind or another and some differences will be found among the contributors on this point). So, what is indie, according to this definition? It is used here, as in my other recent work on the subject (for example King 2014), to define a particular range of non-Hollywood cinema that came to prominence, crystallized, and achieved a particular form of institutionalization in the period from approximately the mid- to late 1980s into the 1990s, when it grew significantly to the point at which some of the issues of cooptation cited above were raised. I would also argue, contrary to some others, that this variety of indie continued to exist up to the point of the writing of this book in the mid-2010s and can be expected to do so into the future, whatever particular economic difficulties the sector might experience in any specific period, such as the recession that started in the late 2000s.

This understanding of indie includes and largely overlaps with the cinema of what Michael Newman (2011) refers to as the “Sundance–Miramax” era, although I would, again, see this as extending beyond the end of the period in which Miramax played a central role, before and during its heyday as a division of Disney. Indie is used here to define this territory – itself far from singular or one dimensional – as something at least relatively distinct within the broader history of what can be included within the category of independent. Independent is taken here to include the many forms of American cinema that have existed outside the Hollywood mainstream. This is a hugely varied landscape including examples as different as the avant-garde, the underground, a number of ethnically or race-oriented cinemas of the decades before the second world war, low-budget exploitation films, and pornographic cinema.

A key issue here is the basis on which particular understandings of indie or independence are established. For some commentators, independence is a matter purely of industrial factors, principally of separation from the Hollywood studio system in any of its manifestations. For others, among whom I would locate myself, either a specific definition of indie or wider notions of independence also entails the particular *textual* qualities of the works involved, individually or collectively. Independence might also be defined, that is, by the subject matter of films, including how they tackle particular sociocultural issues, and thus how they are implicitly positioned in a political–ideological sense. Independence, or degrees of such, can also be defined at a formal level, in terms of the audiovisual strategies employed and the purposes for which these are used (for a fuller account of these ways of defining indie, see King 2005).

Both the sociocultural and formal dimensions of indie/independence are often also articulated in relation to Hollywood – specifically, as markers of difference and departure, to varying degrees, from Hollywood norms. These are usually matters of relative degrees that can be slippery and hard to pin down, which is one reason why industrial-only grounds of definition can seem attractive: it is more often possible to draw firm lines at this level, in terms of who is involved in the funding, production, or distribution of any particular example. But drawing firm lines is often a way to miss key aspects of the character of such a phenomenon: a gain in terms of clarity comes at the cost of a loss of greater understanding of cultural territory that is not clear-cut, and much of the richness and fascination of which lies in between such lines. How all of these dimensions of indie/independence line up in any individual case is a source of much variety. Films can be clearly independent at an industrial level without necessarily manifesting distinctly indie qualities textually, which is one of the bases on which I would make a distinction between my use of indie – to signify a particular range of films – and the broadest definition of independence as marked purely by separation from Hollywood institutions. Films can be innovative formally without being in any way radical at the sociocultural level, and vice versa. However, the limits that are set on the approaches available to films in sociocultural or formal terms remain in general terms closely related to the industrial dimension. As I have argued elsewhere (King 2005), scope for radical departure is usually closely tied to an industrial position at a distance from the more commercial mainstream, as manifested by either Hollywood or the more commercially oriented parts of the indie sector.

My use of the specific term indie involves a narrowing down, then, within the much broader field of the history of all American independent film or of all types of independence that might exist in any one particular period, including the recent past or the present. However, it is also wider than the usage of the term made by some other academic commentators. Yannis Tzioumakis (2013), for example, employs “indie” to characterize just one particular phase in the wider history of this kind of cinema, the period from 1989 to about 1996–1997. He distinguishes this from a preceding “independent” era, dating back to the late 1970s or early 1980s. A clear impression is given here of a general process of loss of independence, this version of the indie period being viewed as being succeeded by “Indiewood” (a dimension considered further below). My argument is that much more continuity can be found than is implied by an historical framework of this kind. Some tendencies involving a move closer to the mainstream in many cases can be identified across the periods marked out by Tzioumakis, a development he relates principally to the changing degree of Hollywood involvement in this terrain. But, for me, to translate this into the existence of such different phases, each titled in such a way, is significantly to overstate any such case and to miss the crucial fact that many different threads of indie/independent cinema continued to exist through the decades concerned, including the maintenance of some core aspects of indie practice as I define it here.

Indie is a territory that suggests a particular range of filmmakers, films, and institutions. It is not an exact quantity, the borders of which can be drawn very firmly or definitively, but neither is it an entirely vague and amorphous category. A key aspect

of its development was its institutionalization, particularly from the mid-1980s and into the 1990s, a well-documented process that made it more than just the sum of disparate parts. Its core components are by now familiar, although the terminological location of many of these as either indie or independent remains a matter of continuing dispute. As with many types of film classification, a broad sense of territory is established through the accumulation of names of filmmakers, film titles, and other institutions. Filmmakers whose work helps to define this variety of independence would include, although be far from limited to, the following, in no particular order: Jim Jarmusch, John Sayles, Steven Soderbergh, Richard Linklater, Kevin Smith, Joel and Ethan Coen, Quentin Tarantino, Todd Solondz, Todd Haynes, Spike Lee, Allison Anders, Rose Troche, and Nicole Holofcener. Key films, in establishing the breakthrough and prominence of the sector, would include (in chronological order) *Stranger Than Paradise* (Jarmusch, 1984), *She's Gotta Have It* (Lee, 1986), *sex, lies, and videotape* (Soderbergh, 1989), *Poison* (Haynes, 1991), *Slacker* (Linklater, 1991), *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino, 1992), *Clerks* (Smith, 1994), *Go Fish* (1994, Troche), *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), and *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), among many others. Major institutions include distributors specializing in such films and festivals, most prominently Sundance, along with organizations such as the Independent Feature Project, one of the branches of which created the “indie Oscars” in the shape of the Independent Spirit Awards. Together, these played a key role in constituting this arena as an established and at least relatively distinct field of cultural production (to use the terms employed by Pierre Bourdieu [1993]) or art world (Becker 1982).

As a relatively distinct field, indie suggests varieties of independent film that make certain claims to a kind of “quality” or “artistic” status, although often mixed with other elements. It can be located, therefore, within a hierarchical sense of cultural valuation founded on long-standing oppositions between the realms of “art” and “popular culture,” a framework that dates back at least to the eighteenth century (for more on the historical process involved, see Shiner 2001). It is its location in this territory that helps to explain much of the sensitivity or controversy that often surrounds this field, the constitution and maintenance of which has always entailed acts of boundary policing in which much can be invested by those involved in one way or another (including both practitioners and commentators; for more on the policing of boundaries specifically, see King 2014, “Introduction”). Indie is part of a large ground that lies in between two extremes identified by Bourdieu in relation to fields of cultural production more generally: what he terms the fields governed by the “autonomous” or the “heteronomous” principle.

Work governed by the autonomous principle exists in an arena entirely separate from the commercial realm, in which the only measure of value is artistic prestige in itself. As far as the wider field of independent film is concerned, this would be limited primarily to the domain of avant-garde or experimental production, much of which exists outside, or on the very furthest margins of, any commercial market. Work produced under the dictates of the heteronomous principal is, in this account, subject to the same economic constraints as noncultural commodities produced on the basis of market capitalism. This would be the location associated with most of

the productions of the Hollywood studios, although it is not necessarily the case that all Hollywood film exists entirely in this domain (for analysis of the role of prestige as one motivation for the production of “quality” work within the studios, see King 2016). Indie exists in part of the broader territory that falls between these two locations and can be understood as being subjected to a varying pull between the two different principles. Exactly how they are combined, or which is deemed to have the greater sway, or how much, accounts for much of the debate about the supposed merits of indie film or about what exactly is to be included – or about the relative merits of indie or independent as designators, and to what exactly each refers.

If indie is not some parts of what is included within the broader landscape of the independent, and does signify some areas reasonably clearly, there are also regions that *might* be included within the term but are subject to particular debate. A key example of this is what has become known as Indiewood, the area constituted primarily by the operations of the “specialty” divisions owned by some of the studios (“some” at the time of writing, although all of the studios at some point in the past decade or so). Whether or not these are included within the definition of indie or independent, in various uses, has been a subject of particular controversy (Perren [2013] even reserves the term indie itself for the output of the studio divisions; another, although less common, usage of the term that associates it with something like a “fall” from “true” independent status). Attachment to the major studios is, for some, a clear ground for exclusion from any notion of independence. Others, myself included, would argue for a more ambiguous location, one that has always involved a degree of autonomy on the part of such divisions. My own preference is to use the term Indiewood to mark the distinctive nature of this crossover region, although the films handled by such divisions vary. Some seem clearly to mix aspects of studio and indie approaches, sufficiently so to merit the term Indiewood at the textual level, as an identifier of a particular blend of textual qualities (see King 2009), although these operations have also been involved with films that seem more clearly indie/independent in terms of their form and content.

What, then, about a company such as Lionsgate, the largest unattached independent film producer–distributor in the United States at the time of writing, and one that, as Alisa Perren (2013) argues, has followed a deliberate strategy of not investing in notions of quality and cultural cachet, in favor of more commercially oriented strategies? My inclination, on balance, would be not to include Lionsgate in the definition of indie around which this volume is organized, for that reason – because this appears to have been a consciously adopted strategy. But I would see this as a far less than clear-cut matter. As Perren suggests, the company had been through a number of different phases leading up to the adoption of this approach, one that might also be subject to future variation. Accusations of being “excessively” commercial in orientation are regularly repeated markers of the policing of the boundaries of indie/independent. This is a process that involves attempts to draw lines within a field that is generally better understood, fundamentally, as being constituted by qualities such as hybridity and impurity, a field within which such lines are always open to challenge and contestation rather than ever being clearly defined. Qualities of indie films that share certain features in common with art cinema, or notions of the artistic more

generally, are frequently mixed with elements that seem more commercial in orientation and/or which have more in common with mainstream production.

The balance of such qualities, the mix found in any particular example or sub-categories, is highly variable. My definition of indie has a good deal in common, in this way, with that of the wider realm of art cinema offered by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, a category they suggest is “defined by its impurity” rather than any essence and that includes “feature-length narrative films at the margins of mainstream cinema, located somewhere between fully experimental films and overtly commercial products” (2010, 7, 6). The realms of art and indie cinema are distinct in some respects, the latter often being oriented more towards the commercial than the former, but also include considerable areas of overlap, an issue I explore elsewhere (King forthcoming). The *exclusion*, or attempted exclusion, of particular types of film – or particular companies or practitioners – from the realms of indie or independent is a key, active part of the *constitution* of the territory, an exercise in which the participants range from those within the sector to critics and academics such as myself and other contributors to this companion.

My understanding of indie, then, is as a particular cultural terrain, one that is shaped by a combination of factors that includes, in addition to the actual production and dissemination of a particular body of films, the creation of various institutional bases and discursive parameters (for a similar general approach, see Newman 2011). It is for this reason that this collection begins with chapters that investigate the field at this level, as a particular cultural landscape, and then proceeds to consider the relationship between indie film and other media, and the critical and marketing discourses through which indie film is positioned. I have chosen deliberately to begin in these dimensions, to build a concerted sense of the terrain in which indie is constituted in such broader terms, rather than, say, with the more specific historical manifestations charted in the following section.

The chapters of this book are divided into eight sections with headings as follows: “Indie Culture,” “Indie and Other Media,” “Criticism, Marketing, and Positioning Indie,” “Movements/Moments,” “Indie as Regional,” “Aesthetics and Politics,” “Kickstarting Indie,” and “Indie Acting and Stardom.” The numbers of chapters in each of these is variable, somewhat unevenly, as I have sought to organize these on the basis of quite closely shared focus, rather than attempting to shoehorn contributions into a more equal distribution among section headings. I have tried quite actively to shape the contours of the book, both in the original commissioning of contributions – all of which were commissioned from the authors – and through a basis of organization that seeks a movement from broad to more specific dimensions of indie film. If the early chapters set out some of the broader parameters of the field, I have tried as far as possible to encourage those who tackle more specific components to situate them within this wider context. One of the aims of this process has been to seek to produce a more coherently assembled body of work than is the norm for edited collections – while also seeking to respect the particular approaches and agendas of each of the contributors. The success of this venture is, of course, dependent on the quality of every one of these.

Part One, “Indie Culture,” begins, then, with chapters that set out some of the broader dimensions of indie as a particular cultural manifestation or movement. The opening chapter, “Indie Film as Indie Culture” by Michael Z. Newman, establishes the location of indie cinema as part of a broader realm – not just of contemporary indie culture as also manifested by indie music, indie games, and other examples, but within a longer historical context of oppositions between mainstream and alternative media. The meanings produced by and around indie culture are, as Newman suggests, premised on a long-standing distinction between such forms and a negative conception of mass culture and mass society, to which they are situated as alternative. If this opposition is rooted in a body of academic work and critical commentary (itself a reaction to the increasing commercialization of culture), Newman’s focus is on how this functions more widely as a lay theory of media, one that, as he suggests, provides a remarkably consistent framework of reference for discourses within which the values associated with indie are promulgated. Three central and overlapping bases of valorization are identified: autonomy, authenticity, and opposition, each of which situates indie culture within the broader framework of expressive individualism that formed a key part of the Romantic response to the commercialization of culture from the eighteenth century and into the era of mass media.

However questionable such notions might be in actual application to the reality of a sphere such as indie film, they are essential, as Newman argues, to the manner in which indie culture imagines itself and in which it or others seek effectively to police its boundaries. A key conclusion about the nature of indie is an emphasis on its contradictory nature: as a realm of culture that is positioned as socially alternative and oppositional to the mainstream while simultaneously predicated on the maintenance of hierarchical oppositions between cultural spheres. After setting out the general parameters of this approach, which include the importance of dimensions such as production and circulation as much as texts themselves, Newman illustrates the operations of this discourse in two particular manifestations: Kaya Oakes’s *Slanted and Enchanted: The Evolution of Indie Culture* (2009) and the documentary *Indie Game: The Movie* (2012), each of which demonstrates the enduring manner in which indie and its accompanying discursive assumptions and oppositions are mobilized within the framework established in this chapter.

The discursive structures and institutions within which the notion of indie as a distinct sphere is constructed are also central to the approach taken by Sherry B. Ortner in Chapter 2, “The Making of the Indie Scene: the Cultural Production of a Field of Cultural Production.” Like Newman’s, Ortner’s approach is strongly informed by sociological understandings of the nature of cultural production, particular those rooted in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu. If indie film can be situated as one example of a field of cultural production, with a particular location between the realms of the most mainstream–commercial and most alternative–artistic in orientation, Ortner’s focus is on how a field of this kind is *itself* produced. A variety of cultural apparatuses are involved in such a process, key examples identified by Ortner in the case of indie film being film schools, festivals, institutions such as the Independent Feature Project, and publications such as *Filmmaker* magazine. The key issue here is an examination of how a cultural movement such as indie comes together – to be identified *as* a distinctive

movement – and how it subsequently grows, takes off, and is sustained over time. A community of this kind is effectively called into existence, as Ortner terms it (drawing broadly on Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation), through the discourses and practices of institutions in which filmmakers are addressed as certain kinds of (artistic, creative) subjects, both independent and part of a wider community of the like minded. It is in this way, as Ortner suggests, that we can understand the process through which an arena such as indie film moves from the realm of a few isolated individuals sharing similar ideas to the creation and consolidation of a larger-scale and publicly visible movement.

The notion of individual artistic freedom, and the broader complex of ideas and ideologies within which this is located, is a key part of the discourses explored in the first two chapters. This is also an important aspect of the historical and conceptual background to the dimension of indie culture examined in my own contribution in Chapter 3, "Indie as Organic: Tracing Discursive Roots." This chapter explores notions of the organic as one facet of the authenticity often associated with indie film/culture, through which certain valorized forms of indie are situated in discursive opposition to a negative other characterized as fabricated or contrived. Some direct but also more implicit parallels are suggested between the organic as understood or applied to indie film practice and to the realm of food and farming, with which it is more commonly associated, including notions of sustainability and diversity. These are explored in dimensions including the roots of indie films, the manner in which they are handled (particularly in marketing), and understandings of their likely effects. The latter includes a consideration of the shared cultural territory in which oppositions are established between particular films (Hollywood versus indie) and the foods or drinks with which they are associated (popcorn and sugary beverages versus organic/vegetarian fare) in their respective theatrical domains. An emphasis is put on the prevalence but also the questionable and rhetorical nature of such discourse in a field in which the reality is more complex and less clear-cut.

A good deal of continuity is found as we move from Part One to Part Two, "Indie and Other Media," which continues to locate indie film within its broader cultural context, although with a more specific emphasis on connections with other forms of indie media. While chapters that include a focus on other media might be expected to come at the end of a collection such as this, following closer attention to indie films themselves, they serve here further to develop a broader staking out of the particular territory of indie – as a distinct arena of culture – that provides a key dimension of the manner in which indie is conceived in this book. The importance of this to the understanding of indie cinema as something distinctive and specific, as opposed to the wider territory of all kinds of independence, is the reason for addressing these dimensions first, providing the context in which to situate the other aspects of indie explored in this Companion.

Broader cultural dynamics of the kind charted in these early chapters can also help us to understand the qualities of particular types of indie cinema. This is the case in Chapter 4, "Quirky Culture: Tone, Sensibility, and Structure of Feeling" by James MacDowell. The focus here is on a quality often associated with indie, that of the quirky, a term sometimes employed in (negative) accounts in which indie is viewed as

a lower or fallen variety of independence. MacDowell's focus, however, is less on quirkiness as something specific to indie film, whether viewed negatively or in a more neutral manner, but on a wider variety of quirky culture within which certain types of indie film participate. This is a variety characterized by a particular tone and sensibility – concepts explored with some care in this chapter – that entail a contradictory pull between ironic detachment and sincerity of engagement. If this dynamic can be identified more widely in the history of artistic production, MacDowell suggests that what is specific to the contemporary context he examines is a particular type of sincerity, as one pole of the dynamic. This is rooted in notions of the childlike and the innocent, offered as a response to the perceived irony of aspects of prevailing culture. The quirky, which blends the two, is interpreted by MacDowell as an expression of a contemporary “structure of feeling.” The latter, a term drawn from the work of Raymond Williams, is employed by MacDowell as a way to give a sense of the broader cultural prevalence of such qualities, but without making the kinds of excessive claim found in accounts that overreach in according such phenomena the status of grand sociohistorical or aesthetic eras (as, for example, in the widespread and often sweeping use of terms such as “postmodern”).

While this particular form of the quirky – which MacDowell distinguishes from a wider and less specific usage of the term – is prevalent in indie film, this chapter focuses on a number of other and often related manifestations, particularly in quirky music, comedy, and radio/podcasting. By demonstrating its prevalence in these other media, MacDowell illuminates both the nature and the broader sociohistorical context of this dimension of indie film. He also concludes by returning to some of the issues of taste distinction and elitism considered in earlier chapters, particularly Newman in Chapter 1, suggesting that the sincere dimension of the quirky, rooted in the childlike, might offer some degree of escape from the stance of cultural superiority often associated more ironic forms of indie film.

The term indie, as used with the particular connotations employed in this book, first came to prominence in relation to certain forms of music, so it should be no surprise that this section also includes a chapter focused on the relationship between indie in these two domains, Chapter 5, by Jamie Sexton, “Independent Intersections: Indie Music Cultures and American Indie Cinema.” Sexton traces the historical development of associations between independent/indie film and indie music, starting with the roots of both in the punk movement of the 1970s. A number of further overlaps between the two are examined at various levels as they developed to include more commercial forms – and as the term indie itself came into increasing use – including contexts of production and circulation and shared aspects of ethos and discursive articulation. These include a number of connections with issues explored in the preceding chapters, including the centrality of certain notions of authenticity – or its questioning – in indie film and its use of music, and an association of indie in some accounts in both domains with the childish or the “twee.”

Sexton's main focus is on the various ways in which indie music can be seen to have shaped and influenced certain aspects of indie film, contributing to its overall texture and to narrative and thematic points of reference in some cases, as well as to both some of its production practices and discursive dimensions. Specific issues explored

within this frame range from the emphasis on do-it-yourself approaches in the punk and post-punk era to the increasing use of indie music within indie films, the composition of soundtracks by figures from the indie music sector, and the use of certain types of music – from particular bands to nostalgic investments by characters in vinyl – as markers of “hip” cultural status.

If such connections can be identified between indie film and music, recent decades have seen the development of new outlets for the work of indie filmmakers, particularly online, a sphere explored by Mark Gallagher in Chapter 6, “Post-Cinema Soderbergh.” While the internet and social media are often viewed as potential sources of funding, distribution, or exhibition for indie features that remain broadly indie-conventional at the textual level (see, for example, the chapters by Chuck Tryon and Sarah Sinwell in Part Seven of this book), Gallagher’s focus is on a range of somewhat eccentric uses of such forums by one of the most notable indie figures, Steven Soderbergh, who declared an apparent retirement from filmmaking in 2013. What, then, Gallagher asks, are the opportunities for creative independents in an increasingly post-cinematic media marketplace? What is most striking about Soderbergh’s excursions into this terrain is the extent to which they do not come across as anything like a concerted attempt to use the internet or social media to either sell or promote his more conventional work of the time, whether that be in cinema or television. Numerous opportunities for promotion appear to have been ignored in favor of a more peripheral or experimental use of resources such as Soderbergh’s Twitter account or his personal website. In this respect, these dimensions of Soderbergh’s output seem to fit into the dimension of indie discourse that entails a rejection of commercial priorities. (Where some more commercial elements are found, such as Soderbergh’s promotion of a Bolivian liquor, these also appear distinctly eccentric in manner.) What Gallagher finds in the online Soderbergh are projects that go beyond the confines of linear audiovisual narrative, including a novel distributed in Twitter installments and a website that includes re-edits of existing films and various, often highly reflexive, written pieces. But all of this remains clearly a part of the wider indie culture as explored in some of the earlier chapters, marked by a continuous reassertion of key aspects of Soderbergh’s established author sensibility, what Gallagher terms a performance of his creative selfhood.

Examining its relationship with other media tells us much about indie film itself, then, both in specific details and in aspects of its broader positioning as part of a particular kind of indie culture. The same can be said of the analysis of other dimensions that might be expected to be situated as more peripheral to the territory rather than within the earlier sections of the volume such as this. This is the case with the aspects of indie explored in Part Three, “Criticism, Marketing, and Positioning Indie.” Contrary to what might be presumed to be their status as marginal paratexts, reviews and marketing materials provide further valuable evidence of the broader cultural positioning of indie – one of the key concerns of the understanding of indie around which this Companion is organized – both generally and in relation to individual films.

These issues are strongly to the fore in Chapter 7 by Erin Pearson, as is suggested by the title: “Structuring Indie and *Beasts of the Southern Wild*: the Role of Review

Journalism.” As Pearson suggests, primarily through a case study of one example, review journalism serves not only to demonstrate some of the key terms in which the concept of indie is negotiated in public discourse but also to contribute significantly to the very structuring and shaping of prevailing notions of what it is taken to represent in itself. What is revealed through a close analysis of the terms in which *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) was both embraced and rejected by critics is the striking continuity of the underlying terms of the discourse that is employed in such cases, one that draws heavily – if usually only implicitly – on a series of Romantic and other assumptions that have remained consistently in play since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In its broadest terms, therefore, and also in the emphasis found on concepts such as authenticity and an understanding of these processes in relational and oppositional terms, this account has much in common with those of Part One.

Pearson identifies a range of position-takings by reviewers (of the kind analyzed by Bourdieu) through which certain textual qualities are either rejected or endorsed as suitable to a notion of the authentic indie: a process that entails the positioning of the films involved, but also a similar dynamic in the relative positionings claimed by some critics as against others. A notable feature of this discourse is a tendency to outline a preferred indie aesthetic primarily in negative terms, in reference to qualities deemed unworthy in one way or another (for example the provision of visual pleasure rather than sober seriousness). Critics tend not to state outright or definitively what indie should or might be, Pearson suggests, on the basis that to do so might be seen as too narrow or prescriptive. Indie, as constructed in this discourse, is treated as something best left as an ineffable quality. It is marked off from what it is not (that which is associated with notions of the mainstream in various ways), while its actual nature is left open to a range of possibilities – a factor that helps to explain the extent to which the exact meaning of the term remains so frequently contested when it is subjected to more general analysis.

More conscious acts of positioning within this terrain are involved in the marketing of indie films, the dimension examined by Finola Kerrigan in Chapter 8, “Marketing American Indie in the Shadow of Hollywood.” The particular industrial strategies adopted in this domain are also situated within some of the broad frameworks outlined in the earlier chapters, including general definitions of indie and its understanding as a dynamic field of production and consumption. The key issue for Kerrigan is the nature of the particular signals and cues supplied to potential viewers to indicate either indie status in itself, particular varieties, or whatever relevant mix of distinctly indie and more mainstream-leaning components might be highlighted in any individual case. As Kerrigan suggests, indie films can represent a challenge to marketers, in their tendency to resist some of the broader categories often employed in relation to the mainstream, although the outcome of this – something positioned in a less clear-cut manner – can itself be a signal of the alternative status sought by some consumers.

Four case studies from the same year, 2013, form the main body of this chapter, examining in detail the varying balance of cues employed in the posters and trailers for *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, *Blue Jasmine*, *Frances Ha*, and *12 Years a Slave*. The cues

most often employed by marketers in general are, as we might expect, the name of the director, stars, endorsements from critics, and prize-winning success or nomination. However, as Kerrigan suggests, the exact manner in which such elements are deployed varies according to the particular nature of any one film and the particular strengths or challenges it might pose from a marketing perspective. A close examination of these helps to underline points of both continuity and variation across the indie sector, also further underlining a number of key dimensions in which notions of indie “quality” and distinction are articulated within the public sphere.

The rest of this collection continues to examine a range of specific manifestations of indie but also to situate these – explicitly or implicitly – within the broader cultural landscape explored so far. Part Four, “Movements/Moments,” offers a focus on four distinctive phases or elements that, together, help to trace some major aspects of the history of indie cinema: an important precursor in the 1960s; part of the institutional consolidation of the 1980s; a watershed in the movement of the major studios into the indie arena in 1999; and a distinctive manifestation of more familiar indie qualities in the context of very low-budget digital production and circulation in the 2000s.

In Chapter 9, “Proto-indie: 1960s ‘Half-Way’ Cinema,” Janet Staiger proposes a historical framework that identifies three waves, the latter two of which form the period that is the main focus of the conception of indie around which this book is oriented. It might be accurate to say that my use of “indie” would refer primarily to a period beginning in the second half of Staiger’s second wave (dated from the late 1970s until 1989), although it is not always best to see these as hard-and-fast boundaries. Staiger’s third wave, dated from 1989, is certainly the one in which indie came to greatest prominence and became most strongly institutionalized, although some important groundwork was done from at least the middle of the 1980s. The focus of this chapter, however, is on what Staiger identifies as a first wave, in the 1960s, a period in which she argues that a number of core aspects of practices and approaches with much in common with the later waves can be identified. This is a version of indie centered strongly on New York and rooted (as indie has usually been seen in later decades) in a combination of broad social context, contemporary aesthetic influences, and “material facilitators,” a term employed to encompass a range of more immediate sources of support and development.

If the relevant sociohistorical context here includes the various upheavals of the 1960s, the wider aesthetic context is one shaped by influences such as those of the Beat movement, in particular, and the overseas art cinema of the time. Material facilitators specific to this wave range from New York film and artistic culture in general to the existence of training sites such as universities and live studio TV drama. An important role was also played, Staiger suggests, by particular controversies such as those surrounding John Cassavetes’ *Shadows* (1959), which is identified here as a touchstone of the proto-indie movement, and the role played by Jonas Mekas in elaborating a vision of a particular variety of independent work. In summary, this chapter argues, a discourse of what might be a viable form of alternative cinema was established in this period, while material sites existed to support and reinforce such a practice – much the same kind of basis on which the existence of later manifestations of indie can be understood. Through a primary focus on the works of Cassavetes, the early films of

Brian De Palma, and Robert Downey, Staiger also identifies a number of thematic and formal points of continuity between this and later indie movements.

The role of institutional frameworks in the development or constitution of American indie film is considered in some of the earlier chapters of this book, especially by Ortner in Chapter 2, and it is to one manifestation of this that we turn in Chapter 10 by Yannis Tzioumakis, “From Independent to Indie: the Independent Feature Project and the Complex Relationship between American Independent Cinema and Hollywood in the 1980s.” That the Independent Feature Project (IFP) played an important role in the increased prominence of the sector is well established, but Tzioumakis offers the first detailed account of its specific contribution, one that is viewed here as having been central to the movement of independent or indie towards increasingly closer relationships (in its most prominent manifestations) with the Hollywood mainstream. The IFP began from a much more oppositional position, Tzioumakis suggests, its initial proposals seeking to create something closer to the model of state-supported film culture that existed at the time in Europe, one of the key markets for independent films in the 1980s. A gradual process of evolution led to ever-greater involvement or acceptance of more mainstream dynamics, however, a move led particularly by the IFP/West, a branch of the organization with much closer connections to Hollywood than was the case for its New York equivalent. For Tzioumakis, these developments in the 1980s, particularly in the latter years of the decade, mark a blurring of lines between studio and independent that occurred earlier than has usually been acknowledged. It also entails, in his use of the terminology, a shift from independent to indie, in the particular use of the latter that suggests a more commercially oriented set of approaches and practices.

If Tzioumakis traces some of the earlier links between the indie and studio sectors, Thomas Schatz, in Chapter 11, “Going Mainstream: the Indie Film Movement in 1999,” focuses on the culmination of such a process in what is identified as a sustained peak of indie-related studio releases in one year, 1999. This year saw, as Schatz suggests, a substantial number of studio–indie “hybrid” productions that constitute what is interpreted here as a watershed moment in indie film history. Most of these were box-office disappointments, leading the studios to reassess their investment in the sector, but they had a huge impact on the indie scene as a whole, Schatz argues, pushing much of the business in more commercial directions. A range of issues is explored through a close focus on four studio-based films (*The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Fight Club*, and *American Beauty*) and the year’s enormous indie hit, *The Blair Witch Project*, a title that had its own wider influence on the indie landscape. A focus on the development, production, and marketing of these examples identifies central features such as the use of arthouse release strategies and the employment of the discourse of the auteur – approaches very much characteristic of the indie sector – along with varying claims to indie status made in each case.

From such a high point of indie–studio crossover, we move in Chapter 12 to the opposite end of the scale and one of the most distinctive low-budget indie strands of the 2000s with J.J. Murphy’s “Looking Through a Rearview Mirror: Mumblecore as Past Tense.” Although a phenomenon seen as very much of its immediate time, particularly in relation to the predominant use of digital technologies, Murphy also

traces a number of connections with earlier manifestations, including some of the figures included by Staiger at the start of this section. In the use of varying kinds of improvisation by some of its exponents, mumblecore is situated in the context of work and pronouncements by figures such as Cassavetes and, in particular, Norman Mailer, in its emphasis on often unscripted and at least relatively unshaped narrative situations, within which a particular kind of performance tends to take center stage. The latter participates also in the dimension of indie that has always tended to involve rhetorics of authenticity, as explored particularly in Chapter 1, a strong marker of continuity from the work of the 1960s to mumblecore and much in between.

The mumblecore story is also another than enacts, in miniature, the broader indie sense of a movement from marginality to a degree of mainstream absorption, if here on a much reduced scale. The latter, however, as with indie more widely, only applies to a limited number of instances: among the examples considered by Murphy, some – such as the work of Ronald Bronstein and Frank V. Ross – retain a distinctiveness that remains fundamentally beyond any process of incorporation.

Among its other characteristics, one of the features of mumblecore identified by Murphy is its regional identity, most of its exponents working or having worked outside the main film-making centers of California (Hollywood) and New York (a key locus for some indie filmmakers). A focus on the regional dimension that has played an important role in indie film as a whole is the subject of Part Five, which begins with Chapter 13, “The Pull of Place: Regional Indie Film Production,” by Mary P. Erickson. A strong sense of the regional was a striking characteristic of some of the types of indie film that began to come to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, as Erickson suggests, although this dimension tended to disappear from view in the late 1980s and early 1990s, another result of the advent of more commercially oriented indies that tended to gain the majority of wider public attention at the time. The notion of the regional, then, the terms of which Erickson analyses in some detail, can be another strong signifier of some of the qualities most valued in some indie discourses, particularly notions of the authentic and the specific (and also the organic, as in my chapter), against which an opposition to the Hollywood mainstream is often articulated.

Erickson identifies a marked return to the presence of regional identifiers in indie film in the late 2000s, along with an upsurge in regional production more generally in the United States. This is attributed to a number of factors. One is the existence of tax and other incentives at the municipal, county, or state level (sometimes challenged by a tightening economy, and often of more value to Hollywood than indies) and other forms of investment such as the creation of local film studios. A tendency is also identified for some filmmakers to return to their regional roots, to take advantage of personal connections and lifestyle attractions. However, a key factor remains, for Erickson, the sense of authenticity and the potential offered by the regional for the expression of a more diverse range of stories and cultures than the increasingly anodyne content associated with the global aspirations of Hollywood.

A rather different dynamic is identified in John Berra in Chapter 14, “Rural Crimewave: Reconfiguring Regional Spaces through Genre in US Indie Cinema,” which examines a group of films in which the regionally specific is mixed with the

more generic patterns of the crime thriller. A shift is traced from the low-key and almost ethnographic nature of the regional indies of the 1970s and 1980s to a tendency among some examples from the late 2000s to give regional settings to crime narratives that employ more conventionally heightened narrative tropes. This is another development that can be situated, at least partly, within the pull between more and less commercially oriented forms of indie. The generic dimensions of such films give them a broader likely audience appeal, and more mainstream marketing hooks. But the examples examined by Berra in detail – *Frozen River* (2008), *Winter's Bone* (2010), and *A Single Shot* (2013) – are also grounded to varying extents in more than superficial regional texture. They are at least partly rooted, Berra suggests, in the real threats to regional communities posed by the recession from the late 2000s. It is economic need that usually provides the initial narrative stimulus, leading financially desperate characters into murky territory for which they are often ill equipped. Crime narrative thus becomes a method for the navigation of regional territory, although Berra finds the balance to vary from one example to another, some integrating the two imperatives more successfully than others.

From the regional we move to Part Six, “Aesthetics and Politics,” which deals with a range of issues relating to the political and aesthetic dimensions of indie more generally, although it would be a mistake to see this as a shift from the particular to the widely applicable. The label “regional” has sometimes been viewed negatively, as something parochial and specific, rather than that which participates in broader dynamics, a point against which Erickson argues in her suggestion that the local and particular can – and often has – become an entry point for filmmakers into becoming part of the larger, national film-cultural voice. There are also, clearly, both specifically aesthetic and political dimensions to the various forms and conceptions of regional indie examined in Chapters 13 and 14, as there are to the issues considered in all of the preceding contributions. The next four chapters are grouped together on the basis of the greater centrality of these dimensions to their focus, both separately or in conjunction, but aesthetics and politics are categories of such broad resonances for this only to be a relative matter within the scope of this Companion as a whole.

While the films examined by Berra include a focus on the plight of individuals living on the social and economic margins, those considered by Claire Perkins in Chapter 15, “Life During Wartime: Emotionalism, Capitalist Realism, and Middle-Class Indie Identity,” present a picture of the social malaise afflicting the inhabitants of the materially more affluent white urban middle class. A key marker of the distinctively indie status of these films is the critically ironic attitude they display towards bourgeois culture, one that is characterized as alienated, absurd, and narcissistic rather than as something to which to aspire or as the taken-for-granted background found in many Hollywood productions. Films such as her key examples, *Young Adult* (2011) and *Touchy Feely* (2013), are situated as part of broader contemporary cultural trends towards an emphasis on the personal and emotional dimensions of life. Social problems, here, are recast as emotional ones, a process viewed as part of the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, particular via Mark Fisher’s notion of capitalist realism. If this material is taken up critically in these films, in their identification of the stranglehold such approaches have on the psyche of the white middle class, the appeal of this

orientation is also related by Perkins to the social basis of indie itself on a similar constituency. The result is what appears to be an ambiguous position: one that offers a critique but no solution, itself a manifestation of certain aspects of the problem it diagnoses.

Neoliberalism also forms a key part of the focus of Chapter 16, “Indie Cinema and the Neoliberal Commodification of Creative Labor: Rethinking the Indie Sensibility of Christopher Nolan,” by Claire Molloy, which examines the qualities associated with filmmakers who have moved between the indie and studio sectors within this particular economic–ideological context. This is also situated within a broader notion of the general or relative depoliticization of the indie sector, particularly in the period from the late 1990s to the economic crash of the late 2000s (some upsurge in more explicitly political work is noted in the years following the crash, but this is not the focus of this chapter). Using aspects of the career of Christopher Nolan as a case study, Molloy argues that such figures function as ideal exemplars of a particular variety of neoliberal subject through their status as members of a creative elite who are often discursively positioned as independent, autonomous artists, even when working on large-scale major studio films. If the notion of the film artist on which such conceptions rest is viewed in some earlier chapters as an embodiment of an inheritance dating back to the eighteenth century, Molloy identifies a number of dimensions of this complex that are also strikingly consistent with more specific aspects of contemporary neoliberal ideology.

This is another domain in which we find the articulation of familiar oppositions between the qualities associated with indie (or the indie filmmaker bringing a notion of distinction to the studio sector) and its most mainstream-conventional other. In the discourses examined in this chapter, including both trade and more general press commentary on Nolan, Molloy identifies a marking of distinction between the privileged status of “filmmaker” and the more negatively positioned “director for hire.” It seems especially notable that a strong reassertion of the supposedly special, auteur status of the former is found in a context within which the lines between indie and mainstream appear most strongly to be blurred. This, though, seems typical of such discourse, the emphasis of which can best be viewed as an act of assertion of difference that is often found at its most heightened within the circumstances in which it might seem most likely to be threatened or undermined.

The next chapter, ““They Believe Every Fuckin’ Word Because You’re Super Cool’: Masculine Cool ’90s Style in *Reservoir Dogs*,” by Stella Bruzzi, shifts the focus to the relationship between film aesthetics and gender politics. While the films of Quentin Tarantino, and *Reservoir Dogs* in particular, have often been celebrated, or otherwise, for their depiction of a certain kind of masculine “cool,” Bruzzi unearths a far more ambiguous dynamic rooted particularly in the relationship between the treatment of such issues and the formal qualities of the films. The characters in *Reservoir Dogs* might be given an identity that appears cool and impregnable, Bruzzi suggests, but what it really recalls, in its drawing on previous exemplars, is the mistake on the part of its heroes of believing the image to equate with the reality. Tarantino’s often flamboyant visual style is identified as an important and distinctive source of the manner in which the films offer something of this experience to viewers (regardless of their

own gender identity). The film offers a visceral, affective response to the experiences of the characters – but this is also one that exposes the frailties at the heart of its versions of masculinity. Repeated tropes and stylizing devices, including the low-angled tracking camera and particular uses of music, are employed, Bruzzi suggests, both to construct and embody but also effectively to question and deconstruct the notion of coolness at the heart of the film.

The relation between aesthetics and politics is a factor in the final part of this section, Chapter 18, “The Craft of Independent Filmmaking: Editing in John Sayles’ *Return of the Secaucus Seven* and *Baby It’s You*,” by Warren Buckland, but in this case involving a distinct separation between the two realms. Buckland’s focus is on an evaluative analysis of two works by one of the more politically oriented established indie filmmakers, one that examines the extent to which their editing demonstrates a skillful application of broadly mainstream-conventional norms. *Return of the Secaucus Seven* (1979) is found wanting in some respects, although far from all, while *Baby It’s You* (1983) is judged overall to be more successful. This might at first appear to be an unfair basis on which to evaluate works from the indie sector, but Buckland makes clear that these are not examples that seek to achieve anything alternative at the formal level. The markers of independence in *Return of the Secaucus Seven*, for example, lie in the subject matter and what Buckland terms an artisanal mode of production, not an attempt to achieve formal distinction based on departures from conventional norms. This raises further questions and scope for such an approach to be applied to other examples beyond the remit of this chapter. A sense of indie distinction is quite often created through a general roughness of form, particularly at the lower-budget end of the scale. How far this is a matter of deliberate design, lack of skill, or, equally, lack of resources might remain open to question in many cases. It might be the case that other priorities override that given to the creation of the kind of accomplished technique examined by Buckland – for example in the favoring of scope for improvised performance in some of the varieties of mumblecore considered by Murphy in Chapter 12.

One of the striking features of indie film culture in general that emerges from the various contributions to this volume is how often similar general dynamics are replicated in different instances or periods or at different scales. One persistent dynamic in indie culture is that in which the status of certain forms or manifestations becomes questioned, usually on the basis of leaning too far towards the mainstream in one way or another. This is one of the central themes in Chuck Tryon’s account of online fundraising in Chapter 19, “Crowdfunding, Independence, Authorship,” the first of two chapters in Part Seven, “Kickstarting Indie.” Crowdfunding is viewed here as having offered an increasingly appealing source of funding for indie filmmakers in the early decades of the twenty-first century, at a time when more traditional avenues became ever-more difficult in many cases (one of those cited here as bewailing the state of the latter is John Sayles, the subject of the previous chapter). As a new addition to the indie landscape, however, offering the potential for a more democratic environment, crowdfunding is seen by Tryon as remaining embroiled in many much more familiar indie dynamics. These include the importance in many cases of notions of authorship, as a basis for the appeals made by those seeking funds, and an often

heated discursive policing of the boundaries of what is considered to merit “true” indie status in this terrain.

Tryon details a number of high-profile controversies involving the entry into this arena of already established filmmakers, viewed by some critics as threatening effectively to take this kind of money from those who really need it; those without the kind of reputation to be able to raise funds in other ways. Against this zero-sum notion, in which the gain of one type of filmmaker is seen as the loss of another, Tryon argues for a more positive understanding of those who contribute: as members of an active community who make their own choices about what kinds of media culture to support. Statistics cited in this chapter suggest that larger projects by well-known figures bring new funders to sites such as Kickstarter, some of whom go on to support smaller enterprises as well, thus creating benefit for all. At the same time, however, the dynamics of crowdfunding seem to remain within some of the broader limitations of the more established indie scene, including a distinct favoring of projects from male filmmakers.

A similar sense of emphasis on community and recognition of a combination of benefits and limitations of crowdfunding is found in Chapter 20 by Sarah E.S. Sinwell, “Go Digital or Go Dark: Crowdfunding, Independent Financing, and Arthouse Exhibition on Kickstarter.” The focus shifts here from the funding of films themselves to campaigns employed for the upgrading of arthouse theaters, a key part of the broader indie infrastructure. As Sinwell’s title suggests, arthouses were faced in the second decade of the twenty-first century with the need to convert to digital projection systems or effectively to be forced out of business. A major factor in creating such pressure was the decision of Twentieth Century Fox no longer to distribute in 35 mm, the consequence of which would be that any arthouse that failed to convert would be denied access to the films of its specialty division, Fox Searchlight, a key provider of some of the higher-profile and most commercially desirable indie titles of the time. After establishing this and other aspects of the context of contemporary arthouse exhibition, Sinwell analyses in detail the nature of the promotional materials used by theaters in their efforts to raise funds. This is another dimension in which a particular kind of distinction-making appeal is made to potential members of the indie community, a factor that relates this particular realm (as we have seen with others above) to some of the broader conceptions of indie established in Part One.

One particular emphasis identified by Sinwell is on the notion of community, in discourses that set this quality – the needs of the local and the specific – implicitly in opposition to the association of the multiplex with its homogeneous (and more commercial, mainstream) other. The particular sense of community on offer is, again, in keeping with broader conceptions of indie culture, one that entails an invocation of belonging to a fellowship of cinephiles. The result, as Sinwell reports, has been successful in many cases, enabling numerous arthouses to stave off the threat to their survival and also to benefit financially in other ways. But this is not the case for all such campaigns. This is another aspect of indie that has a distinctly regional dimension, alongside those explored in Part Five, although it is only in particular kinds of regional setting that crowdfunding campaigns have worked. Those which

have benefited from this approach tend to be in urban areas with access to upper- or middle-class constituencies with sufficient investment – and available funds – to support arthouses, rather than in smaller towns or rural areas where such a demographic basis is lacking. Crowdfunding the arthouse is, then, another example of the innovation and investment that can characterize indie culture but also of its limited social constituency.

Dimensions of independence that include relevance to particular communities or constituencies also figure in two of the four cases studies employed by Chris Holmlund in Chapter 21, “Casing Indie Acting,” the first of two contributions to the final section of the book, the focus of which is on acting and stardom in the indie sector. An examination of the careers of Giancarlo Esposito and Lupe Ontiveros illustrates the greater diversity the indie sector has allowed as far as the (actual or perceived) racial or ethnic background of performers is concerned, although Holmlund concludes that the difference here – as we might argue more broadly – is relative rather than absolute, inequity still existing in this part of the film landscape. Esposito and Ontiveros join John Cusack and Michelle Williams as examples chosen to demonstrate various facets of acting in independent film, a dimension that includes the valorization of a number of qualities more broadly associated with the indie field.

Key dimensions of performance highlighted by Holmlund are those that make claims to the status of naturalism (or neonaturalism), modernism, or postmodernism, each of which can be understood as marking distinctions from the approaches usually associated with the mainstream/Hollywood norm. A focus on neonaturalism, including an acting style based on impersonation and transformation, as opposed to typecasting or the showcasing of persona, correlates closely with the wider claims to various kinds of authenticity that figure centrally in indie discourse. Acting that entails elements of modernist distanciation or postmodernist exaggeration and showiness likewise suggests a variety of “artistic” engagement far less likely to be found at the more commercial end of the spectrum. Performances in indie films sometimes combine different such elements, as Holmlund demonstrates, often gaining the kind of critical recognition and awards (or award nominations) that remain so important to the independent sector as a whole.

That indie is best understood as a relational concept and that the boundaries between what it is considered to include or exclude are often blurred or subject to change is an argument found in many of the contributions to this book. This includes the final chapter, Chapter 22, “Flexible Stardom,” by Paul McDonald, which examines a number of dimensions and degrees of independence within stardom, from distinctly indie-only stars to forms of independence that are very much within the orbit of the dominant Hollywood mainstream. McDonald outlines two principal dimensions of stardom of relevance to this context: stardom in commercial terms and that which plays on the symbolic capital of artistic consecration via critical approval and awards. If the former is more obviously aligned with Hollywood and the latter with indies, this is, as McDonald argues, a far from clear-cut distinction, the two sometimes operating in close conjunction.

Stars who gain their status exclusively within the indie sector represent a separate realm of stardom from that of the studios, McDonald suggests, although he also

questions whether or not their scale of success or visibility is really sufficient to merit the term. In many cases, though, including some of the most noted names within indie, star status is attributed to success in films that have crossed over into the realm of the mainstream, either via the studios or their specialty divisions. A case study is provided by the career of Philip Seymour Hoffman, a figure shown to have had a presence in all levels of the space between indie and mainstream blockbuster – and thus to represent more broadly the range of options available in the era of what McDonald terms “flexible stardom.” Hoffman is also a figure, for McDonald, whose brand of stardom entailed a mixture of the difference marked by impersonation and the continuity represented by a degree of personification via his association with particular types of character and/or role. It is here that the chapter identifies a distinct indie leaning, in this case, the physical appearance of Hoffman being one that represents qualities antithetical to conventional notions of movie star glamour.

Overall, the chapters in this Companion offer both a broad and an in-depth analysis of the distinct terrain of what goes under the name of indie in American film. There are, inevitably, more issues and aspects of this part of the film landscape that could have been covered, even in so substantial a collection as this. There are some notable absences, such as chapters with a greater focus on some specific sociocultural domains, such as black or other racially/ethnically defined filmmakers/filmmaking or areas of gender such as films made by women or from an LGBT perspective. I would like to have been able to embrace more, including some of these perspectives as more substantial points of orientation (aspects of some of these issues are picked up in some cases, including for example the dimensions of issues of race and ethnicity in Chapter 21). I have not, largely for reasons of space, but also because of a desire to focus on certain dimensions of indie film in the pages available – and because these are areas that already have bodies of established literature (at least two existing collections on New Queer Cinema, for example, and one recently on women indie filmmakers, co-edited by one of the contributors to this book – Badley, Perkins and Schreiber 2016; some of this territory is also considered in a previous collection I co-edited – King, Molloy and Tzioumakis 2013). This Companion has also been driven to a significant extent by the topics selected by the contributors themselves, although this is clearly partly a self-fulfilling process, depending on whom I approached in the first place. Overall, this volume can make no claims exhaustively to cover all aspects of indie terrain (and I am sure many readers will have their own list of what they consider to be missing). Instead, its main aim is to offer a sustained analysis of indie cinema as a particular region of recent/contemporary American film culture, one elaborated in the earlier chapters and that provides a major point of reference for most of what follows.

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