

**FROM THE CINEMA SCREEN TO THE SMARTPHONE:  
A study of the impact of media convergence on the  
distribution sector of American independent cinema  
2006 – 2010**

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## ABSTRACT

### FROM THE CINEMA SCREEN TO THE SMARTPHONE:

#### A study of the impact of media convergence on the distribution sector of American independent cinema 2006 – 2010

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Film distribution has undoubtedly changed during this contemporary era of media convergence, with a range of innovative practices and methods being adopted across US film and the arrival of new organisations to the industry and distribution sector. This should not suggest that conventional distribution and marketing methods are extinct, or that the traditional gatekeepers of these fields are obsolete. Rather it should indicate a merging of old and new strategies, practices, methods, and organisations, and it is through this fusion of tradition and novelty that today's complex distribution landscape has emerged. At the forefront of many of these changes has been American independent cinema and as such, the central question posed by this thesis is: how has media convergence impacted on the distribution and marketing of American independent cinema, and how can this impact be understood in terms of wider technological, industrial and sociocultural contexts relevant to the current media landscape? In answering this, this thesis provides a comprehensive re-mapping of the distribution sector of American independent cinema, in terms of the distributors involved and methods and strategies through which films are being released, within this contemporary era of media convergence.

This thesis uses the concept of media convergence as a complex and multifaceted lens that has dimensions in the technological, industrial and sociocultural realms, through which recent innovations in film distribution and marketing can be examined.

Underpinning this framework is the adoption of an approach informed by the emergent media industry studies agenda (Holt and Perren, 2009; Hilmes, 2013; and McDonald, 2013). The implementation of this converged method to understanding media industries has allowed for a fluid, diverse and multi-layered assessment of the area under examination. Specifically, the thesis uses Thomas Schatz's (2009) macro and micro level framework to examining film industries in order to identify key trends and industrial practices within American independent cinema (and, to a degree, US film at large),

exploring how they relate to specific films, filmmakers and companies, within a distribution context.

From this a number of key findings have emerged, including:

- The identification of a new industrial structure that has facilitated a form of re-conglomeration of parts of the American independent cinema that is similar to the co-optation of American independent cinema in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- The identification of new, collaborative distribution and marketing strategies being used within American independent cinema that not only seek to connect films with consumers, but also involve them, to varying degrees, in related processes.
- An outline and discussion on how changes within the distribution sector have impacted on film form and consumption practices evident in this era of convergence.

The thesis provides original contributions to knowledge in the fields of American independent cinema and distribution studies at large by: reconceptualising what independent film is within this contemporary period of media convergence; reframing discussions on film distribution to be more inclusive and less elitist in their scope; providing new methodological approaches to understanding the wider workings of film distribution and marketing; and demonstrating how distribution studies can be utilised to understand innovations within the fields of film production and exhibition.

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## INTRODUCTION

### WHERE IS CINEMA? FILM AS A CROSS-PLATFORM PRODUCT

One of the most prominent figures in early film theory, André Bazin, posed the question, “What is cinema?”, throughout a number of his essays in the 1950s<sup>1</sup>. Since the dawn of the millennium, this ontological enquiry has returned to the forefront of film studies as film has undergone dramatic change as part of an evolving media landscape dominated by discussions of convergence. Within this media environment, the way film is both defined and studied are being rethought. Traditional film theory and long-held beliefs about film may not necessarily be adequate in this contemporary climate. Writing about this, Anne Friedberg suggests that the concepts of both film history and spectatorship need to be reconceptualised due to technological developments (2000: 278), and that film as a “discrete object...[is becoming]...an endangered species” (2000: 277). Echoing Friedberg’s sentiment but without the melancholy undertones, Lisa Cartwright described how film is “disintegrating into – or integrating with – other media” as part of this contemporary wave of media convergence (2002: 417). *Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema* also adds to this discussion through reconsidering the relationship between film and the movie theatre (Koch et al, 2012: 6).

This body of work, underpinned both directly and indirectly by the question “what is cinema?”, suggests that over recent years film has undergone a paradigmatic shift at technological, industrial and sociocultural levels. Film is no longer being seen as (and perhaps never was) an autonomous medium in which images are recorded onto celluloid, developed and then projected onto a screen in a theatre for an audience to watch. Instead, film has transformed into a cross-platform product that is becoming increasingly fluid and mobile as it merges with other media forms. Nowadays we consume films in various ways, from watching films in the cinema to viewing the latest blockbuster on a smartphone. Media convergence has been central to creating the conditions in which these changes have occurred.

Yet rather than focusing on what film is or has become, perhaps it is more productive to pursue a topological query, “where is cinema?”. Given that the contemporary media environment is synonymous with “mobile media, ubiquitous screens and moving images on the move”, Vinzenz Hediger proposes that investigating the

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Gray translated a number of Bazin’s work into English in *What Is Cinema? Volume One* (1968) and *What Is Cinema? Volume Two* (1972). The essays in these collections were translated from *Que-est-ce que le Cinéma?*, originally published by Editions du Cerf. Translated versions of Bazin’s work have also

location of cinema is of paramount importance (2012: 61). This has resonance with Victor Burgin's argument that scholars need to re-examine cinema's position because of the plethora of fragmented ways consumers now encounter film (2012: 93). The present day physical (and metaphysical) place of film is an area that film scholarship needs to explore due to film's increased dispersion between movie-theatres, our homes and our pockets. This breaking of the boundaries of the physical space occupied by film is not a recent phenomenon, but today's enhanced portability of film content and on-the-go viewing practices do represent a significant shift in film consumption trends.

Fundamental to the changes in film exhibition that have reinvigorated this questioning of film's location, have been developments in distribution. Distribution plays a vital role in connecting films with consumers. When this study refers to the distribution sector it is referring to the industry sector that operates between and connects the production and exhibition arenas, encompassing distribution strategies, methods and logistics, licensing and marketing operations. A myriad of organisations operate within this sector, each providing key functions and services that get films to sites of exhibition and thus connect them with consumers. First are the film distributors; these companies generally purchase the rights to a film across specific territories (i.e. geographical locations) and different outlets (i.e. theatrical, DVD, etc.), coordinating its release across them. Companies such as Fox Searchlight, Magnolia Pictures, Regent Releasing and Wildcat Releasing are all examples of film distributors, despite varying in their industrial position, size and operations. Furthermore, some distributors, as exemplified by Fox Searchlight, also operate within the realms of film production, distributing their own self-produced films as well as ones they have purchased the rights to. In recent years, aggregators such as New Video, bitMAX and Distribber, who are a third parties that negotiate deals between filmmakers/companies and various online/digital platforms such as iTunes and Netflix, have emerged. The aggregator's role within distribution is similar to that of a sales agent, they have a pre-existing relationship with digital platforms and vet titles before they go on sale on them (Weiler, 2008). The aggregator usually takes responsibility for converting files ready for each specific platform, providing the platform with the necessary marketing components (e.g. trailer, image etc.) and also collecting the revenue for the filmmaker/production company (Ravid and Candler, 2014). Aggregators are in some ways akin to distributors in that they are the middlemen between film production companies and sites of exhibitions, and in some instances

distributors will have their own direct relationship with digital platforms that negate the need for an aggregator (ibid).

Within the marketing realm of the distribution sector more varieties of companies exist. Whilst some of the marketing (i.e. the production and/or dissemination of content and campaigns) for a film's release may be completed by a distributor's in-house marketing team, a large proportion of such activity is commissioned to other companies such as marketing agencies like New Wave Entertainment. New Wave Entertainment were commissioned by Magnolia Home Entertainment – a sister company of Magnolia Pictures – to produce the DVD/Blu-Ray for the release of *The Last Days on Mars* (Robinson, 2013) into the US home entertainment market (New Wave Entertainment – *The Last Days on Mars*, 2015). This included the menu design, compression and authoring of the DVD (ibid). Additionally, New Wave Entertainment also provides trailer editing and print design services for films and television programmes. There are also companies, such as A Big Trailer, that specialise in editing film trailers. These companies are often referred to as 'trailer houses'. A Big Trailer was responsible for the production of the trailer for *Despicable Me 2* (Coffin and Renaud, 2013), and the TV spot for *Mama* (Muschiatti, 2013) (A Big Trailer – Our Work, 2015); both of which were distributed in the US by Universal Pictures. More recently, companies that specialise in the online and mobile marketing arenas have emerged. These digital agencies provide services such as social media and mobile-optimised marketing campaigns. HipCricket – formerly Augme Technologies – for example, provides mobile advertising services for a range of industries including the film industry. As Chapter Three explores, this agency was commissioned by Lionsgate to deliver an innovative digital marketing campaign that promoted the release of *For Colored Girls* (Perry, 2010).

The recent innovations in distribution, namely the various incarnations of digital delivery and marketing opportunities as briefly mentioned above, underpin and support the increasingly varied ways that consumers now encounter film. Yet despite this, this area has received relatively little scholarly attention. Alisa Perren notes that the academic work that has been conducted on media distribution has a lack of "thematic consistency" but in general, two points are clear (2013a: 165): First, distribution is discussed less than the production and exhibition sectors; and second, digitalisation has had a substantial impact on media distribution (ibid). The majority of work in this area generally discusses changes in film distribution as part of larger studies on the impact of convergence or technological developments in film. This work has revolved primarily



around the discussion of digital distribution methods (see Allen, 2003 and Keane, 2007). These studies have not necessarily been technologically deterministic, but they have foregrounded the technological aspects of these developments, while paying little attention to their industrial and sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, recent studies on film marketing are few and far between; the noticeable exception is Finola Kerrigan's *Film Marketing* (2010). Whilst Kerrigan provides a comprehensive account of contemporary film marketing strategies and links them effectively to their historical roots and the current media landscape, the study is perhaps too broad to fully engage with more intricate discussions about why new practices have emerged or older practices developed. Such discussions are vital if film scholarship is to meet the challenges that this emergent environment is presenting.

There is small but growing body of studies – such as Ramon Lobato's *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* (2012), Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham's edited collection, *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line* (2012), Chuck Tryon's *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies* (2013) and Henry Jenkins, Joshua Green and Sam Ford's *Spreadable Media: Creating Meaning and Value in a Networked Culture* (2013) – that have begun to address this gap in literature and look beyond technological change<sup>2</sup>. These studies look at the messier and less quantifiable ways in which film and media distribution has evolved. It is within this growing area of research that *From the Cinema Screen to the Smartphone: A Study of the Impact of Media Convergence on the Distribution Sector of American Independent Cinema 2006 – 2010* situates itself. As Chapter One will discuss, the 'category' – if one can use that term – of American independent cinema is fluid in its definition and can have differing connotations dependent on the line of enquiry taken and the historical context. This fluidity means that American independent cinema can contain a diverse array of films<sup>3</sup>. These films are currently being distributed in a multitude of ways, from being released theatrically on thousands of screens to being shared across social media platforms. Furthermore, recent innovations in distribution and marketing methods have been heralded by commentators such as Peter Broderick (2008) as a "new world" in which independent filmmakers have more power and control over how their films are released than in previous decades. As such, American independent cinema makes an

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter Two provides extended discussion on the literature surrounding film distribution, with Chapter Three providing a similar review on marketing.

<sup>3</sup> The methodology for selecting the film corpus for this thesis and the thesis's understanding of what American independent cinema is, are detailed later.

ideal case study for examining the impact of media convergence on film distribution. This should not suggest that Hollywood has not witnessed, embraced and even tried to counteract changes in the distribution field, but rather acknowledge how independent film has tended to be a forerunner of these changes that are then sometimes co-opted in more mainstream arenas. Therefore, although this thesis looks specifically at American independent cinema, it should not indicate that the distribution and marketing activities examined are exclusive to this area.

Despite American independent cinema's suitability as a case study for this type of research, there is relatively little scholarship that has used it. Writing in 2005, Patricia Zimmerman argued that independent film "needs to be rethought of as a form of cinema that moves across different platforms and through different audiences and economies, rather than a static model of a feature-length film on celluloid that plays in theatres and film festivals" (2005: 214). Playing a pivotal role in enabling this movement is distribution, yet since Zimmerman's essay the plenitude of recent studies emerging on American independent cinema<sup>4</sup> have had a minimal amount to say on this subject. There are, however, a handful of exceptions which include Geoff King's *Indie 2.0: Change and Continuity in Contemporary Indie Film* (2014) and Yannis Tzioumakis's journal article, 'Reclaiming Independence: American Independent Cinema Distribution and Exhibition Practices beyond Indiewood' (2012a). Work such as this has started to tackle some of the issues surrounding the ways in which American independent cinema is distributed and marketed across different platforms, but there is still substantial terrain left uncovered.

It is the aim of *From the Cinema Screen to the Smartphone* to reduce this gap in research by posing the central question: How has media convergence impacted on the distribution and marketing of American independent cinema and how can this impact be understood in terms of wider technological, industrial and sociocultural contexts relevant to the current media landscape? In doing this, this thesis will provide a comprehensive re-mapping of the distribution sector of American independent cinema, in terms of the distributors involved and methods and strategies through which films are being released, within this contemporary era of media convergence, and thus locate its own niche within the ever-expanding canon of research being produced on independent film. Furthermore, the thesis will provide original contributions to research by reconceptualising what independent film is in a converged media landscape, reframing discussions around film

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter One provides a literature review on American independent cinema.

distribution, providing new methodological approaches to examining independent film within this context, and exploring how changes in the distribution sector have impacted on the fields of film production and exhibition. To do this, the thesis will approach media convergence as a multifaceted concept, using it as a lens through which changes in the distribution sector of American independent cinema can be examined. With this in mind, the remainder of this introduction will provide a brief overview of the impact of media convergence on US film, before moving onto a literature review on media convergence. It will then outline the study's methodological approach, before concluding with a summary of its structure.

### **A (very) brief overview of media convergence and US film**

Early discourses on this contemporary period of media convergence, specifically in reference to media production, referred to a “digital revolution” that had apparently swept through media industries. However, as Tony Feldman suggests, the move to digital media production is nowadays being perceived as “a process of evolution” (2007: 1). With a similar perspective, Brian Winston writes, “[w]hat is hyperbolised as a revolutionary train of events can be seen as a far more evolutionary and less transforming process” (1998: 1). Therefore, while there have been significant changes within the film landscape, one must not to assume that everything about the film industry has changed, or will change, as a result of contemporary media convergence. Articulating this sentiment, Tim Dwyer suggests that media convergence is a process rather than a radical shift in which “new technologies are accommodated by existing media and communication industries and cultures” (2010: 2). The term “accommodated” signifies that the emergence of new technologies has not changed *everything* about the pre-existing media landscape; instead it indicates that old and new practices, technologies, industrial formations and cultures have converged. Consequently, the impact of media convergence on US film should be written about as a developing process in which old and new coexist, converge and in *some* cases, replace one another.

Since the early 1990s, the majority of Hollywood films shot on film were digitised for post-production, and then exported back out onto 35mm as film for exhibition (Willis, 2005: 3). Therefore, rather than film production suddenly changing from celluloid to digital formats, what has actually occurred, as Stephen Keane notes, is a “transition from analogue to digital processes” (2007: 1). During this transitional period numerous trends have emerged, which include:

- An increase in the number of films being recorded digitally.
- Editing being most frequently undertaken on digital, non-linear editing software.
- The rise of digital effects in films and the use of computer-generated images.
- The adoption of digital sound recording.

Looking at the motivations behind the move towards digital processes, John Belton (2002) outlines how they were primarily economically driven. Digital processes simultaneously had the potential to reduce costs and allow technology brands to market new technologies to consumers, and thus attempt to increase sales (2002: 100 – 103). In previous decades, technologies such as Technicolor or CinemaScope were used to attract filmgoers back to the cinema when television was seen as a competitor. This same logic underpins the marketing of digital technologies (such as the resurgence of 3D) to film consumers nowadays, but this time the competitors are ‘new media’ technologies, such as video games and the Internet.

While digital production processes are used by all sectors of the US film industry, they are significantly pertinent to independent companies and D.I.Y. filmmakers, as the increasing affordability of digital hardware and software has made film production more accessible. The development of cheaper technologies/materials for producing films is not new in itself; post-digitisation both 9.5mm and 16mm stock were cheaper alternatives to 35mm. However, technologies such as non-professional digital camcorders and smartphones, coupled with home editing software such as iMovie and Windows Movie Maker, have enhanced access to filmmaking tools considerably. So although, as Holly Willis describes, many commentators have heralded digital video as the death of “real film”, many others perceive it as opening up avenues via which new or underrepresented ‘voices’ can be heard (2005: 1). In line with this, a reinvigorated D.I.Y. culture of film production has emerged.

This technological context has impacted on the type of content that can be considered to be ‘film’. From 90-second shorts shot and edited on smartphones, to Hollywood blockbusters, digital production and post-production techniques have infiltrated all sectors of the filmmaking spectrum, and as such the term ‘film’ has very different connotations in different contexts. The ontological discussion of what film is, is not something that this study is overly concerned with. If people choose to label user-generated videos as films then they have just as much right to be considered as such, as a feature film being projected in a theatre would. In this sense, this study is far more

concerned with “where is cinema?” and the strategies and methods used to disseminate all forms of film.

Regardless of what form a film takes, the commonality between them is that their primary purpose is to connect with an audience<sup>5</sup> and thus, be exhibited. The traditional and perhaps most prestigious site of film exhibition has been the cinema screen and even this has not escaped the reach of media convergence. Over recent years, digital projection systems have been installed in a significant number of theatres, but their uptake, in the US, was initially slow because of the “battle over who would finance the installation of digital projection equipment” (Tryon, 2009: 65). In 2005, this wrangling was subdued with the major studios establishing “a financial arrangement that would help underwrite the cost of converting to digital projection” for some US cinemas (ibid). According to Tryon, the transition to digital projection was less clear for small independent theatres because as they had fewer screens than multiplexes, the cost of converting each screen increased (2009: 66).

Despite these issues, the *2010 MPAA Theatrical Statistics* report found that the number of digital screens in the US had “more than doubled” since the previous year, resulting in digital screens accounting for 40% of the total US cinema screens (2010:15)<sup>6</sup>. The benefits of this include the potential of digital projection to provide “more flexible film schedules”, the provision for “simultaneous event screenings with remote locations” and the preservation of “the opening-night print quality of a film” (Tryon, 2009:6). Michael Allen suggests that “[p]rints using digital sound tend to last far longer than those that do not, because there is less degradation of sound quality across repeated use” (2003: 223). Despite this, Belton argues that digital projection and sound offer nothing new for film audiences and argues that “digital cinema is a revolutionary technological innovation for filmmakers...[and] it is also a potential boon – in the form of cost saving – for film distributors” (2002: 107). Whilst Belton maybe right in suggesting that the theatrical experience has not really changed because of digital projection and sound, such technological developments may impact on the types of films that people see in a theatre. Between 2009 and 2010 the number of films released by distributors who were not one of the major studios (or a specialty division of a studio), increased by

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘audience’ is a problematic as it can mean different things depending on what media form is being discussed and its potential to oversimplify the representation of a group of consumers (Burton, 2005: 83). Consequently, it is being used here in its broadest sense to refer to an individual person, a mass group of people, or sub-groups of people who access, use, or otherwise ‘consume’ film content.

<sup>6</sup> This trend has continued; in 2013, 93% of cinema screen in the US and Canada were digital, with 37% of these being 3D equipped (MPAA, 2013: 6).

5%, whilst films released by the studios themselves dropped by 6% and films released by their specialty divisions reduced by 21% (MPAA, 2010: 13). Whether this increase in the theatrical releasing of certain types of independent films (and the decrease in other types of films) can be linked to the upsurge in digital projection facilities requires further research, but there are signs of an initial correlation; the 2013 statistics, for example, depict a similar trend to the 2010 report (MPAA, 2013: 22).

While, digital projection may make it cheaper for independent filmmakers to distribute their films due to the difference in cost between the traditional 35mm prints of films and their digital counterparts, it also, as Tryon states:

...[allows] exhibitors to shut down at a moment's notice a poorly performing film and to replace it with a more popular one, potentially reinforcing the blockbuster logic of Hollywood and by extension placing even further emphasis on theatres as sites designed primarily for the reception of those films (2009:6).

Consequently, 'smaller' films that build up an audience over numerous weeks due to the spread of positive word-of-mouth are being removed from theatres almost instantly, and this reduces the chance of a film becoming a 'sleeper hit'.

Outside of theatrical exhibition, we have seen an enhanced mobility of film exhibition and consumption. The roots of this can be traced back to the initial domestication of film in the late 1940s with the introduction of television and developed further in the 1970s with the launch of VHS. At the time, rhetoric emerged suggesting that the theatrical exhibition of film would become obsolete. Yet decades later, there are still large numbers of theatres still operating. Consequently, rather than an obliteration of cinema-going, television and VHS together have brought about "new forms of access to the filmic experience" (Casetti, 2009: 62). Alongside this, there has been an emphasis from Hollywood on releasing blockbuster and event films that continue to draw consumers into cinemas. While the format of VHS has now become all but obsolete, what is still evident is a strong culture of domestic film consumption that was proliferated with the launch of DVD and Blu-Ray. Nowadays, a number of technological developments have emerged that have enabled consumers to engage with film content in a variety of new locations and ways. This migratory nature of film is symptomatic of wider media trends; for example, gaming has gone mobile with devices such as the Sony Playstation Portable and through apps. Film however, as Ekkehard Knörer suggests, has always been nomadic in the sense that copies of films have been sent out to theatres to be projected (2012: 169). Therefore, the portability of film has been in development

practically since the medium's inception<sup>7</sup>, but over recent years its migratory nature has intensified, resulting in film being "no longer located and locatable in a single place" (ibid).

Viewing any of these changes in the arena of film exhibition (and media consumption practices at large) as being purely motivated by technological development, simplifies the situation greatly<sup>8</sup>. Instead these changes have been brought about by both technological and social developments. Writing about the domestication of film, Francesco Casetti suggests that the "transformation of the experience of film...occurs not only because of the pressure of the technological revolution...but also because there is a new cultural scenario with which cinema must engage" (2009: 63). Discussing the relationship between technology and society in broader terms, Winston has argued that technological change is generally pre-dated by social factors, stating that "there is nothing in the histories of electrical and electronic communication systems to indicate that significant major changes have not been accommodated by existing social functions" (1998: 2). What both authors argue, is that the relationship between technology and how society uses it, cannot be written about with cause-and-effect logic. Rather, the relationship between them is more complex, and as such, should be discussed in a multifaceted way.

Underpinning (and fundamental to) all forms of exhibition is distribution. Essentially, in order for a film to be exhibited, distribution must occur. Distribution's function as a connection between production and exhibition makes it the "linchpin of the entire industry" (Kunz, 2007: 112). With production and exhibition showing numerous signs of the impact of media convergence, it is unsurprising that distribution has not escaped its reach. Recently, numerous tendencies have emerged in film distribution, including, but not limited to:

- The implementation of digital distribution practices (e.g. streaming, digital downloads etc.) and marketing strategies (e.g. QR codes, 'viral' campaigns).
- An increased visibility and viability of non-theatrical distribution models (e.g. online distribution) and the usage of new marketing avenues (e.g. social media).

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<sup>7</sup> Drawing on work from Ben Singer, Barbara Klinger describes how "[o]nly two years after Edison's Kinetoscope appeared in 1894, manufacturers began producing projectors intended for use in the home and in other off-theatre sites" (2006: 6).

<sup>8</sup> Publications such as Charles Swartz (2005), Glenn Kennel (2007) and Lars Svanberg (2013) – to varying degrees – adopt this approach.

- The entry of new companies and platforms into the distribution field (e.g. YouTube, Amazon, iTunes) and marketing arena (e.g. Twitter, Facebook).
- A reinvigoration of D.I.Y. and grassroots distribution models and marketing strategies.

These changes however, should not suggest that conventional distribution and marketing methods are extinct, or that the traditional gatekeepers in these fields are obsolete. Indeed, quite the contrary is true. What is taking place is a convergence of old and new strategies, practices, methods, and organisations, and it is through this co-existence, and fusion of tradition and novelty that today's distribution environment is being constructed. Echoing Feldman's (2007) statement about the incorporation of digital technologies into media production, this process of change within the distribution sector is an evolution, rather than a revolution.

Major studios and D.I.Y. filmmakers alike are still working out the rules of this environment. Innovative distribution methods and marketing strategies are being tested out and the ones that do not produce the desired results are being rethought. The frameworks that previously governed traditional notions of distribution and marketing are being renegotiated, restructured and reorganised, but perhaps the most interesting aspect of recent innovations is that such changes are not just being played out before film consumers, but *with* them. Such changes are not only a real 'game-changer' for organisations operating at the top of the film industry hierarchy, but perhaps more meaningfully so for those who exist at the bottom. D.I.Y. filmmakers and associated organisations are learning how to use novel distribution and marketing strategies to connect their films with consumers and in doing so, are often bypassing the traditional gatekeepers of distribution.

In previous decades, distribution has been a challenge for certain independent filmmakers. In the US film industry, major studios and larger independent companies have had a stranglehold on distribution, as they have been the organisations with the finances, reach and industry contacts to provide distribution in a market that was dominated by theatrical releasing. With the striking and delivery of prints currently costing around \$1000 (Stewart and Cohen, 2013), not to mention advertising costs, the likelihood of a small independent company or filmmaker having the finances available to release a film in numerous theatres across the US is very slim. However, this situation has changed due to the impact of media convergence. It is anticipated that satellite theatrical distribution of films could reduce costs to just \$100 per film (ibid).



Furthermore, while there have been other markets than the theatrical one for some time – such as television and straight-to-video – the Internet has transformed the situation further. As Jordanova argues, the Internet has created a situation in which D.I.Y filmmakers “have at their disposal the means to access previously distant audiences...sufficient to provide the modest revenue needed to keep going” (2012: 7). Independent companies have been at the forefront of exploiting these possibilities, with films such as *Rethink Afghanistan* (Greenwald, 2009) and *10mph* (Weeks, 2007), utilising the Internet to bypass the traditional gatekeepers of distribution and to market their films. Specifically, independent filmmakers and small-scale independent film companies have harnessed new communication methods associated with Web 2.0 to connect with consumers and encourage them to not only actively engage in their production, but also their distribution, marketing and exhibition. However, despite such change, conventional forms of distribution and marketing are still widely adopted, and it is this coexistence that makes contemporary film distribution such a fruitful research area.

### **Discussing media convergence: A three-stranded approach**

Throughout the last decade, media scholars, as well as academics working in other areas, have discussed the concept of media convergence widely. Since its publication, Jenkins', *Convergence Culture: When Old and New Media Collide* (2006) has informed a significant proportion of this discussion, alongside his earlier essays (2004a, 2004b). As such Jenkins' work seems an apt starting point for this review. Jenkins suggests that convergence culture is a space in which “old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (2006: 2). In this environment, binary oppositions such as ‘old’ and ‘new’, “grassroots” and “corporate”, and “producer” and “consumer” are engaging, borrowing, and ultimately converging with each other, thus differentiating this period of convergence from older ones. Jenkins' approach views media convergence as involving “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go to almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (ibid). This statement highlights convergence's multidimensional nature across three distinct strands – technological (the flow of content), industrial (dialogue between industries) and sociocultural (the emerging consumption practices).

Echoing this, other scholars have also discussed media convergence as a multifaceted phenomenon. Virginia Nightingale suggests that media convergence concerns the ways in which “technological, industrial, cultural and social changes” have impacted on the circulation of media (2007: 20) and Dwyer describes how media convergence has “a number of distinct levels including cultural, industrial, technological or regulatory levels” (2010: 5). Where Jenkins’ writings on convergence differ from these studies is that he proposes a hierarchy between these different expressions. For Jenkins, media convergence is primarily a “cultural shift” in which “consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (2006: 3); the technological and industrial manifestations of convergence are secondary. In assuming a hierarchy between the different strands, it is possible to overlook how the strands relate to and impact on one another. Consequently the pecking order Jenkins imposes is arguably artificial, and using it to analyse contemporary media convergence is not necessarily productive<sup>9</sup>. Instead, this thesis presumes each key strand of media convergence – namely industrial, technological and sociocultural – to be of equal importance and argues that these strands exist in a plait-like form. Essentially, a plait is a constant and perpetual overlaying of one strand over another to create a chain and this analogy aptly describes the interlocking of industrial practices, technological developments and consumer interactions embodied within the contemporary media landscape. This understanding is more akin to Dwyer’s (2010) and Nightingale’s (2007) conceptualisations, and the remainder of this literature review will discuss these strands, exploring how they interlink with one another.

In terms of technological convergence, it is digitalisation that is central to facilitating the convergence “between different media” (Henten and Tadayoni, 2008: 45). At the heart of digitalisation, Anders Henten and Reza Tadayoni suggest, is the Internet as “it is unquestionably the most important common technological platform for the convergence between different kinds of communication and media industries” (ibid). The Internet is “a distribution system for information” (Küng, Picard and Towse, 2008: 3) and it has played a significant role in enabling traditional forms of media content to be exhibited and consumed in new ways. This convergence of new digital practices and traditional media is central to the success of portable media players. Devices such as the

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<sup>9</sup> What Jenkins’ hierarchy does achieve, is distancing his work from earlier writings on media convergence that overlooked sociocultural contributions to the phenomenon (see Collins, 1996, Doyle, 2002, Feldman, 1999). Jenkins’ hierarchy was perhaps motivated by a desire to reframe scholarship’s approach to media convergence at the time.

iPod, according to Matt Hills, are perhaps the clearest depictions of convergence at work as on them the “interfaces and intersections of different media technologies are perhaps most visible” (2009: 107).

Yet, as Jenkins notes, it is important not to perceive convergence in relation to specific hardware, instead “convergence is a paradigm shift – a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels” (2006: 254). For example, despite being able to consume all kinds of media content on smartphones – from films to newspapers – this has not yet led to the demise of cinemas, the printed press and other traditional mediums. In reference to this, Nightingale argues that technological convergence is “changing the shape and contours of contemporary mediascapes, but far from the media world becoming simplified as a result, it has become increasingly complex” (2007: 20). She suggests that “[r]ather than concentrating media in one device, the current expression of convergence addresses multiple devices, wireless access and continuous connectivity to individually preferred networks of personal and work contacts, and leisure and entertainment resources” (ibid). Yet Peter Forman and Robert W. Saint John argue that the goal of media convergence is “the union of audio, video and data communications into a single source, received on a single device, delivered by a single connection” (2000: 50). Jenkins refers to this “goal” as the “Black Box Fallacy”, which describes the argument that “[s]ooner or later...all media content is going to flow through a single black box” (2006: 14). However, as Jenkins correctly observes, rather than one product that delivers all media content, nowadays an array of devices exist that provide access to various combinations of media content (2006: 15). With this in mind, Nightingale usefully defines technological convergence as “a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them” (2007: 20).

Forman and Saint John’s stance, on-the-other hand, adopts a technologically deterministic<sup>10</sup> understanding of convergence; an approach that has become largely outdated. The authors perceive convergence as having three categories; “content (audio, video and data); platforms (PC, TV, Internet appliance, and game machine); and distribution (how the content gets to your platform)” (2000: 50). While these three subsections do exist within the umbrella of convergence, perceiving convergence only in terms of technological considerations overlooks how they work with industrial and

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<sup>10</sup> This view suggests that technologies are “causal agents, entering societies as active forces of change that humans have little power to resist” (Baym, 2010: 24). In short, technological determinism assumes a one-way cause-and-effect logic in which technology affects society.

sociocultural factors. When discussing the launch of an “enhanced” version of the television game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (1999 – 2002) in which viewers could “play along on their PC while they watch the show on TV”, Forman and Saint John do acknowledge how Disney-owned ABC Television worked in conjunction with its corporate sibling *Go.com* on the venture, yet this is side-lined (as is the sociocultural context that the product was released in), in favour of exploring the technologies that enabled its creation (2000: 51). What this article depicts is a one-dimensional discussion, overlooking – as Dwyer argues – that “[c]onvergence is never just a technological process” (2010: 8).

Industrial convergence, specifically at an ownership level, is key to facilitating the cross-platform flow of media content (Murray, 2005: 417). A fundamental manifestation of industrial convergence is corporate convergence – a process in which “companies from one sector acquire or start new ones in another of the converging industries” (Küng et al, 2008: 4)<sup>11</sup>. The structure of the six major multinational conglomerates (Time Warner, News Corp., Sony Corporation, The Walt Disney Company, Viacom, and Comcast) and their diversified interest across multiple entertainment industries, enables them to control much of the global entertainment markets. Jenkins describes this trend as “alarming” because it has concentrated ownership, resulting in “a small handful of multinational media conglomerates dominating all sectors of the entertainment industry” (2004a: 33). Related to this is the concept of co-option, which is a “process in which popular countercultural forms (especially youth subculture fashions) are commodified by the culture industries” (Chandler and Munday, 2011). News Corp.’s 2005 purchasing of the MySpace exemplifies this (BBC News – News Corp. Profits Fall, 2011). Furthermore, co-option also occurs when mainstream media companies imitate the production, distribution and exhibition practice of alternative media products in order to commercialise them. As Chapter One details, the creation of specialty film divisions, such as Fox Searchlight and Paramount Vantage, by major studios co-opted certain attributes of independent film, ranging from aesthetics to distribution strategies. The situation is perceived to have reduced competition, ultimately decreasing the number of alternative or ‘independent’ voices present in mainstream media. Whilst elements of this argument are true, there are ways in which industrial convergence (to a certain degree) supports

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<sup>11</sup> Numerous partnerships, contracts and mutually beneficial deals have also emerged to support the flow of media content across different platforms, while simultaneously allowing each organisation to operate independently of one another. An example of this is the corporate relationship between Warner Bros. (a subsidiary of TIME Warner) and online retailer, Amazon Studios, discussed further in Chapter Two.

independent media. As Chapter Two explores, some film festivals and independent distributors have adopted similar structures in order to support independent film.

The logic of synergy underpins many forms of industrial convergence. Synergy, according to Paul Grainge, is “a principle of cross-promotion whereby companies seek to integrate and disseminate their products through a variety of media and consumer channels, enabling ‘brands’ to travel through an integrated corporate structure” (2008: 10). This process is evident in The Walt Disney Company’s *Alice in Wonderland* products. *Alice in Wonderland* (Burton, 2010) was produced by Walt Disney Pictures (a subsidiary company of Walt Disney Studios), was also made into a theme park ride at the Disneyland Resort and had related merchandise (e.g. jewellery and clothing) sold through the online and offline Disney stores. Despite The Walt Disney Company being an anomaly in terms of how the six multinational media conglomerates formed<sup>12</sup>, it has none the less become “probably the most synergistic of the Hollywood majors” (Wasko, 2003: 64). The present day corporate structure of the Walt Disney Company allows for distribution of its ‘brands’ across various outlets and mediums. Through exploiting their ownership of different companies operating across various industries, conglomerates like The Walt Disney Company have learned “how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities” (Jenkins, 2004a: 37). Whilst economic motivations underpin these synergistic activities, it is also important to understand how these trends have supported the emergence of new storytelling and consumption practices, as examined in Chapter Four.

These discussions are more related to sociocultural convergence that underpins the varied ways that media consumers now consume, use, circulate and produce media content. A crucial part of this discussion is what Jenkins (2006) has termed “participatory culture”, within which the roles of media producers and consumers conflate with both sides, interacting “with one another according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understand” (2006: 3). In a co-authored article with Green, Jenkins reviews the different conceptualisations of media consumers in contemporary convergence culture, from Betsy Frank’s (2004) “media actives” (young people who want to shape their media worlds more so than their parents’ generation) to Grant McCracken’s (2005) notion of “multipliers” (media consumers who are now responsible for the partial shaping of brands) (Frank, 2004; McCracken, 2005; paraphrased in Green and Jenkins,

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<sup>12</sup> The other major studios were all acquired by conglomerates, whereas The Walt Disney Company transformed itself into a conglomerate from the film studio Walt Disney Pictures.

2009: 216). This review leads the authors to the conclusion that although these understandings of consumers have affiliations with the concept of the active audience that was prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s (see Hall, 1973; Blumler & Katz, 1974; Morley, 1980), today's consumer and the media environment they are in is distinctly different (2009: 216). They suggest that today's consumers have different motivations, different resources and operate in a different relationship with media producers than audiences from previous decades (ibid). While consumers have always been involved in the production of media content (to certain degrees) – from participating in test screenings to being guests on talk shows – over the last decade or so, convergence has opened up further avenues for participation.

One of these is the revitalised D.I.Y. culture of media production, facilitated by digitalisation and the widening availability of the Internet. Writing about the role that digital tools have played in this culture, Jenkins suggests that:

...new media technologies have lowered production and distribution costs, expanded the range of available delivery channels and enabled consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content in powerful new ways (2004a: 33).

With increased accessibility, affordability and feasibility of media production, distribution and exhibition, a digital D.I.Y. culture has emerged in which consumers are using technologies not only to produce their own content, but to share and discuss it. In response to this, has been “the development of a market for ‘prosumer’ technologies” that are aimed at both ‘professional’ and ‘consumer’ content producers (Lister et al, 2009: 34). For Jenkins, this type of creativity is a form of “grassroots convergence” that represents the “increasingly central roles that digitally empowered consumers play in shaping the production, distribution and reception of media content” (2004b: 166).

While Jenkins is correct in identifying how consumers are increasingly becoming more involved in the production, distribution and exhibition of media content, his decision to assign consumers an almost central role in the media landscape is questionable. Numerous inequalities exist between multinational media conglomerates and individual consumers. As Jonathan Gray suggests, this type of “You-topian” rhetoric should be treated with some scepticism (2010: 164). He writes:

Much of the hoopla surrounding Web 2.0's multiple sharing sites, such as YouTube, My Space, and Facebook, has focused on how they challenge corporate culture and logic, opening up cultural production, authorship, and distribution to

seemingly anyone. In the face of such excited rhetoric though, we must remember that “You” often excludes all of those on the other side of the digital divide who do not own computers with editing software and high-speed Internet service. Also, media multi-nationals frequently have considerably more time and resources than “You” to produce, publicise, and circulate [media content] (ibid).

Although technological advances have lowered the barriers to media production and opened up new opportunities in terms of distribution and exhibition, the control, influence and dominance of the media landscape has not yet been taken out of the hands of the aforementioned media conglomerates and other, large media companies. Distinct inequalities *still* exist in terms of finances, time, resources and skills between large media organisations and grassroots producers. Furthermore, some of the tools consumers use to create and share media content, are owned by the types of media organisations that these practices are assumed to be subverting. As Janet Wasko and Mary Erikson note, social media platforms are being used by corporations to “translate potential captive audiences into advertising revenue” (2009: 377).

The scenario outlined here should also not suggest that people have suddenly become creative. As David Gauntlett writes, “people have been making things – and thinking about the meaning of making things – for a very long time” (2011: 1). Rather than generating a sudden rush of creativity, digital technologies have instead provided opportunities for new types of creativity and the Internet has increased the visibility of these forms of creativity. Motivations to create in order to connect with others existed prior to this contemporary era of convergence, yet it is new sociocultural communication practices (social media, blogging etc.) that enable such connections to exist across wider geographies.

In recent years new online platforms have emerged – from social media to applications such as Skype – through which people can connect with one another. These technologies are generally referred to under the umbrella term Web 2.0, and have facilitated the development of new media consumption practices, such as live-tweeting whilst watching TV programmes or participating in forum discussions about films. Yet whilst technology has played an enabling role, it must not be overlooked that consumers choose the ways in which they use these technologies. Furthermore, these ‘new’ consumption practices are generally predated by existing social practices in the offline world; online discussions of media on social media platforms are akin to workplace ‘water-cooler’ interactions (see Hanna et al, 2011, Zhao and Rosson, 2009). Therefore, it

is perhaps apt to perceive Web 2.0, as Annie Green and Michael Stankosky do, as a concept that converges both technological and social dimensions (2010: 235).

What has become apparent through this discussion of media convergence is that none of the three key strands operate independently of one another and are instead interconnected. Technological, industrial and sociocultural expressions of media convergence are not unconnected practices but rather interdependent processes and the strand that predominates is dependent on the perspective of enquiry that is taken. This understanding of media convergence is broadly akin to social shaping conceptualisations of the relationship between technology and society. As Nancy Baym suggests, this model accounts for both “the social capabilities technologies enable - and the unexpected and emergent ways that people use those affordances” (2010:44). Essentially, when people use new technologies they have the capacity to learn to use them to fulfil their own objectives, yet at the same time, people cannot make the same such technologies perform functions that they are technologically incapable of doing. As Baym writes:

From the social shaping perspective we need to consider how societal circumstances give rise to technologies, what specific possibilities and constraints technologies offer, and actual practices of use as those possibilities and constraints are taken up, rejected and reworked in everyday life (2010: 45).

The fact that people make technologies, makes any technological development at least partially social in terms of its formation. As Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman’s suggest, it is “mistaken to think of technology and society as separate spheres influencing each other: technology and society are mutually constitutive” (1999: 41). This understanding is one that is akin to how this study perceives the interactions between the various expressions of convergence, and thus, too, seems an appropriate way in which to view and critique the usage of new technologies by media consumers.

As all three strands of media convergence have played a role in creating today’s film distribution landscape, it seems illogical to discuss their impact on the field separately. For example, digitalisation has played a significant role in enabling film content to flow across different platforms, yet corporate convergence has also facilitated this movement. Furthermore, consumers’ engagement with film content across platforms, and their increasing ability to ‘spread’ this content themselves, has also contributed to the development of innovative distribution practices. With this in mind, it seems more fruitful to discuss these three stands as operating in a dialogue with one



another. Therefore, rather than foregrounding one form of convergence over another, this study will instead use the concept of media convergence as a complex and multifaceted lens through which innovations in the distribution and marketing of American independent cinema can be examined.

## **Methodology**

As this study is assessing the impact of media convergence on the distribution sector of American independent cinema from various interconnected perspectives, its overall methodological approach needs to be equally as fluid. The emergent field of media industry studies seems to offer such flexibility and scope. In *Media Industries: History, Theory and Method*, Jennifer Holt and Perren set this field's initial agenda;

Our main objective is to articulate the diverse academic traditions and common threads defining media industry studies while also illustrating how the integrated analysis of media texts, audiences, histories, and culture could enable a more productive scholarship...To that end, the essays within this book attend to constructs of text and image as they relate to industrial structures and economics, connects politics and policy to issues of art and audience, and develop theoretical and methodological paradigms that not only engage with the past but also offer ways of thinking about media industries in the present (and presumably future) landscape of convergence (2009: 2).

With media industry studies providing an industrial-led approach that also considers “texts, audiences, histories, and culture” (ibid), and this thesis examining changes in distribution from industrial, technological and sociocultural angles through the lens of media convergence, adopting media industry studies as an overarching approach seemed apt.

As Paul McDonald describes, media industry studies is an “intellectual subfield which has cherry-picked ideas, concepts, perspectives and arguments from many – though highly circumscribed – directions” (2013: 146). In this respect, media industry studies has “divergences in the methods and perspectives” that are embodied within it (McDonald, 2013:149). This makes any argument that presents media industry studies as a unified subfield of research relatively weak, yet the underlying commonality between studies adopting this approach is that their objective remains the same: to examine “the industrial aspects of media communications” (ibid). This shared goal provides a degree

of alliance between the diversity of studies within this intellectual subfield and thus demonstrates its case for being seen as such.

However, in adopting a more industrial line of perspective – as media industry studies does – researchers must be careful not to overlook the relevance of and contributions that other, more traditional approaches, can offer when examining the media landscape. As John T. Caldwell writes:

In the recent shift to industry studies it sometimes feels like the very things that [cinema and media studies] is most skilled at – critical race theory, cultural studies, feminist theory, postcolonialism, narratology, close textual analysis – have been unwisely discarded in favor of the ostensibly more commonsensical, empirical approach to “real world” institutions. This “correction” is terribly naive. All of these critical dynamics pervade media industries organisations as well. Ignoring this fact suggests wilful intellectual blindness (2013: 157).

However, as Caldwell demonstrates, industry studies do not necessarily have to be devoid of these fields or understandings informed by such approaches. As a hybrid subfield, media industry studies draws on existing approaches from a range of areas, using them in collaboration to better understand the current industrial landscape from a range of perspectives and in relationship in wider technological, cultural, political, aesthetical contexts. This thesis therefore situates itself within this more contemporary and nuanced approach to studying media industries, as advocated by Caldwell (2013) and McDonald (2013) amongst others, that perceive the field of media industry studies as being a hybrid discipline with the capacity to bring in discussions of culture, texts, and audiences into its wider remit. In doing so, this study distances itself from more conventional and one-dimensional approaches to studying film industries that is found (to a certain extent) in work such as Douglas Gomery’s (2005) monograph, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History*.

Furthermore, as it becomes increasingly difficult (and perhaps misguided) to study any media industry as an entity in itself rather than part of a much wider, amalgamated media landscape, a versatile methodological approach seems an obvious choice for researchers working in this area. As Michele Hilmes suggests, the strength of media industry studies is that it breaks our “conceptual silos” and instead of examining the media by “medium, or technology, or textual form”, researchers adopting a media industry studies approach can focus more clearly on “the ways media function in the real world: as an interlinked, hybrid economy of activities, representations, and uses that

spread across technological platforms, media professions, textual forms and audience experiences” (2013: 177). Given that the question posed at the beginning of this thesis was “Where is cinema?”, the adoption of this overarching methodological approach becomes increasingly more justified.

It is not unprecedented within the study of the American independent cinema for scholars to adopt a media industry studies approach; two recent publications, Tzioumakis’s, *Hollywood’s Indies* (2012b) and Perren’s (2012) study on Miramax, both advocated this methodology. Furthermore, recent work in the field of distribution studies such as Labato’s *Shadow Economies of Cinema* and Iordanova and Cunningham’s *Digital Disruption* also use this integrated approach. It is however, Thomas Schatz’s (2009a) ‘Film Industry Studies and Hollywood History’ essay that has significantly informed this thesis’s adoption of the media industry studies agenda. Schatz proposes the adoption of both macro and micro level analyses in terms of unpicking how the US film industry works. At a macro level, Schatz suggests the structural operations of the industry that should be focused on (2009a: 46), whereas a micro level analysis is more concerned with individual production companies, filmmakers, discrete markets and other smaller denominators (2009a: 48). This combination provides enough flexibility to delve deep into specific areas of film distribution, analysing the operations of individuals and companies, whilst simultaneously allowing for a discussion of how these finer details relate to wider macro-industrial considerations.

In the closing paragraph of his essay, Schatz writes that “media production and consumption are converging” (2009a: 54) and as this thesis will demonstrate, this confluence is directly related to innovations in the distribution sector. In terms of its macro-industrial level outlook, this thesis will cover areas such as past and present industrial structures evident in the film and media industries and new technologies and the economic/exchange systems evident. For example, the industry trend of corporate convergence will be examined in terms of its impact on the ways that films are distributed (see Chapter Two) and how it has facilitated forms of transmediality (see Chapter Four). At a micro-level this study examines individual companies and filmmakers, such as exploring the collaborative practices adopted by documentary filmmaker Robert Greenwald (Chapter Six) and a discussion of the marketing strategies deployed by home entertainment specialists, The Asylum (Chapter Three). Micro-level analysis also provides opportunity for the discussion of consumers’ roles in shaping the distribution sector and its practices. As Schatz himself observes, “consumers are becoming active players in the

various phases of production and distribution, in ways that may well transform our study of media industries as they transform the industries themselves” (ibid). In short, a macro and micro level analysis that examines industrial structures alongside more nuanced and narrowly focused discussions on people and organisations, is one that has the flexibility and depth to fully examine how new industrial arrangements have come to fruition and how they work within the contextual settings from which they emerge.

As established earlier in this introductory chapter, the distribution sector of the global film industry is made-up of a variety of different companies, ranging from aggregators such as New Video who support the process of getting films onto online distribution platforms such as Netflix, to digital agencies such as HipCricket who provide mobile marketing solutions, to film distributors themselves who may undertake within their own organisational capacity these activities or may choose to outsource them. The distribution sector of American independent cinema is no exception. In fact, due to the scope of terrain that American independent cinema can refer to (as is discussed later in this chapter and revisited in Chapter One), the distribution sector of this particular area of the US film industry is broad. It is therefore not possible to examine how every industrial operation and company (or even type of company) functions in depth and with rigor, during the timeframe and word count of this thesis. Consequently, it is apt to delineate this thesis’s scope in terms of how it will examine the distribution sector of American independent cinema to looking at the activities and operations of film distributors as they are ultimately the organisations (regardless of size) who exert overall control over the way that any given film is marketed and distributed, even if they do commission specific tasks within this process to outside organisations. In essence, this thesis will take as its starting point the distributors involved in distribution of American independent cinema and seek to examine the impact that media convergence has had on their practices and organisational structures. From this, the myriad of ways in which media convergence has affected the distribution of American independent cinema, and its wider impact on the interlinked realms of production and exhibition, can be articulated and appreciated.

To conduct such an analysis, a mapping of the current industrial landscape of distributors involved in the distribution of American independent cinema must take place, and from this a film corpus needs to be compiled so that trends can be identified and specific case studies selected. While constructing this thesis’s film corpus, a number of challenges were encountered, with one of the main issues being defining American

independent cinema. Chapter One examines this issue in-depth, but it is apt to write a few words on the matter here. This study has been written with the intention to look at the whole of the American independent cinema landscape, including in it ‘mainstream’ examples of independent film and those filmmakers operating on the fringes of the industry. This inclusive approach means that when referring to American independent cinema, this study is including within its remit films by companies without any corporate ties to the six major entertainment conglomerates (TIME Warner, News Corporation, Sony Corporation, The Walt Disney Company, Viacom, and Comcast) and films by specialty film divisions<sup>13</sup> that operate with a degree of autonomy within these conglomerate’s corporate structures. This definition excludes films released by the major studios Columbia Pictures, Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures and Twentieth Century Fox<sup>14</sup>. Although films associated with these companies are not included in the film corpus it should not suggest that no reference should be made to their output. Given the increasingly close proximity of Hollywood and these major studios to parts of the independent sector, a small number of Hollywood films will be mentioned within this study. This brief referencing (as is the case with non-US films) is permissible as a means of situating the practices occurring within the distribution of American independent cinema into wider contexts, therefore ensuring that American independent cinema is not discussed as operating within a vacuum removed from both Hollywood and world cinema.

This approach to defining American independent cinema means that a large amount of films are eligible for the film corpus and consequently some delimiting was needed. A decision was made to focus on films distributed between 2006 and 2010, based upon a number of factors. First, numerous developments occurred in US film, in 2006: Apple began to offer movies and TV shows to rent or buy; Amazon launched a video-on-demand (VOD) service called Amazon Unbox; and Netflix introduced their ‘Watch Instantly’ function that facilitated the streaming of movies (Cunningham and Silver, 2012: 191). In relation to the marketing arena, 2006 saw the launch of Twitter that has played a significant role in the evolution of social networking sites and impacted on the marketing strategies of organisations operating in the entertainment industries and

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<sup>13</sup> In using the term specialty division, this thesis refers to formerly independent companies that have been acquired by the conglomerates (e.g. Miramax), divisions that have emerged from within the conglomerates’ structures (e.g. Fox Searchlight) and genre labels (e.g. Rogue Pictures) that were subsidiaries of the conglomerates during the timeframe this thesis examines.

<sup>14</sup> This approach therefore rejects other notions of independence such as Geoff King’s (2009) understanding of Indiewood. See literature review in Chapter One for further details.

beyond. The “tweets” people post on the site are restricted to 140 characters, which, as Vladimir Barash and Scott Golder outline, was because Twitter was originally “designed to be used via SMS” (2011: 144). From Twitter’s inception, the platform was designed to be mobile and in the years following its launch this ‘on-the-go’ usage of social media has become more common. Furthermore, Twitter (perhaps more than any other social media platform) provides a direct line of communication between people working in media and entertainment industries and consumers and what makes Twitter particularly interesting is that this communication works two-ways.

Also in 2006, *Time* magazine, rather controversially named their Person of the Year as You. What ‘You’ were doing, according to *TIME*’s Lev Grossman (2006), was “seizing the reins of the global media...founding and framing the new digital democracy...working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game” and You were now being congratulated for it. This story of 2006 was “about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before”, and it was the masses who were orchestrating it (ibid). Similarly, in 2006, *Business 2.0* also topped its ‘50 Who Matter Now’ list with You (Business 2.0, 2006). Whilst this type of “You-topian” rhetoric should be assessed with a degree of scepticism, as Gray (2010) suggests, the fact that such discourse was prevalent indicates that the relationships between producers and consumers were changing, or at the very least felt like they were. Therefore, 2006 seemed like an apt starting point for the film corpus.

The decision to cut off the corpus at the end of 2010 was made partially due to this thesis commencing its life in late 2010. Consequently, this end-date seemed appropriate, otherwise the film corpus would have continued to expand throughout the process of researching and writing; thus making it unmanageable. Additionally, a number of other significant developments occurred in the distribution sector in 2010 such as Hulu (a formerly free video streaming platform) launched a subscription service, YouTube positioned advertisements on ‘illegal’ uploads and gave the revenues to the copyright holders, Netflix offered unlimited downloads for \$7.99, and iTunes offered online streaming of films in a number of countries (Cunningham and Silver, 2012: 193). These developments allude to a further consolidation of online distribution practices, including the monetising of the “shadow economies of cinema” by YouTube, suggesting perhaps that era of online experimentation within distribution had come to an end and the era of monetised online distribution was about to burgeon.

With this loose definition of independence in mind and a specific timeframe in which to locate examples of this notion of independence, online databases were used in order to survey both the types of films being released and the companies who were releasing them that fitted this criteria. As a starting point *The-numbers.com* was used to collate a database of US-produced feature films distributed for the first time in the theatrical market by any company except the major studios between 2006 and 2010<sup>15</sup>. The ‘independence’ of these films was determined by their distributor. This means that even if a film was produced by a non-major studio but was distributed by one, it could not be considered. This does mean that some contentious decisions were made. For example, the independently produced, micro-budgeted *Paranormal Activity* (Peli, 2007) has been excluded from the corpus despite being produced by the then independent company, Blumhouse Productions<sup>16</sup> because a major studio – Paramount Pictures – distributed it. This film does exemplify the utilisation of new distribution and marketing practices but as this study focuses on the distribution arena, the decision to delimit independence based on distributor is justifiable.

Whilst collating this list there were a few discrepancies and as the source is not independently verified, it was necessary to cross-reference this initial list with another database. *IMDb* was chosen for this cross-referencing, alongside *boxofficemojo.com*. Both of these sites are recognised as being largely reputable sources for information and have previously been used by a number of scholars (see Nelson, 2011; Schatz, 2013). Although neither of these two additional sites are independently verified and therefore cannot be assumed to be 100% correct, the triangulation of all three sources has provided a relatively reliable set of results. Furthermore, in cases where contradictions emerged, then other sources such as industry publications (e.g. *Variety*) were also consulted. This process resulted in over 1400 films being identified as being examples of American independent cinema that had been distributed theatrically in the aforementioned years, and over 200 different companies that have acted as these films’ distributors (see Appendix Item 1).

From examining this database of films and distributors, it was first thought that these films and distributors could be positioned on a spectrum of independence, with one end being located nearer to mainstream film (e.g. Hollywood) and the other the end

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<sup>15</sup> Re-releases, novelty films (i.e. IMAX releases), short films or films produced entirely outside of the US we not considered.

<sup>16</sup> When Blumhouse Productions produced *Paranormal Activity* the company could easily be defined as an independent outfit, but in 2011 the company signed a three year “first look” agreement with major studio - Universal Pictures, transforming its independence into a different kind (Kroll, 2011).

being the fringes of US film (e.g. the terrains of the low-to-no budget filmmakers and companies) (see Kleinhans, 1998; Pribram, 2002; King, 2005). From a macro perspective, this understanding initially led to the conclusion that the current distributors involved in the distribution of American independent cinema can be placed quite neatly within a taxonomy of independence, as indicated in Table One<sup>17</sup>.

**Table One: The Taxonomy of Independence**

<b>Categories of Distribution Companies distributing American independent cinema</b>
Major Studio Specialty Film divisions
Mini-majors
Mid-scale independents
Low-end independents/D.I.Y. filmmakers

At the top of the taxonomy, are the specialty film divisions, and this category accounts for those distributors who operate within the structures of the major conglomerates, including companies that were originally standalone but were later acquired by a studio<sup>18</sup> (e.g. Miramax), specialty film labels established by the studios themselves with the intention to compete in the US independent film market (e.g. Fox Searchlight) and genre divisions established by these specialty film labels in order to handle product that was perceived as being different to ‘quality’ independent production (e.g. Dimension Films and Rogue Pictures). Films released by the specialty divisions regularly win high-profile awards, such as *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), and play in thousands of cinemas whilst on theatrical release, such as *The Return* (Kapadia, 2006). Distinguishing clear lines between these types of films and the output of the major studios in terms of production budgets, cast and crew, overall quality and other similar factors is, often, a difficult task. Similarly, the output of today’s “mini-majors” such as Lionsgate and Summit Entertainment<sup>19</sup> is often similar to the output of the major studios, despite not having any ownership/corporate ties to them (Hillier, 1994: 21).

<sup>17</sup> Brian Taves (1995) proposed a similar taxonomy when looking at B films, which he perceived as Hollywood’s “other half”, and links between the taxonomy being discussed here and Taves work can be drawn. The main difference is that Taves’ taxonomy foregrounded the films and their aesthetics, whereas the categories proposed here have been defined primarily on industrial position, with textual considerations being secondary.

<sup>18</sup> Otherwise known as major independents (Wyatt, 1998a).

<sup>19</sup> During this period that this thesis examines, Lionsgate and Summit Entertainment were separate companies, however in 2012, Lionsgate acquired their former rival (White and Grover, 2012).



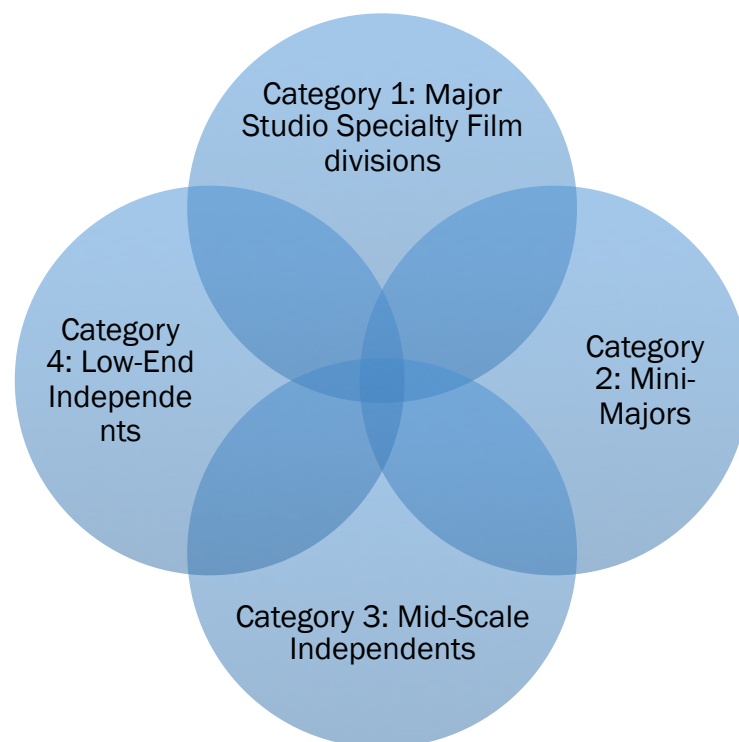
Indeed, the types of films released by companies such as Lionsgate and Summit Entertainment are too comparable (perhaps more so than some of the specialty divisions' output) to major studio releases as they also contain a high calibre of production talent, household name actors and have high production values; *The Expendables* (Stallone, 2010) and *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (Weitz, 2009) exemplify this. When looked at from a hierarchical perspective, the independent films released by specialty divisions and by contemporary mini-majors, as Chapter Two will explore, seem to operate at the 'top' of the independent sector.

The third category in the taxonomy is occupied by mid-scale independents that range from companies such as Magnolia Pictures to smaller outfits such as Artistic License. Film released by distributors categorised under this banner are not necessarily as well financed as major studio releases such as *Avatar* (Cameron, 2010), yet they are not the most quickly and cheaply produced films in the market. For example, Magnolia Pictures' repertoire includes films such as *Bubble* (Soderbergh, 2005) that was directed by Steven Soderbergh - a well-known (and respected) director within independent film, and *I'm Still Here* (Affleck, 2010) that contained 'A-list' actor, Joaquin Phoenix. Qualities such as these separate the distributors (and their films) in this category from those operating in the bottom rung of the taxonomy. The final category is the domain of the low-end independents such as Aloha Releasing. The lower regions (or fringes) of terrain also includes D.I.Y. filmmakers who self-distribute through four-walling strategies, selling DVDs at festivals, releasing online via social media and other grassroots, 'outsider' methods. This area of the independent terrain forms a part of what Lobato terms the "shadow economies of cinema" which are those economies that are largely unregulated, unmeasured and, in some cases, less legal than more mainstream or (initially) visible ones (2012: 1).

However, after further examination of the different distributors identified in the database, viewing the industrial landscape on a spectrum simplifies it, and what is actually present, is a much more complex environment. While the majority of contemporary independent films and companies could easily fit into the four categories outlined in Table One, there are notable anomalies. For example, initially IFC Films (which stands for Independent Film Channel) would probably be considered to be a mid-scale independent due to the types of films they release. Yet as Perren notes, despite having the word "independent" in the company's acronym, the IFC is actually "co-owned by several of the wealthiest media companies in North America" (2004: 22) Therefore,

given the IFC's ties to large conglomerates it does not fit into the mid-scale independent category as easily as it first appeared, while it is too small and different in nature than the studio specialty film divisions to be included in the first category. This example illustrates the problematic nature of imposing such a rigid taxonomy of categorisation on the current landscape of American independent cinema. Therefore, what this thesis proposes is rather than impose a taxonomy on an industrial context that it does not always fit, it is more appropriate to adopt the Venn of Independence as depicted in Diagram One.

### Diagram One: The Venn of Independence



As the diagram demonstrates, the four main categories evident within the American independent cinema landscape are clear to see and operate within a semi-structured framework, but what this approach also allows for is for malleable boundaries between these categories. Therefore, films and companies can be positioned within two or more of the categories. This conceptualisation of American independent cinema's terrain is one that is tolerant of, and sympathetic to, the current industrial landscape that is dominated by convergence, mergers, acquisitions, fluidity, movement and on-going change. This approach is therefore more relevant and adaptable to change than other,

more rigid approaches allow (see Perren, 2013b). Whilst this is largely an industrial approach in terms of the positioning of different types of distributors involved in the sector in the diagram according to industrial position, the decision-making underpinning the positioning of individual companies within its framework also takes on-board the types of films that the company in question releases and the distribution/exhibition strategies they adopt. IFC Films, for example, could be positioned in the overlap between categories one and three. Although IFC film's current industrial characteristics are somewhat similar to "specialty divisions" due to its ownership by AMC Networks, the textual qualities of the distributor's films, the topics they address and ways they are distributed, are more akin to mid-scale independent distributors.

From a research perspective, this diagram provides a macro overview of how American independent cinema's distribution sector (in terms of the distributors involved) is structured. From this initial table of films and distributors, the scope of the American independent cinema terrain also becomes visible, and an overview of diversity of films are a part of it – at least in terms of the theatrical market – is provided. Through this process, the researcher became more well-informed about the types of films and companies involved in American independent cinema, and therefore when discussing or referring to American independent cinema, this thesis does so in the knowledge that it has systematically reviewed and mapped-out the terrain beyond the initial limitations of the researcher's own subjective knowledge.

Despite the database's value, it was felt by the researcher that the examination of more than 1400 films and over 200 individual companies was beyond the scope of this thesis. It was decided that 10% of this figure would provide a more manageable corpus and therefore a selection process for this sample was needed. This began by dividing the theatrically released films in the database into Venn of Independence categories (including the various overlapping areas). This resulted in:

- 212 films in category 1 (studio specialty divisions)
- 194 films in category 2 (mini-major)
- 731 films in category 3 (mid-scale independent)
- 113 films in category 4 (low-end independent)
- 98 films in the specialty division/mid-scale independent crossover
- 60 films in the mini-major/mid-scale independent crossover<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Some of the crossover categories from the Venn of Independence showed no results.

Each category was then allocated a 10% ratio remit for inclusion into the film corpus and therefore as Appendix Items 2 – 7 demonstrate, the following numbers of films were selected from each category or crossover category<sup>21</sup>:

- 21 films in category 1 (studio divisions)
- 19 films in category 2 (mini-major)
- 73 films in category 3 (mid-scale independent)
- 11 films in category 4 (low-end independent)
- 10 films in the specialty/mid-scale independent crossover
- 6 films in the mini-major/mid-scale independent crossover

The individual films were subjectively selected to form the sample on the basis that they represented a diverse range of theatrical release strategies, approaches to marketing, genres, distribution companies and budgets, in order to present a true picture of the theatrical distribution of American independent cinema. This resulted in a theatrical corpus of 140 films, whose distribution history (e.g. methods, strategies, marketing campaigns etc.) was researched furthered for the purposes of this thesis, and where relevant, their production and exhibition contexts were also investigated. More specifically, throughout this thesis, the films and distributors evident in these tables have been used to: (a) identify broad, general trends within the distribution sector; (b) provide a macro-level overview of the distribution sector in terms of the distributors involved; (c) identify key films and distributors that can be used for case studies that act as exemplars for wider practices<sup>22</sup>.

With this study looking at the diverse ways in which American independent cinema is distributed, the film corpus must also be representative of this. It therefore needed to include films distributed outside of the theatrical realm, including the home entertainment, festival and online markets. Producing such a corpus was quite problematic. In fact, it has actually been impossible to ascertain, with any degree of accuracy, a definitive list of eligible films released online, on DVD, on television or at festivals between 2006 and 2010. This is largely due to the parameters of film converging with other media forms, and this in turn has posed a number of challenging methodological questions: how is it possible to track how many people have sold their film at a festival?; how is it possible to account for all of the films that have been

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<sup>21</sup> Number of films selected were rounded to 0 decimal places.

<sup>22</sup> How this corpus is used within the individual chapters of this thesis will be reflected on at various points within them.

released online across various platforms such as iTunes or YouTube?; how do we measure how many straight-to-television films have been distributed? The answer to these questions is that it is not possible, especially when examining all current forms of distribution. What this means is that film distribution (in its current forms) is not quantifiable and perhaps trying to quantify it misses the point; film no longer has an absolute definition or state – it is more fluid than that.

Referring back to Lobato's understanding of the "shadow economies of cinema", the areas contained within these economies are categorised by their lack of measurability and in some cases, visibility (2012: 1). Therefore, how do we approach studying these terrains whilst still demonstrating rigour within our approach? The answer this study proposes is through undertaking an informed yet subjective decision-making process in terms of film selection when analysing areas that defy measurement. Consequently, this study's approach to discussing films distributed outside of the theatrical realm has been based on hand-picking specific examples that the researcher considered to be representative of the diverse distribution methods and marketing strategies currently being adopted, provided that they fall somewhere within the Venn of Independence categories (see Appendix Item 8). The films selected are referenced throughout the pages of this thesis, both in general terms (e.g. when referring to non-traditional forms of distribution) and also specifically (e.g. acting as key case studies). Whilst this approach to defining a non-theatrical corpus may be both contentious and questionable from a methodological perspective, it has provided a way in which *all* film distribution methods and marketing strategies evident within American independent cinema can be discussed within the same study in an inclusive manner. It is this approach that qualifies this thesis as being an original contribution to knowledge in American independent cinema, film and distribution scholarship. In essence, this thesis is a film distribution study that utilises the industry sector broadly referred to as American independent cinema as a case study through which recent changes in film distribution can be examined. In order to present and discuss such findings, an overarching methodological approach that aligns itself with current strands of media industry studies research has been adopted, allowing the thesis to examine the industrial trends present, but also to relate and discuss them in line with textual considerations and their reception (in the broadest sense of the term) by consumers.

## Structure of Thesis

This thesis is divided into two sections in fitting with the macro and micro analysis methodology proposed earlier. Part One (Chapters 1 – 3) will contextualise the study and provide a comprehensive overview and examination of broader topics such as the industrial landscape of American independent cinema in the era of convergence (in terms of the distributors involved in the sector), and the distribution and marketing strategies currently being adopted within the sector. This substantial contextualisation is required as there is no existing monograph that has surveyed how American independent cinema (in all of its incarnations) is being distributed and marketed in the timeframe that this thesis covers. Part Two (Chapters 4 – 6) will provide micro-level analyses of the ways in which these broader areas have impacted on or relate to specific issues concerning film form, the way in which consumers engage with film and the alternative ecosystems of distribution that have emerged. Whilst this thesis is primarily a distribution study, exploring distribution's links to production and exhibition is necessary due to the distribution sector acting as a link between the two. If the transformations evident in distribution were presented as though they operate within a vacuum it would greatly underestimate and misrepresent the impact of such changes, and thus not fully answer the thesis's main question. Furthermore, without the contextualisation provided by Part One, the more intricate discussions in Part Two would have no roots and it would therefore be difficult to relate these examinations to wider trends. In short, one part without the other would not fully examine how media convergence has impacted on the distribution sector of American independent cinema.

Specifically, Chapter One discusses the current state of American independent cinema, providing an outline and critique of recent approaches to studying this field. It also presents a framework through which consumer articulations of American independent cinema can be examined and their relationship to the marketing and branding of American independent cinema be explored. Chapter Two explores recent developments in the distribution of American independent cinema, discussing these changes with reference to their technological, industrial and sociocultural contexts. In essence, this chapter examines distribution strategies and methods, the logistics of the sector, and licensing, alongside the distributors involved in it. Chapter Three surveys the marketing of American independent cinema. This chapter covers conventional elements of marketing campaigns such as trailers, TV spots and posters, coupled with discussions of newer marketing techniques and platforms. The chapter highlights how, as part of a

converged media landscape, marketing campaigns are becoming increasingly more integral to films' story worlds.

The thesis then moves on to Part Two in which more nuanced focal points are explored. Focusing on transmediality and its relation to distribution studies, Chapter Four highlights the impact that new distribution methods and marketing strategies have had on the emergence of novel storytelling practices in the sector and relates this to wider topics such as film brands and franchises. This chapter demonstrates that distribution studies is intrinsically linked to other fields and that distribution practices undoubtedly have a relationship with those practices evident in production and exhibition. Essentially, this chapter argues that the impact that media convergence has had on distribution and marketing has also had a ripple effect on the types of stories being told in American independent cinema and how consumers are engaging with these stories. Developing on from this, Chapter Five discusses online articulations of consumption practices specific to film-viewing contexts, exploring behaviours such as hashtagging tweets, 'checking-in' whilst watching films, and other similar phenomena. This discussion draws comparisons between traditional notions of word-of-mouth and articulations of consumption, and the word-of-mouse practices evident online. It accounts for how consumers use online platforms (most notably social media outlets) to 'talk' about, and engage with films, and examines the online reception of a viral marketing campaign. Chapter Six discusses how both D.I.Y. (do-it-yourself) and D.I.W.O. (do-it-with-others) models are used to bypass the traditional gatekeepers of the distribution sector. It links this discussion to wider trends such as the portability of media content and the thriving on-demand media consumption culture, the relationships between media producers and media consumers, alternative economies and current industrial structures. The study culminates with a conclusion outlining the new industrial arrangement that oversees much of the distribution of American independent cinema, and, arguably, that of US film at large. It also assesses the value of media industry studies as an approach to this kind of study and proposes an agenda for future research.

## PART ONE: CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE STUDY



## CHAPTER ONE

### AMERICAN INDEPENDENT CINEMA IN THE ERA OF CONVERGENCE: AN EVER-EXPANDING DISCOURSE OF UNCERTAINTY

In 2014, The Sundance Film Festival celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, and since its inception (via the Sundance Film Institute's takeover of the U.S. Film Festival) in 1985 (Sundance – Festival History, 2014), the festival has been synonymous with independent film. The festival has been associated with, and launched, some of the most recognisable 'independent' film directors and canonical films such as *sex, lies, and videotapes* (Soderbergh, 1989), *Clerks* (Smith, 1994), *The Brothers McMullen* (Burns, 1995), *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez, 1999), *Memento* (Nolan, 2001), *Little Miss Sunshine* (Dayton and Faris, 2006) and *Precious: Based on the Novel "Push" by Sapphire* (Daniels, 2009). Furthermore, as Michael Z. Newman suggests, out of all the festivals, Sundance exerts "the strongest influence on independent cinema" (2011: 63) and as such seems an apt place to start this chapter's discussions of what American independent cinema is.

A cursory look at the films nominated for the U.S. competitions at the 2014 festival demonstrates the broadness and ambiguities in what American independent cinema is deemed to be. Blumhouse Productions, for example, was the production company behind *Whiplash* (Chazelle, 2014), the winner of the U.S. dramatic competition category. As a production outfit, Blumhouse Productions has produced *Paranormal Activity* and its sequels, as well as other relatively well-financed and mass-released horror films such as *The Purge* (DeMonaco, 2013)<sup>23</sup>. Despite its acceptance and subsequent win at the Sundance Film Festival, the current industrial position of Blumhouse Productions, its distribution links to major studios and the types of films it produces, makes *Whiplash's* 'independent' status questionable. Yet, other winners from the same year – such as the recipient of the Audience Award: Best of NEXT competition category, *Imperial Dreams* (Vitthal, 2014) – seemed to embody much more of what would typically be perceived as an independent film. As Emmanuel Levy suggests, the ideal independent film is a "fresh, low-budget movie with a gritty style and offbeat subject matter that express the filmmaker's personal vision" (1999: 2). This version of independence "conjures up visions of ambitious directors working with little money and

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<sup>23</sup> *The Purge* had a reported budget of \$3 million and was distributed theatrically by Universal, which opened the film in a saturation release in over 2500 theatres across the US (Box Office Mojo – *The Purge* (2013), 2014).

no commercial compromise” (ibid). *Imperial Dreams* fits this notion of independence well as it is the first feature film from writer-director Malik Vitthal, and the film was developed through Vitthal’s involvement with the Sundance Screenwriters Lab in 2011 (Sundance – *Imperial Dreams* (2014), 2014). This brief comparison of these two films and their production narratives represents the contradictory, fractured and diverse nature of the term American independent cinema.

Definitions of American independent cinema are constructed via a range of approaches. Scholars, film journalists and industry commentators all have their own (often competing and contrasting) understandings of the sector. Some contemporary debates in this field question whether the term has lost all meaning – and in some cases querying if American independent cinema actually exists. For example, John Berra asserts that:

It is debatable whether a genuine American ‘independent cinema’ exists in the new millennium... What is not debatable is that the term ‘American independent cinema’ not only exists, but carries with it a variety of meanings, associations, and expectations of both an artistic and commercial nature (2008: 1).

This lack of homogeneity in outlining what contemporary American independent cinema is and the diversity of approaches to studying it, contributes to what is simultaneously a minefield for scholars to tackle *and* a rich, intricate field of study. In their edited collection King, Claire and Tzioumakis identified that since the new millennium there have been twenty books published on American independent cinema, in addition to a large number of essays (2013: 1). Since the release of this collection, more monographs have been published including Sherry B. Ortner’s *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (2013) and King’s own publication *Indie 2.0: Change and Continuity in American Indie Film* (2014).

This consistent stream of research suggests that the area is still fruitful for scholars, further justifying the rationale behind studies such as this one. Yet, despite this, contemporary American independent cinema can be a problematic research area because of the conflicting approaches to determining what this field of study comprises. It is therefore important for any new studies entering into this field to firstly be aware of the existing material and, secondly, to be clear as to how they are defining and approaching American independent cinema. Without this awareness and clarification,

new studies risk contributing nothing meaningful to research in the field<sup>24</sup>. Whilst the Introduction to this thesis outlined the way in which it perceives American independent cinema to be structured (primarily) as an industrial category, this chapter will provide a critical review of earlier studies and approaches to delineating and discussing the field. This review will feed into a case study analysis of how a specific group of consumers perceive American independent cinema and how such perceptions can contribute to, impact on and be understood in relation to wider notions of independence. The results of this case study will be discussed in-line with how certain parts of American independent cinema are being marketed and branded, and thus further highlight why this thesis has adopted an industrial line of enquiry when determining independence. Although the rhetoric of this chapter may seem to suggest that American independent cinema as a category of film is extensively problematic, this should not imply that the term or the sectors of the US film industry that the term can refer to are no longer in existence. Rather, this chapter will suggest that the term is still viable, providing that scholars use it discerningly – in essence, being clear from the off-set what they mean by it and with what position such meaning was been derived. Without this, the term can mean almost anything, and subsequently as a point of reference, it becomes useless.

### **So, once again, what is American independent cinema?**

As a prelude to this chapter's case study, a brief detour is required through the academic landscape in which definitions of independent cinema, if not hotly contested, are subject to varying conceptual approaches, which shape what independence might mean. In *American Independent Cinema*, King presents a useful tripartite framework, suggesting that American independent cinema, its films and filmmakers can be discussed “in terms of (1) their industrial location, (2) the kinds of formal/aesthetic strategies they adopt and (3) their relationship to the broader social, cultural, political or ideological landscape” (2005: 2). These three ways of looking at independent film loosely groups lines of enquiry in the field and as such will provide the broad structure to this literature review.

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<sup>24</sup> Berra asserts that although “the economics of feature film production and of mass entertainment in general have previously been discussed in detail in an academic context, the industry sector that is American ‘independent’ cinema has generally been overlooked by scholars who have focused on this particular form of modern media” (2008: 11). He goes onto to suggest that where such considerations have been taken into account that they have been sidelined or portrayed as “a footnote to a bigger picture” (ibid). This critique is not entirely justifiable as studies such as Tzioumakis' *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction* (2006a) and Pribram's *Cinema and Culture: Independent Film in the United States, 1980 – 2001* (2002) – both published prior to Berra's work – do take into account, highlight and discuss such topics. This lack of awareness of existing research is a downfall of certain studies, and is a reason why certain discussions in the field do not seem to progress.

These three approaches, however, should not be seen as operating in opposition to one another; rather, these broad lines of enquiry often overlap and interlink. Therefore, as the latter part of this review and the proceeding case study will demonstrate, industrial, formal and ideological understandings of independence are best examined within a discursive framework.

Turning our attention first to independence as an industrial position, King argues that “[a]t an industrial level, American independent cinema stretches from the extremes of...almost no-budget filmmaking to the margins of Hollywood” (2005: 11). This diverse industrial landscape and its (in some cases) close proximity to Hollywood, is largely responsible for the current difficulties involved in defining American independent cinema. When describing something as ‘independent’, the “subtextual assumption”, according to E. Deidre Pribram, is “that it is independent of something other than itself” (2002: xiii). In the case of American independent cinema, “the implicit reference...is the ubiquitous presence of the Hollywood industry” (ibid). Yet if the independence of American independent cinema is defined by its supposed freedom from Hollywood, the industrial arrangements of the US film industry in recent decades have undoubtedly problematised definitions.

It is difficult to draw a decisive line between Hollywood and the independent sector, largely due to the impact of industrial convergence. Since the 1980s the major studios (Paramount, Warner Bros., Columbia, Twentieth Century Fox, Walt Disney Pictures, and Universal) and their respective current parent conglomerates (Viacom, TIME Warner, Sony, News Corporation, The Walt Disney Company, and Comcast) have, in some cases, acquired formerly independent film companies that produced what they perceived to be commercially viable forms of independent film (e.g. Walt Disney Pictures acquisition of Miramax). In other instances, these companies have established new companies within their own structures that produce and release similar types of film (e.g. News Corp.’s launch of Fox Searchlight). Through corporate convergence and/or co-option, the major studios and their respective parent conglomerates, have successfully encroached upon and commercially exploited independent film, creating an increasingly permeable boundary between Hollywood and the ‘independent’ sector of US film. Trade publications’ notions of independence as an industrial category also struggle with this porousness. *Variety* defines independent film to be any film without financial backing and/or distribution from one of the six major US film studios. However, many of the films

within *Variety's* weekly independent box office chart are from specialty film divisions of the six major US studios, such as Fox Searchlight (*Variety Independent Box Office*, 2011).

Hollywood's involvement with independent film is complex and multifaceted. Schatz describes these recent industrial arrangements as the "annexation of the indie film movement by the media conglomerates", suggesting that this has created a "safe haven for a privileged cadre of filmmakers while leaving the truly independent film business in increasingly desperate financial straits" (2009b: 20). For Schatz, American independent cinema in the 2000s can be divided into two distinct categories; first, the specialty divisions of major conglomerates that produce "modestly budgeted films in the \$30 million to \$50 million range for more specialised and discerning audiences" and second, the "truly independent producer-distributors" that produce films up to the \$10 million range (usually less) and have a very niche share of the overall market (2009b: 25)<sup>25</sup>. Add to this, the "franchise-spawning blockbusters budgeted in the \$100-\$250 million range" that are synergistically exploited across various entertainment industries and mediums, and Schatz creates a picture of a three-tier US film industry (*ibid*). This macro framework of the US film industry is useful as an overview, yet as the Introduction to this thesis highlights, the American independent cinema is far more complex than the two tiers that Schatz proposes. Instead this thesis has identified four main categories of American independent cinema and perceives these sectors to be permeable; Schatz's framework however, is more rigid.

A useful conceptual structure for approaching this area is Tzioumakis's periodisation framework that he first introduced in *Hollywood's Indies: Classics Divisions, Specialty Labels and the American Film Market* (2012b) and then in an essay titled 'Independent, indie and indiewood: Towards a periodisation of contemporary (post-1980) American independent cinema' (2013). In both of these pieces of work Tzioumakis segments contemporary American independent cinema into three phases – the independent, the indie, and indiewood – with each phase representing a specific expression of independent filmmaking and roughly coinciding with the respective decades of the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s<sup>26</sup>. In terms of Hollywood's involvement with the independent sector, this framework highlights how each phase "is marked by

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<sup>25</sup> The criteria for the 2014 Spirit Awards – a leading independent film awards – seems to share Schatz's notions of 'true' independence, specifying that any film that cost less than \$20million to produce (including post-production costs) was eligible (Spirit Awards - Eligibility, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> As Tzioumakis acknowledges, these periods overlap and therefore there are not definitive dates when one stage ends and another begins (2013: 30).

the presence of a distinct group of studio film divisions” that signifies the closeness of American independent film to Hollywood (Tzioumakis, 2013: 30).

In the first phase, divisions such as the now defunct Universal Classics and Twentieth Century Fox International Classics began to emerge within the structures of the major studios and their parent conglomerates (2012a: 15). While the life-span of these divisions was relatively short, they “signalled the beginning of an American independent cinema that was also financed, produced and distributed by companies with corporate ties to the Hollywood majors” (2012: 5), although, in this initial phase, finance and production were limited. The “indie” period that followed saw a new set of divisions materialise with ties to Hollywood, such as Sony Pictures Classics and Fine Line Features. These divisions handled more commercial independent film compared to the low-key, low-budget films of the previous decade (Tzioumakis: 2012a: 8). These films tended to have recognisable stars, stronger generic conventions, increased emphasis on authorship and/or sought to appeal to well-established niche audience groups such as African Americans (ibid). The final phase – “indiewood” – involves more recently established divisions like Fox Searchlight and Focus Features and represents an “enhanced ‘convergence’ with Hollywood” (Tzioumakis, 2012a: 10). Rather than harbouring similarities with the 1980s independent phase, indiewood is a heightened version of indie filmmaking practices with larger budgets and distribution practices akin to the major studios (ibid). Fox Searchlight’s *Black Swan*, for example, was playing in over 2400 theatres at its widest release (Box Office Mojo – *Black Swan* (2010)) and had an A-List star, Natalie Portman, in its lead role. In segmenting Hollywood’s post-1980 involvement with independent film into these distinctive yet overlapping waves of film production and distribution, Tzioumakis offers a structure that both highlights key trends and how they have developed, while simultaneously providing scholars with an historical framework in which to situate and discuss specific films and companies.

Outside of this industrially influenced framework are more textual-based understandings of the concepts of independent, indie, and indiewood film that draw on aesthetic and ideological interpretations. Turning our attention to the discussions around independent film’s formal and aesthetic qualities, the general consensus in scholarship is that independent film should diverge from the mainstream filmmaking practices often associated with the major studios. Tzioumakis suggests that mainstream American cinema tends to adopt a “classical aesthetic”, which indicates that independent cinema has the scope to “depart from some or all of conventions associated with classical

narrative and film style” (2006a: 7)<sup>27</sup>. Such departures may include incoherent stories, an exaggerated emphasis on character development over plot, discrepancies in spatial and temporal relationships, inclusion of scenes that do not progress the story or character development, the presence of visuals and/or audio that disrupt the viewers’ coherency in understanding the film and other conventions that to greater or less degrees can be attributed to more avant-garde filmmaking practices. These characteristics can be found in a number of independent films that form this study’s corpus, such as incoherent presentation of story in *Inland Empire* (Lynch, 2006) or the prominence of character exposition over the development of story in *The Puffy Chair* (Duplass, 2005). Yet this approach also has its problems. As Tzioumakis observes, many contemporary Hollywood or mainstream blockbuster films could be described as being deviant from the classical approach in the sense that the spectacle of the film is of far more importance than a clear and coherent causally-structured story (2006a: 9).

When approaching ‘indie’ cinema, Newman defines it as a “cultural category” which is not just based on a “set of industrial criteria or formal or stylistic conventions” (2011: 11)<sup>28</sup>. The period in which this cultural category emerged, according to Newman, was in the “Sundance-Miramax” era, and although he acknowledges the impossibility of declaring a definitive origin and conclusion, he does propose that the 1989 US Film festival (later renamed Sundance) at which *sex, lies, and videotape* was screened and Disney’s shuttering of Miramax in 2010, are events that help to construct indie cinema’s historical frame (2011: 1-2). King’s (2014) identifies another strand of indie filmmaking, one that he terms indie 2.0. Indie 2.0 represents a second generation of indie filmmaking that emerged from around the 2000s onwards (King, 2014: 5). The term has resonance with Web 2.0, as it alludes to the “collective participation and collaboration in the production of online materials” that some independent filmmakers within the indie 2.0 category have engaged (King, 2014: 4). As King acknowledges, such practices are still relatively marginal (*ibid*) and as such conceptualisations of indie 2.0 are questionable. It is this tenuous link between the actual practices and the practices that

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<sup>27</sup> David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger (1985) outline the classical aesthetic as being a practice associated with films produced under the studio system which has continued into contemporary years as a dominant mode of film practice. This approach is governed by causal narratives (ones bound by a cause-and-effect logic) in which the visual and audial elements of the film are all geared to the telling of the ‘story’. The emphasis is on the telling of a coherent story, not necessarily the stylistic features of the film.

<sup>28</sup> Perren’s notion of indie film differs from this as she uses industrial position to define its parameters; she uses the term ‘indie’ to refer to any “conglomerate owned” studios, and the term ‘independent’ to refer to studios and labels with no such ties (2013b: 108).

'2.0' alludes to, why this thesis broadly rejects its usage. Furthermore, this thesis strives to account for both traditional and innovative practices present within American independent cinema. The use of '2.0' puts the innovations at the forefront, when it is actually the convergence of novel approaches with traditional practices that has created the current, complex landscape of American independent cinema.

For Newman, indie cinema, as a cultural category is constructed by "a cluster of interpretive strategies and expectations" that are shared by film industry personnel, festivals, critics, audiences and so on (ibid). Newman proposes that indie cinema's audience use "viewing strategies" to understand indie cinema (2011:11). His discussion is largely informed by a textual analysis that sees him assessing the films' form, aesthetics and ideological stances to substantiate his argument. The specific viewing strategies that the author identifies are "characters as emblems, form is a game, [and] when in doubt, read as anti-Hollywood" (2011: 29). Yet whilst Newman offers convincing arguments and case study analyses of how these viewing strategies work, he does fall into the trap of overemphasising how these three slogans "signal a distinct conception of Off-Hollywood cinema" (ibid). For example, the viewing strategy "form is a game" could just as easily be applied to Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (Nolan, 2010) as it could to *Memento* (Nolan, 2000) – one of which is a Hollywood product, the other part of the indie cinema that Newman's study discusses. Issues such as this, mean that although Newman's study seeks to present a framework through which indie cinema can be understood, it does so with contradictions. In this sense, Newman's approach is not as useful as Tzioumakis's (2012b, 2013) framework, because of its relative lack of clarity and general looseness.

In a similar vein, King's (2009) understanding of Indiewood<sup>29</sup> is also problematic. Initially King's notion of Indiewood seems to be in-line with Tzioumakis's (2012b, 2013) periodisation as he describes Indiewood as "an industrial/commercial phenomenon' that occurred within the American film industry during the 1990s and the 2000s" (2009: 2). For King, Indiewood is the middle territory of US film, somewhere between the Hollywood blockbuster and the no-low budget independent film, and is a site in which "Hollywood and the independent sector merge or overlap" (2009: 1). This merger is characterised by a borrowing and combining of formal, aesthetic and ideological features from both Hollywood and independent film (2009: 3). The point of departure between the two

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<sup>29</sup> King adopts a capitalized 'I' when discussing Indiewood, whereas Tzioumakis uses a non-capitalized version. This study aligns itself more so with non-capitalisation of indiewood as outlined by Tzioumakis, but when discussing King's work in this field, the capitalised version of the term is adopted.



scholars' approaches is that King's Indiewood is a particular institutional arrangement associated with the specialty film divisions and with examples of Indiewood films that are characterised by particular textual features. In essence, King's industrial and textual definition of Indiewood also includes films released by the major studios themselves – not just their subsidiaries – providing that their textual features are in line with his perceptions of what Indiewood film is (2009: 4 – 5). Tzioumakis (2012b, 2013), on the other hand, discusses indiewood as a phase in the evolution of contemporary American independent cinema that also coincides with a particular approach to filmmaking and he uses it to discuss the subsidiary companies of the major studios that fall into this bracket. This subtle, yet important difference sets the approaches apart from one another. King's inclusion of major studio releases into his conceptualisation contradicts this thesis's approach as he foregrounds textual features over industrial position, whereas this study has chosen to take an industrial-led approach to determining independence that is informed by textual qualities at a secondary level<sup>30</sup>.

In foregrounding textually-led notions of independence over industrial position, scholars risk presenting a misguided and incomplete view of American independent cinema. For example, when writing about independent film in the 1980s, Justin Wyatt (2000) suggests that films such as *First Blood* (Kocheff, 1982) are independent due to the company behind it – Carolco Pictures – having no ties with any major studios. However, the textual qualities of the films produced by Carolco Picture did not necessarily challenge dominant filmmaking practices of the time, in fact, they did the opposite. As Wyatt writes, Carolco Pictures did not compete with the major studios along the lines of offering something different to them, but instead competed on the same terms by producing “costly, star-driven vehicles” (2000: 143). In this respect these films had few points of contact with the way the label independent was defined and used during the 1980s, when the term was firmly “associated with intelligent, meaningful, often challenging but always full of spirit filmmaking” (Tzioumakis, 2006a: 13). In contrast to this, films produced by major studios were deemed to be more formulaic in their nature, conservative in their ideologies and style, and were aimed at an increasingly younger demographic (ibid). Therefore, the output of companies such as Carolco Pictures

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<sup>30</sup> This should not suggest that King's (2009) or Newman's (2011) work has no merit, nor that points raised by these scholars will not inform this thesis's wider discussion. Rather, whilst this thesis broadly rejects their ways of conceptualising recent incarnations of American independent cinema, it does generally embrace their arguments on textual features and cultural considerations.

are rarely discussed as part of American independent cinema. Wyatt's essay, for example, was published in an edited collection on 1980s Hollywood.

Parallels with Carolco Pictures' releases can be drawn with a number of the films distributed by Lionsgate and Summit Entertainment. Films such as *The Expendables* and *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* from an aesthetic stance do not challenge contemporary, dominant filmmaking practices, nor are they particularly akin to avant-garde or experimental films. Yet both were industrially independent of the major studios. Despite this, films like these and the companies that release them are still often overlooked in scholarship on independent film; notable exceptions include Schatz's (2013) discussion of New Line Cinema and Perren's (2013b) essay on Lionsgate. As the proceeding section of this chapter demonstrates, this is probably due to the rhetoric that perceived 1980s independent film as a cinema of 'quality', produced for discerning audiences (Tzioumakis, 2006a: 13), still holding some currency.

The disregarding of these types of films from discussions on American independent cinema is probably also due to them not being particularly politically or ideologically challenging. As King suggests, independent film provides a space for alternative expressions of political perspectives, non-dominant ideologies and different social viewpoints (2005: 199). In approaching independent film from this perspective, films produced in different industrial contexts such as Brave New Films' *Rethink Afghanistan* (Greenwald, 2009) and Focus Features' *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005) can both be discussed within the context of independent film. Whereas *Rethink Afghanistan* was produced by a company with no ties to the major studios that crowd-sourced the finances and resources to make and release the film, *Brokeback Mountain* was backed and released by Focus Features, a specialty division of a major studio. *Rethink Afghanistan* is a documentary that questions the US's involvement in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. *Brokeback Mountain* is feature film about the secret love between two cowboys and, as Gary Needham describes, "refuses to portray homosexuality as anything but a difficult and emotive subject" (2010: 6). Despite the difference in industrial position, both films contain non-dominant political and/or ideological representations. As Needham observes, independent film production and that of the major studios were "once radically opposed to one another through production practices and politics" (2010: 29 – 30). Yet while films such as *Brokeback Mountain* are being produced and released within close proximity to Hollywood, a space is being

created, as Ian Mohr states, for films that are simultaneously “glossy award hopefuls and edgier fare” (Mohr cited in Needham, 2010: 30).

What this suggests, as Chuck Kleinhans observes, is that independent film is a relative concept determined by its relationship to the “dominant Hollywood system” (1998: 308) and, therefore, producing delineations of independent film and outlining the ‘best’ way to approach it is nigh on impossible. Given the complexities in defining American independent cinema, numerous studies discuss it as a discourse, with many of these discussions drawing upon Michel Foucault’s work. In a lecture titled ‘L’Ordre du discours’ (translating into English as ‘The Discourse on Language’), Foucault suggests that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures” (1970: 216). This implies that the dominant discourse – a way of talking, writing, discussing a topic or idea – is embroiled with notions of power, due to the way in which it is controlled and constructed by people, groups and institutions. Discourses then, when approached from a Foucauldian stance, delineate “what can legitimately be said about a particular topic within different historical periods” (Molloy: 2010: 2). In this sense, Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis suggest that such discourses “have a maieutic function” – they “bring cultural objects into being by naming them, defining them, delimiting their field of operation” and because of this, these objects “become linked to specific practices” (1992: 216). Discourses depend on who is contributing to them and in what historical context, meaning that a discourse-based approach to discussing American independent cinema acknowledges that a delineation of the field is neither fixed nor absolute, allowing for different and often competing ways of defining this sector of US film.

Yet, the question still remains – who contributes to the discourse of American independent cinema? According to Tzioumakis, this discourse “expands and contracts when socially authorised institutions (filmmakers, industry practitioners, trade publications, academics, film critics and so on) contribute towards its definition at different periods in the history of American cinema” (2006a: 11). As Molloy suggests, when “the interest of groups shifts and change, discourses will necessarily be established, adapted, negotiated and revised” (2012: 2). Furthermore, at any given time there will be a number of different discourses in circulation that serve a multitude of purposes and represent a number of perspectives (ibid). Approaching American independent cinema as a discourse, acknowledges the fact that definitions are

simultaneously dependent upon the historical contexts under examination and on the sources that have contributed to the discourse. What the following case study analysis will demonstrate is, how consumers contribute to this discourse. It will do this by outlining how consumers' conceptions of what American independent cinema is can be examined in an online environment, and then discussing these conceptions as part of wider discursive frameworks. From this, links between online consumer discussions of American independent cinema and the ways in which certain types of films and incarnations of American independent cinema are marketed and branded will be drawn. Thus, what this case study will begin the discussion of is the link between marketing and consumer perceptions about films<sup>31</sup>.

### **Talking about independence: IMDb.com and the discourse of American independent cinema**

In order to bring film consumers' perceptions of American independent cinema into the wider discussions on its discourse, the first challenge researchers encounter is how to methodologically approach the way in which consumers talk<sup>32</sup> about this sector of US film. While audiences have always 'spoken' about film, what this talk consists of, and their responses to films, has generally been written about in a speculative manner (see Plantinga, 2009), or have been the basis of relatively small-scale and/or geographically limited studies (see Austin 2006; Chuu, Chang and Zaichkowsky, 2009). The Internet and web 2.0 communication tools have changed this to a certain degree. As Chapter Five demonstrates further, primary data from online sources such as social media can be useful in both quantitative and qualitative analyses. With a growing number of platforms on which consumers can talk about film, the first step in researching these conversations is to decide upon which platform(s) or which communication tool(s) to examine.

For the purpose of providing an overview of how consumers discuss and delineate American independent cinema, consumption-related online communities seemed an apt starting point. According to Jo Brown, Amanda J. Broderick and Nick Lee these communities are "networks of people whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities" (Brown et al, 2007:3). As opposed to social media platforms such as Facebook

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<sup>31</sup> Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five all return to this discussion.

<sup>32</sup> The use of the word 'talk' in this context is used in relation to oral communication practices (e.g. speech) and online communication practices that mimic this (e.g. status updates on Facebook etc.) despite the latter also being a form of written communication.

and Twitter, where interactions between users are not necessarily based on a particular consumption activity, sites that provide an online space for consumption-related communities are more specific. Websites such as */Film*, *Rotten Tomatoes* and *IMDb* are examples of ‘places’ where film and/or TV consumption-related communities congregate and are more suitable platforms for researchers to analyse consumer discourses on.

Of all the online platforms on which film consumption-related communities exist, *IMDb*<sup>33</sup> is perhaps the most prolific, identifiable and visible. According to *IMDb*, the site has over “103 million unique visitors per month” (*IMDb.com* – Advertising, 2014). The user profile of the *IMDb* community is split relatively evenly between the genders and the largest percentage of the site’s users is from the US (31.8%) (*Alexa* – *IMDb*, 2014). The dominant age range of *IMDb* users is between 18 and 49 (*IMDb.com* – User Demographics, 2014). This profile is largely in-line with wider trends in US Internet usage (*United States Census Bureau*, 2012). Furthermore, as Nelson (2009) states, the site is representative of how contemporary consumers are consuming films in different ways. These new practices extend beyond just viewing films and involve more interaction and engagement with them, their associated paratextual entities, and with other consumers. In Andrew Fischer’s case study analysis of *IMDb*, he asserts that it has become “a major force in raising public awareness of film titles and connecting filmmakers and other industry professionals to audience members around the globe” (2012a: 143). Here Fischer accounts for the transformation of *IMDb* from a small project designed to create an online database of films into a subsidiary company of Amazon with investiture in film distribution (as detailed in Chapter Two) (*ibid*).

For the purposes of this case study, it is its function as a database of films and the ways in which it provides opportunities for users to discuss and value films according to “communal practices” that are most useful (Molloy, 2010: 101). These communal practices involve users posting comments, talking about films on discussion boards and rating individual films (*ibid*). Through analysing the results of these communal practices in relation to the wider frameworks of *IMDb* and its community, the case study presented here will attempt to discern how this community discusses and delineates American independent cinema. In doing so, it will propose that *IMDb* and its community can be considered as one of the “socially authorised institutions” (Tzioumakis, 2006a: 11) that contributes to the discourse of American independent cinema. Furthermore, it will relate

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<sup>33</sup> *IMDb* is an online film and television programme database that is largely openly accessible and contains features via which registered users can participate in activities such as uploading reviews of films, posting and replying to threads on message boards, writing synopses for films, and rating films.

these consumer articulations of independence to the way in which certain sectors of American independent cinema are being marketed and branded, highlighting the link between industry and consumer discourses.

In terms of the behavioural characteristics of the *IMDb* community, Molloy suggests that it is a transient space in which “activity coalesces, shifts and ebbs around particular films, constructing discourses about them and allocating value to them within hierarchical ranking systems...that reflect the performance of the community’s dominant taste preferences” (2010: 101). With these hierarchical ranking systems being one of the defining features of the site, it seemed appropriate to use the site’s Top 50 Independent Film Chart as the starting point to exploring how the community discusses American independent cinema by analysing the users’ reviews of films contained within it. This approach brought about some ethical considerations. In Inger-Lise K. Bore’s (2011) study, she justified her use of *IMDb* reviews as primary data because they had been posted on a public website with “the intention of being read by a wide audience” (2011: 146). Despite this, Bore also acknowledges that she was using the reviews in a different context than what their writers had intended and therefore she adopted a “light disguise” approach in protecting the identities of the reviews’ authors (ibid). Light disguise is mid-level of disguise that online ethnographers can adopt when using words people have posted on the Internet. As Ann Bruckman suggests, light disguise involves naming the place where the information was gleaned from and using full quotes; names or pseudonyms, however, are not given (2002:229). This means that it may be possible to trace back the quotes or work used in a study to their original sources with a little online investigation (ibid). A light disguise approach was adopted in this case study.

In order to calculate the top 50 independent films, *IMDb* uses the numerical values attributed to the films (basically a mark out of ten) given by users to rank the films in order using the formula –  $WR = (v \div (v+m)) \times R + (m \div (v+m)) \times C$ <sup>34</sup> – to give a true Bayesian estimate (*IMDb.com*– Independent Film Chart, 2011). This means that the more votes a film has, the more influence they have on the film’s position in the chart. This system is in line with the sites hierarchical measurement systems and highlighting of the community’s dominant tastes (Molloy, 2010). This is particularly relevant to this case study as the results presented here are representative of the dominant discourse of independence found on *IMDb*, not necessarily the only prevalent discourse.

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<sup>34</sup> WR = Weighted Result, R = Rating (mean average for the movie), V = Votes (number of votes for the movie), M = Minimum Votes (currently at 200) and C = Mean Vote across whole report (currently 6.8).

In terms of the films eligible for this specific chart, *IMDb* classifies independent film as being a film “not produced by a major studio” and studios it considers to be “major” are MGM/UA, 20th Century Fox, Sony Pictures, Warner Bros, Paramount Pictures, Universal, and Disney (*IMDb.com – Glossary, 2011*). Any film produced by a company other than these aforementioned studios (including their subsidiaries), released in any year and attributed to any country is therefore eligible for the chart. *IMDb’s* delineation of independent film is therefore slightly different from how this thesis has approached constructing its film corpus<sup>35</sup>. Despite this, the chart’s data is useful in discussing the discourse of independence from consumers’ perspectives because it is representative of a number of new and emerging practices through which film consumers now connect and engage with film. For example, users contribute to the information about the films detailed in the site’s database, the formation of its various charts, and various other features. In this sense, the site can be seen as an example of, what Pierre Lévy (1999) has termed, “collective intelligence”. According to Lévy, the principle notion of collective intelligence is that “[n]o one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity” (1999: 20). This concept is one of the defining characteristics of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006: 4) and as Tom O’Reilly has suggested, also contributes to the notion of Web 2.0 (O’Reilly paraphrased in Green and Stankosky, 2010: 235). Therefore, the practices evident on *IMDb* are symptomatic of wider consumption practices evident in contemporary convergence culture. Furthermore, the functionality of the *IMDb* site, in terms of its search function and open access to certain data, also makes it an apt resource. Essentially, the site is an example of the intertwining of the sociocultural and technological strands of convergence explored in the Introduction.

As the chart is concerned with worldwide films, the dataset was delimited to contain just films that credited the US as being a country of origin. This reduced the sample of films to 35<sup>36</sup>. Even with this reduction, it was not possible to examine every review attributed to the 35 films as many of them had thousands of reviews. Consequently, the reviews were ordered via how useful other members of the *IMDb* community found them. Due to the hierarchical nature of *IMDb* and also because the

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<sup>35</sup> This thesis focused on distributor, not producer, as a way of delineating independence. It also includes MGM within its corpus as although it was one of the major studios in what is commonly referred to as Hollywood’s golden era, it is currently not owned, unlike the other major studios, by a multinational conglomerate. Therefore, within the timeframe examined in this thesis, MGM is more akin to the mini-majors.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix Item 9.

wider community have authenticated these reviews – to a certain degree – by ascribing the value of ‘useful’ to them, this seemed an appropriate reading order. The decision was then made to only analyse 10 reviews per film. This decision was based on *IMDb* only displaying ten reviews per page of results and as general user practices of reading search engine results indicate, very few users look beyond the initial page of results<sup>37</sup>. This provided a more manageable dataset of 350 reviews.

It is worth noting here two more observations about the dataset used before moving on to its analysis. First, as users are constantly updating *IMDb*, this chart, the films’ reviews and their rankings are subject to change over time, making both the order of the films and their reviews temporary. The second observation was that the vast majority of user reviews submitted were from the US (55%). The other countries of origin of the reviewers included the United Kingdom (9%), Canada (8%), Australia (5%), Netherlands (1%) and Finland (1%), with all other countries equating to less than 1% each (see Appendix item 10). Therefore, the discourse of the reviews analysed is largely representative of US *IMDb* users and depicts a generally Western perspective.

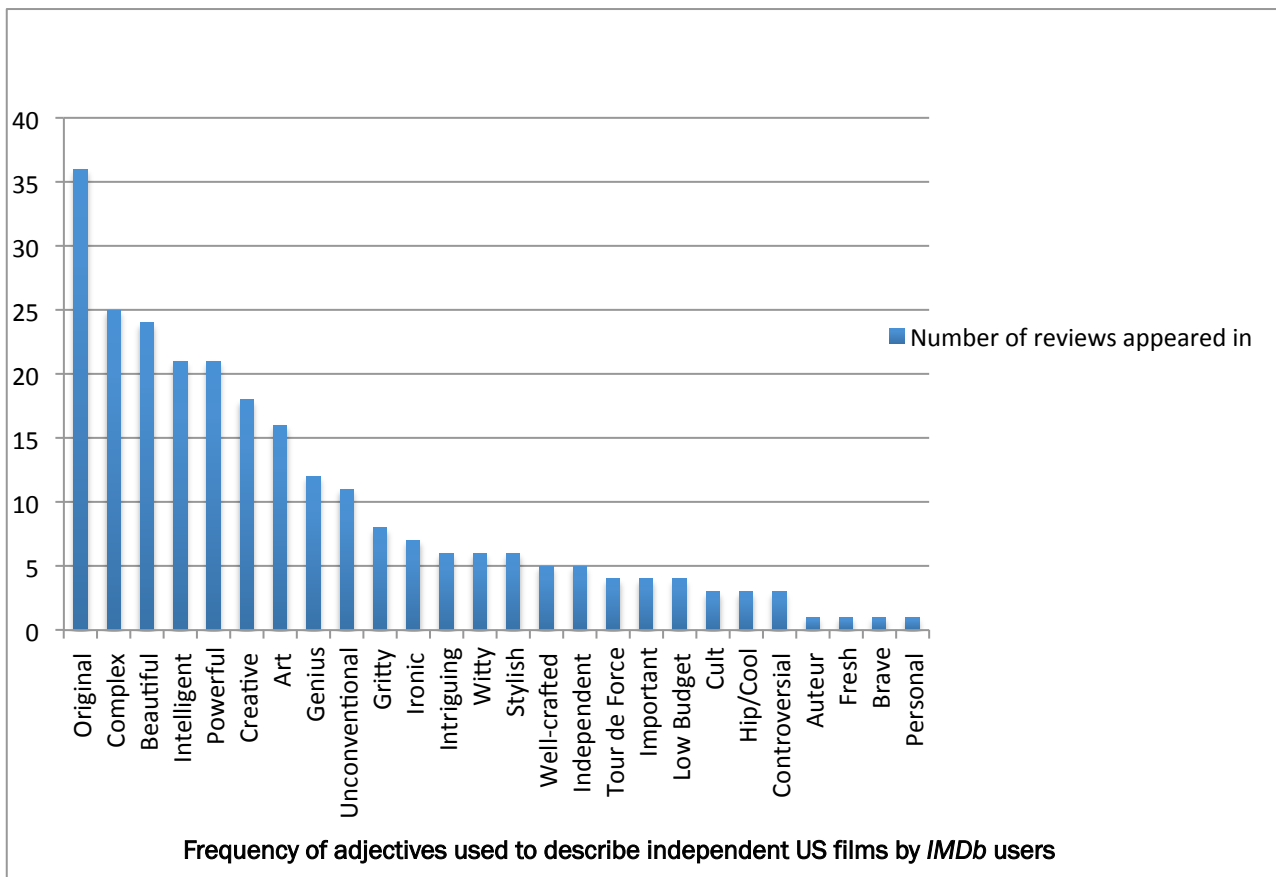
When analysing the reviews both quantitative and qualitative approaches were adopted. The quantitative stage identified the frequency of adjectives used by reviewers to describe the films. When analysing this frequency, judgement words such as “bad” or “good” were discounted, as were words such as “masterpiece”, “classic”, and “landmark” as these adjectives could be used to describe any type of film found in a chart, whether it was a best independent film or best blockbuster chart. In analysing the frequency of the adjectives, words that had the same or very similar meanings were put into groups. For example, the words ‘original’, ‘unique’ and ‘one-of-a-kind’ were grouped together into a cumulative frequency. This was done in order to provide a truer quantitative understanding of the discourse of independence. If similar descriptive words were counted on an individual basis they would not seem as dominant as when they are grouped together. The full results of this quantitative grouping are detailed in Chart One.

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<sup>37</sup> A recent study from Chitika (2013) reported that page 1 results on *Google* garnered 92% of all traffic from searches.

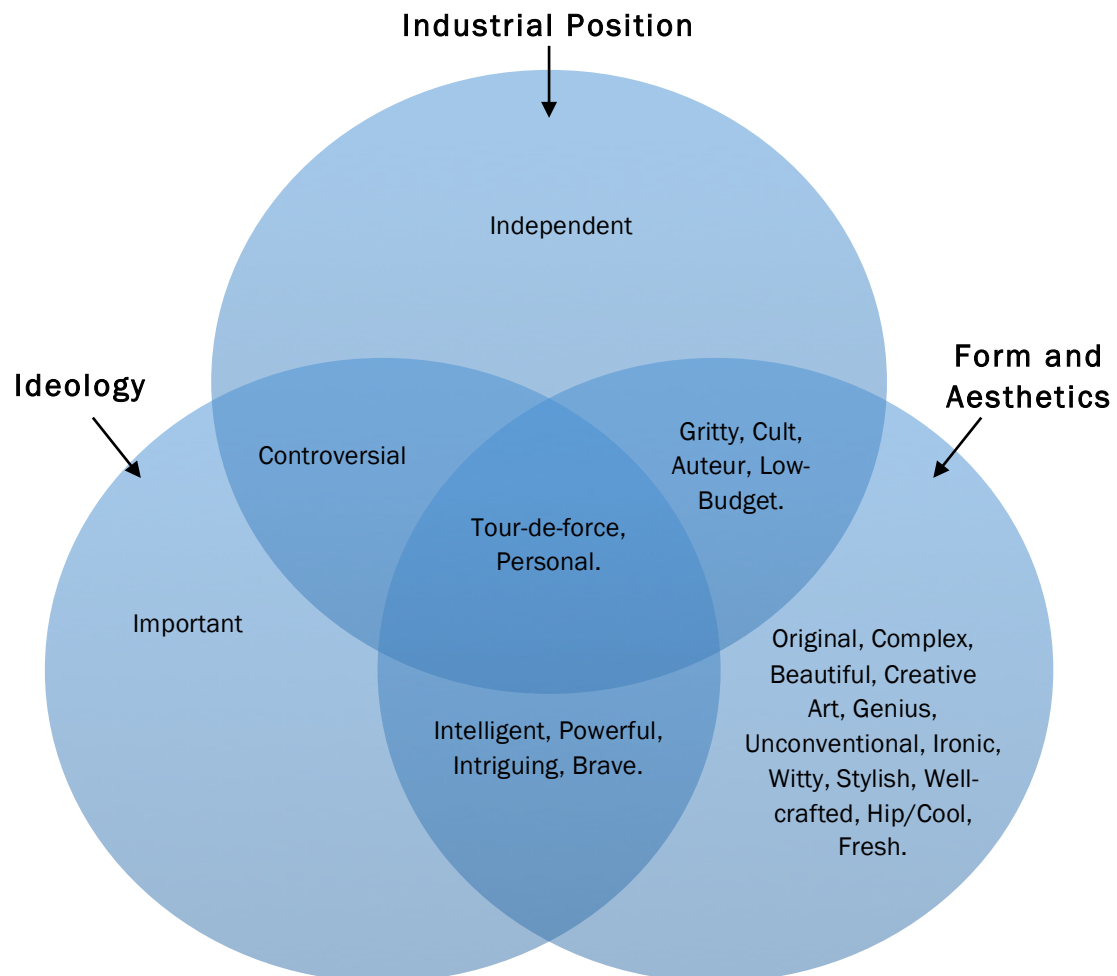


**Chart One: Frequency of Adjectives**



In order to make sense of these quantitative results, the adjectives identified were qualitatively analysed in-line with the connotations of the various reviews and wider understandings of American independent cinema. First, the adjectives were grouped in accordance to industrial position, form and aesthetics, and ideologies, in-line with Kings’ (2005) framework. Given that these three categories are both fluid and interconnected, a Venn diagram approach to categorising them was adopted (see Diagram Two). This approach is akin in many ways to this thesis’s understanding of the three key strands of media convergence as operating in a plait-like structure. In essence, the three key determinants of independence that King proposes are too interrelated. Terms such as ‘gritty’ and ‘low-budget’ can be both seen as aesthetics, and also as relating to the industrial position of the film.

Diagram Two: Venn diagram depicting the quantitative results when categorised using Geoff King's (2005) framework for approaching independent film



As Diagram Two depicts, the *IMDb* discourse of independence situates the discussion of independent film firmly in the grounds of form and aesthetics, with the vast majority of the adjectives used in the reviews falling either wholly within this category or into one of the hybrid areas that it is a part of. The industrial position and ideology categories are sparse in comparison.

What is surprising about these results is that only 1.4% of the sampled reviews referred to the films as being “independent”. There are a number of potential reasons for this. For example, the users who have written the reviews may not have felt that “independent” was a useful way in which to critique or comment on the films. This could relate to the previous discussion about the scope of the term “independent” and that in its present incarnation could refer to more or less any film. Furthermore, as Tzioumakis

outlines, the term “independent” – as a way of referring to a specific section of the US film industry – came to prominence in the 1980s as critics and scholars began to refer to a canon of films as “contemporary American independent cinema” (2012b: 12). This body of films’ ideologies were seen as being in opposition to the New Right ideologies that permeated American culture at the time, and represented an “articulation of progressive and even radical ideas” (ibid). However, by the 1990s this conservative dominance was dwindling, and coinciding with this the independent film sector was becoming more commercialised as part of its co-option by Hollywood and its close proximity to mainstream culture (Tzioumakis, 2012b: 13). Therefore, by the late 1990s the term “independent” had become virtually meaningless for critics and film-goers alike as a way of referring to and categorising films (Tzioumakis, 2012b: 14). Given that *IMDb* only emerged in its current incarnation in 1996, the historical and industrial understandings of independent film are perhaps largely lost on consumers who are posting reviews on the platform. Incidentally, many of the films contained within this chart have industrial positions close to Hollywood. With reference to King’s notions of independence being on a spectrum (2005: 9), many of the chart’s films, such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004), are edging towards the ‘mainstream’ arena. This could also explain why the reviews do not really discuss the films as being ideologically radical, as in most instances, they are not.

Perhaps then, it is media convergence in its various guises – industrial, technological and sociocultural – that has rather substantially influenced what consumers deem to be independent film. In essence, the industrial convergence that has taken place over the last couple of decades in which formerly independent media companies have become part of multinational conglomerates and where companies have emerged from within these conglomerates that have co-opted production, distribution and exhibition practices associated with independent media, makes it difficult perhaps, from a consumers’ perspective, to distinguish what is really independent, and what is not. This could explain why the term ‘independent’ does not feature in many reviews. Furthermore, as a consequence of technological convergence (as explored briefly in the Introduction) there is now so much film production, distribution and exhibition taking place at a grassroots level via the use of digital technologies and processes, which has seen thousands of films of all kinds made and disseminated through various platforms. It is perhaps these less viewed (and in certain instances, less critically-acclaimed) independent films that might be more likely to be perceived as being

independent by consumers and thus, discussed as such. Perhaps then due to technological convergence facilitating a renewed D.I.Y. culture of film production (and also dissemination) that has created a sociocultural merger between the roles of producer and consumer, and with industrial convergence having brought about the co-option of the most visible parts of the independent film landscape, consumers' delineations of what American independent cinema is, have shifted. The discourse prevalent on *IMDb*, goes some way to demonstrating this.

Despite users not tending to discuss the films as being independent, inspecting the reviews as entire texts (as opposed to individual adjectives) has revealed that many of the users passed comment on how the films were not like Hollywood's output. In a review of *Se7en* (Fincher, 1995) a user stated that "The film, blending a well put together combination of dark visual style, intense plot development, and polished acting, remains tight and focused throughout, from beginning to end, never straying outwards into unimportant issues, or resorting to typical Hollywood clichés" (Anon, 2002). This sentiment was found in many reviews; whilst the users were not directly referring to the films as "independent" they were pitching the films in opposition to Hollywood. From this we can decipher that both Kleinhans' (1998: 308) and Pribram's (2002: xiii) assertions that independent film is generally defined in terms of its relation to Hollywood (2002: xiii) still holds currency with contemporary film consumers despite certain sectors of US independent film operating in close industrial proximity to Hollywood as a result of industrial convergence.

The interconnectedness of certain parts of the US independent film sector with Hollywood could also explain why the discourse of independence in this case study is dominated by discussions of form and aesthetics; with the blurring of lines between Hollywood and independent film, film consumers perhaps find it easier to focus on the individual films rather than their position within a larger industrial context. The most frequently used adjectives were from the form and aesthetics category or one of its hybrid groupings. As stated, the most frequently used adjective grouping was "original", appearing in 36 of the reviews analysed. This suggests that independent films do things differently, and it can be generally assumed (as indicated above) that this means doing things differently than Hollywood. This was followed by the words "complex", "beautiful", "intelligent", "powerful", "creative" and "art" that respectively appeared in 25, 24, 21, 21, 20, 18 and 16 reviews. One user suggests that *Memento* (Nolan, 2001) was "not to be missed if you are looking for something clever and original" (Anon, 2001a), with

another user referring to *American Beauty's* (Mendes, 1999) plot as being “intelligently built” (Anon, 2000). In a review of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, a user stated that it was “a modern artistic triumph” (Anon, 2004). These adjectives were generally used in reviews that alluded that the audience for these films were more discerning in their tastes. For example, one reviewer described *Memento* as having a “very original premise” (Anon, 2003) and would appeal to audience members who “seek something to keep them awake, interested, and constantly thinking”. Another reviewer described the structure of *Mulholland Drive* (2001, Lynch) as complex, suggesting that the film was only recommended for the “right crowd” who are “serious about film and do not mind having to think about what [they] watch” (Anon 2005). Furthermore, one reviewer of *Fargo* (Coen & Coen, 1996) stated that “[i]f you can appreciate an intelligent look at not-always-so-intelligent life on this planet, you'll enjoy the little more than the hour and a half this movie has to show you” (Anon, 2001b). The underlying message of this particular statement is that only a certain kind of viewer can “appreciate” a film such as *Fargo*<sup>38</sup>.

This type of elitist discourse<sup>39</sup> relates to how product differentiation can be established. In his essay on high concept films, Wyatt draws upon Jack Hirshleifer's (1980) work to suggest that product differentiation can be achieved via distinctions made in terms of variety and quality (Hirshleifer, 1980 paraphrased by Wyatt, 1991: 87). In this respect, variety refers to the “characteristics of a commodity” (ibid); in film terms this could be the genre, the star, the music and other attributes. Distinctions in terms of quality, on the other hand, “assume that consumers value some underlying attribute contained within the product” (ibid). As Chapter Three demonstrates, both of these distinctions occur in the marketing of American independent cinema, yet the reviews analysed here tend to focus on the distinction of quality. A general trend is that these reviews position the films in opposition to, as one user states, “Hollywood bubblegum” (Anon, 2001c). This positioning is similar to how the marketing of certain types of independent film position themselves as being for selective audiences<sup>40</sup>. This type of independent film tends to be released by companies such as Fox Searchlight and also by smaller distributors such as Magnolia Pictures. As Chapter Three will explore, films in this category tend to emphasise the supposed ‘quality’ of their films and are regularly

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<sup>38</sup> A similar type of rhetoric is associated with and found within many of the different types of DVD special features that are discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>39</sup> See Newman (2011).

<sup>40</sup> The branding of films via the special features on DVDs, as Chapter Four discusses, is another incarnation of this elitist discourse.

released in correlation with the awards' season, often winning Oscars and other high-profile awards. A large number of post-1990 US films in this chart belong to this category, potentially explaining why markers of quality such as originality and intelligence are prevalent in the reviews. Thus what this suggests is that a symbiosis exists by which brands are created, understood, strengthened and utilised. Essentially, for a brand to work its meaning must be taken on by consumers and once consumer understanding has been acknowledged by the industry, marketers can then exploit the brand characteristics further. In terms of American independent cinema what we are seeing is that the characteristics of 'quality' and 'elitism' that were promoted by marketers of certain films are now (at least in terms of this case study's demographic) being determined by consumers as being generally representative of what independent film is.

It is this type of American independent cinema – the section that has largely been co-opted by the major conglomerates at an industrial level – that Newman (2011) refers to. The author suggests that during the Sundance-Miramax era “the idea of independent cinema has achieved a level of cultural circulation far greater than in earlier eras, making independence into a brand, a familiar idea that evokes in consumers a range of emotional and symbolic associations” (2011: 4)<sup>41</sup>. This brand of independence, or indie cinema as Newman refers to it, is based on a discursive framework worked out through an array of textual and/or contextual criteria (2011: 8 – 9). Writing in an earlier article, Newman proposes that indie cinema can be tied into indie culture at large, and as such has connotations of “small-scale, personal, artistic, and creative” (2009: 16). Conversely, mainstream culture, “implies a large-scale commercial media industry that values money more than art” (ibid). Yet despite the opposition between these two cultural categories, Newman does not see indie cinema as definitive and absolute, instead (like Kleinhans, 1998, Pribram, 2002 and King, 2005) he proposes that the indie-mainstream dichotomy is actually part of a spectrum, and he states that “some films might be stronger or weaker examples of indie cinema...some are more central, and some more peripheral or problematic” (2011: 9). In reference to the case study analysis presented here, the films in the chart generally contribute to this brand identity, with the discourse that the users have created exemplifying this. This gives credence to Newman's stake that indie cinema is a brand, as the user reviews demonstrate both an understanding and reiteration of the brand's connotations.

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<sup>41</sup> The earlier eras that Newman is perhaps referring to here are the pre-1980s when the term 'independent' wasn't necessarily prominent in audience discourse within the US.

However, independent cinema is not a singular brand, nor does the range of films under its banner share a single identity. The construction of the film corpus for this thesis demonstrates this as it provides an overview of the diversity of films being distributed under the umbrella of American independent cinema, rather than just the films released by a certain incarnation of independence. With the film corpus being largely compiled on a systematic basis, using industrial points of reference to independence (such as ownership, organisational structure and capacity etc.) as opposed to more subjective notions found in articulations of aesthetics or ideological stance, this study has provided a mapping out of the various different types of films being distributed within the American independent cinema sector, rather than just one fraction of this. It is the case, as will become apparent in subsequent chapters of this study, that American independent cinema has a range of 'brands' operating within its terrain, with the indie cinema that Newman describes, being just one of them. The exploitation fare offered by companies operating on the edges of the film industry such as The Asylum are a different brand, the genre films that were released by Fox Atomic and Rogue Pictures another, and so on. Therefore, the dominant 'brand' of independence is dependent upon the discursive framework within which it is examined. For example, the *IMDb* case study suggests that the dominant discourse present on this site regards independent film to be in-line with Newman's understandings of indie cinema, yet perhaps if a similar analysis was to be done using consumers associated with more politically radical activities then it is conceivable that a completely different discourse would be created. Referring back to Molloy's work, it is clear that there will always be a number of different discourses in circulation at the same time, and these different discourses will be representative of a range of perspectives (2010: 2).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the complexities involved in approaching the study of American independent cinema that most notably start with the question, what is American independent cinema? This chapter has not necessarily answered this question in a definitive sense, but it has added its own contribution to the discussion. There are no set definitions or boundaries (whether industrial, political or cultural) for this sector of US film, but that should not suggest that it does not exist. What it does indicate is that concepts of American independent cinema can be constructed in different ways and that these constructions form a degree of correlation with the various 'brands' of

independence that are in existence. Furthermore, as Chapter Two explores, despite academic questionings over the existence of American independent cinema, industrially this terrain is thriving, as films that in one way or another fall into the discourses of independence form the majority of the films released in the US.

Yet despite this, only a small number of these films are regularly discussed in academic publications within the remit of independent cinema studies. A certain elitist tendency exists and dominates much of the scholarly discussions around American independent cinema. It could be said that such perspectives are largely influenced by the markers of “quality” explored in the *IMDb* case study analysis; an overhanging influence perhaps from independent cinema in the 1980s. This influence could also be due to independent cinema’s perceived relation to art cinema and supposed opposition to the mainstream or commercial terrains (see Murphy, 2007). Yet as was demonstrated in the Introduction of this thesis, via the Venn of Independence and the film corpus, the terrain of American independent cinema is far more diverse than these “quality” judgements and discourses. In this light, further justification and credence is given to the way in which this thesis has approached studying the sector by using a systematic process, underpinned by subjective insight, to guide the decision-making process as to what films and distributors are discussed within its pages. The opposite approach to this would rely either wholly on the researcher’s initial knowledge of the sector or on popular discourses about independence, which would have led this thesis into the pitfall of only discussing certain parts of American independent cinema whilst purporting to examine the whole terrain’s distribution.

Furthermore, until relatively recently film studies has been dominated by approaches that looked at film from its formal/aesthetic qualities or ideological substance; in comparison, industrial approaches to film studies are thin on the ground. One of the seminal and most often recommended introductory books in film studies, *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell and Thompson, 1979), for example, almost avoids any industrial discussions, even in its newer editions. Therefore, the academic discourse of independence has been largely dominated by discussions of challenging films – either formally or aesthetically – that experiment with mainstream modes of filmmaking or those films that take on alternative perspectives and taboo subjects. However, the popularisation of the media industry studies agenda has changed this to a certain degree, with work by scholars such as Schatz (2009a), Tzioumakis (2012b) and Perren (2012 and 2013a) being testament to this. As highlighted in the Introduction, what



differentiates this 'new wave' of industrial approaches to earlier ones, is that such approaches are not industry-deterministic in the sense that they do not see industry as being devoid of the culture(s) they operate in, the products they create, and the audiences they serve. Instead, the aforementioned studies and approaches advocated by Caldwell (2013), Hilmes (2013) and McDonald (2013) combine industry-led analysis with other approaches from textual analysis to reception studies, and thus position industry discussion within the socio-political contexts in which they occur. In a similar fashion to how this thesis positions itself in terms of its understanding of media convergence as a three-stranded concept with dimensions in the industrial, technological and socio-cultural realms, the discussion of the distribution of American independent cinema presented within its pages tries to adhere to these interconnected realms.

Therefore, in adopting an industry-led but not determined approach, such as the one evident in this thesis, scholars can avoid the pitfalls of making value judgements on 'independence' and thus not overlook the varied and diverse terrain of this sector. This is not to say that industrial notions of independence are more worthy or credible than ones more based on the film texts themselves – or that industrial considerations are not intrinsically linked to the film text and the ideologies it conveys – but rather to highlight that such notions should also be considered alongside other discourses of independence on an equal level. The genre products and commercial output of outfits such as New Line, Lionsgate and Summit Entertainment all contribute to American independent cinema, yet many of their films are often overlooked in most research in this field. The films produced and distributed by companies operating on the edges of the US film industry such as The Asylum and Maverick Entertainment also contribute to the American independent cinema landscape, yet discussions about their output are generally limited to their cult or exploitation content, and do not extend to questions of independent filmmaking (see Evans, 2012). More so, what about discussions of filmic content that is independent but forms part of a larger transmedia text such as Lance Weiler's *Pandemic 41.410806, -75.654259* (2011)? Should examples of this fare also be discussed as contributions to the wider landscape of American independent cinema? This study argues that they should. All of these aforementioned examples are embodiments of independent film and as such, should not be excluded from scholarship on the area on grounds of form, aesthetics or ideological stance. The industrial approach to examining American independent cinema outlined in the Introduction of this study provides scope for including all forms of independent film into such discussions. This is important

because as the remainder of this study will demonstrate, the distribution landscape of American independent cinema in the era of convergence is vast, varied and almost beyond definability.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DISTRIBUTING AMERICAN INDEPENDENT CINEMA IN THE ERA OF CONVERGENCE: AN OVERVIEW OF DISTRIBUTION METHODS AND STRATEGIES 2006 - 2010

In January 2006, Soderbergh's *Bubble* (2005) was released simultaneously in cinemas, on DVD and online by 2929 Entertainment (2929 Entertainment – About, 2011). This strategy – day-and-date releasing – collapses the “windows” between the markets and subsequently eradicates the traditional hierarchy that has seen the theatrical presentation of a film as the most prestigious site of exhibition, due to its conventional place as the first platform to exhibit a film. The novelty of *Bubble*'s distribution garnered significant attention in press and industry circles: Anthony Kauffman (2006) described what would follow as the “day-and-date distribution revolution”; *Screen Daily* reported the move as “mould-breaking” (Kay, 2005); and Mohr (2005) suggested that if the strategy proved a success that it could signal a “massive sea change in the business of distribution”. This hyperbolic rhetoric was not, however, because *Bubble* was the first film to adopt a day-and-date releasing strategy but because of the “star power” of Soderbergh's name (Tryon, 2009: 105). Soderbergh rose to acclaimed director status in 1989 with the release and success of *sex, lies, and videotape*. Since then he has become a high-profile name in independent cinema, thus explaining the press attention *Bubble* received.

The emergence of day-and-date releasing strategies can be attributed to a number of factors – all of which can be linked back to media convergence at technological, sociocultural and industrial levels. Fundamental to the current methods used to release films across platforms is the digitalisation of film. Without this, home video/DVD and online distribution would be impossible. As discussed in the Introduction, the digitalisation of film has enabled consumers to access films in an ever-increasing number of ways and with this has come new consumption practices, which latter chapters of this thesis explore. The institutional structure of 2929 Entertainment also facilitated the implementation of *Bubble*'s release strategy. Whilst 2929 Entertainment is not a conglomerate on the scale of Time Warner or News Corp., it still demonstrates the application of corporate convergence (see Jenkins, 2004a; Küng et al, 2008), in order to disseminate film content across multiple platforms. A number of 2929 Entertainment's subsidiary companies contributed to *Bubble*'s cross-platform release: Magnolia Pictures

handled the theatrical distribution of the film; Landmark Theatres were the theatrical screening venue; Magnolia Home Entertainment orchestrated the DVD release; and HDNet Movies handled the film's online release (2929 Entertainment – About, 2011). This ownership of different subsidiary companies allowed 2929 Entertainment to negotiate and alter the order in which they distributed *Bubble* in each market.

At the time of *Bubble*'s release Magnolia Pictures' president, Eamonn Bowles, was positive about the day-and-date model, suggesting that it widens the audience for independent film from being just those consumers that are based in cities with theatres that play independent films (Bowles, quoted in McNary, 2009). Day-and-date releasing means that online or home entertainment audiences can watch a film at the same time as people who live in cities such as New York (ibid). Whilst commentators such as Jenkins have referred to the multinational conglomerates' ownership of various media companies as "alarming" (Jenkins, 2004: 33), this same strategy when adopted in the independent film sector could support some independent films in connecting with new consumers. This could lead to more revenue from a film's release and consequently, economic viability to certain sectors of American independent cinema. Despite this, the strategy has not been welcomed by all sectors of the film industry. Theatrical exhibitors were already anxious about reducing the windows between theatrical and ancillary market releases due to a fear of their revenues dropping, and day-and-date releasing takes this further by completely collapsing such windows<sup>42</sup>. While day-and-date releasing has not dominated film distribution strategies post-*Bubble*'s release, it has continued to be utilised (almost exclusively in the independent sector), and the windows between markets are still condensing.

This indicates that film distribution has changed, and theatrical distribution is not as dominant as it was in previous decades. In fact, as Jeff Ulin states, the theatrical presentation of a film is actually a "loss leader" in a large number of instances and therefore theatrical presentations of films could be perceived as another marketing component for the more profitable ancillary markets (2010: 121). Additionally, with methods available that bypass theatrical distribution altogether, a reassessment of what film distribution is in this cross-platform, multifaceted environment must take place. With this in mind, this chapter will provide an overview of recent changes in film distribution in

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<sup>42</sup> In a study on the top 50 grossing films in the US released between 2001 and 2005, Randy A. Nelson and Patrick Rutherford found that "roughly a quarter of the films appear on DVD before exiting the theatres" (2010: 689). In 2010 the Odeon cinema chain contemplated boycotting *Alice in Wonderland* (Burton, 2010) in some European cinema chains due to Disney's plans to cut "the period between a film's debut and its DVD release from the standard 17 weeks" to just 12 weeks (BBC News – Odeon, 2010).

reference to American independent cinema between 2006 and 2010, examining them in the technological, industrial and sociocultural contexts in which they occurred. The chapter will explore different areas of film distribution, such as logistics (via the discussion of different distribution strategies and methods), licensing, and the companies involved, thus providing both a review of scholarship on the field *and* current practices evident in the distribution of American independent cinema. In-line with the wider scope of this thesis, this chapter will focus primarily on film distribution companies rather than the smaller companies (such as aggregators) that are involved in supporting distribution practices. Furthermore, the distributors and films selected for discussion will be drawn from the film corpus with the aim that they are representational of wider industry practices and the American independent cinema sector at large. In essence, the discussions within this chapter will seek to provide a macro-level overview of the ways in which American independent cinema is being distributed (methods and strategies) and the types of film distributors involved. Through this discussion, that details the continuation of traditional distribution activities alongside the emergence of new practices, the chapter will argue that new types of film distributors have arisen who now co-exist alongside traditional gatekeepers of this realm. It is this pull between innovation and convention that creates today's distribution landscape.

### **Film Distribution: A review and discussion of**

Media distribution operates in between the production and exhibition arenas, acting as a link between the two and providing routes through which content can be disseminated to sites at which viewers can access, engage and interact with it. As Perren observes, distributors are “middlemen” and are “responsible for ensuring that media finds an audience” (2013a: 166). In the film industry, distribution's pivotal position between a film being made and it being screened has led commentators to perceive it as the key sector of the industry. William M. Kunz, for example, describes it as the “linchpin of the entire industry” (2007:112) and echoing this sentiment, King suggests it is “a critical component of the film business” (2005: 17). King goes on to argue that it is through distribution that films “find their way into cinemas... [receiving]...the necessary marketing and promotion to secure an audience” (ibid). The focus of King's statement is on theatrical distribution and at the time when he wrote it, theatrical distribution was more dominant than it is now, yet as stated, this situation has changed. As a reflection of this, in King's latest monograph, he describes distribution as “a crucial stepping stone en

route to exhibition and sales” (2014: 79). This subtle adaptation allows for a discussion of non-theatrical distribution strategies on the same level as theatrical ones, and is indicative of changes that have occurred in film distribution between the studies’ publication dates.

In her study of Hollywood, Wasko adopts a more economic perspective to defining distribution, describing it as a process that “involves a number of different markets where revenues are gleaned for the lease or sale of motion pictures, as well as other related products” (2003: 80). This statement is as relevant now as it was when it was written, as it encompasses how film is a cross-platform product. Yet through using the term “revenue gleaned”, Wasko firmly situates distribution as a part of profit-pursuit process and whilst this is true in some (perhaps even most) cases, defining distribution in this way overlooks how it can also be used to add non-economic value to films in terms of opening up new ways for consumers to access and engage with them. Furthermore, there are films produced that are not distributed with the intention to make money. Instead their *raison d’être* could be social, political or artistic; the output of Brave New Films exemplifies this. Therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to see Wasko’s notion of distribution as being applicable only to commercial forms of filmmaking, akin to the context that she was writing about.

With this thesis covering wider remits of the US film industry, the inclusive understanding of distribution that industry practitioner David Sin<sup>43</sup> provides is perhaps more apt. For Sin, distribution is “where completed films are brought to life and connected with an audience” (n/d). This definition is one that is quite fitting for this study’s approach to understanding and examining the distribution of American independent cinema, given both its openness to all forms of distribution and motivations behind a film’s distribution. The distribution process can be divided into three distinct, yet interconnected stages – marketing, licensing, and logistics (ibid). This chapter will explore the areas of licensing and logistics with the following chapter focusing on the marketing arena. Licensing refers to the rights to release a film across one or more platforms in different geographical locales (Sin, n/d – a). Traditionally, distributors were usually offered licenses for “theatrical rights, for showing the film in cinemas; video rights, for video and DVD exploitation; and TV rights, if the distributor is able to sell the film to a broadcaster” (ibid). Nowadays an array of digital delivery rights can also be

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<sup>43</sup> David Sin is the Head of Cinemas at the Independent Cinema Office and has also written for *Screen Online* (the BFI’s education website).

included in this list. The logistics of distribution involves the physical and digital transportation of a film to the various sites of exhibition. In the early days of film this meant getting a print to a theatre, but nowadays can range from selling DVDs at festivals to the online streaming of films. As established in the Introduction, there are a wide array of companies operating within the distribution sector of American independent cinema such as digital agencies and aggregators, yet this thesis's scope and focus is set on just the companies that would be traditionally described as film distributors *and* the online companies that are quickly establishing themselves as new types of film distributors. This limitation, as previously indicated, is due to both the practical constraints of this thesis and also because distribution companies<sup>44</sup> are the ones who ultimately govern the three key elements of film distribution that Sin outlines (marketing, licensing, and logistics) even when they outsource and commission specific activities to other agencies and companies.

Despite distribution's importance to the film industry, the diversity of activities incorporated in this sector's functions, and the considerable development it has experienced over recent years, the scholarship on the field is relatively small. Looking first at existing work on the sector prior to the recent innovations that this study examines, it is Wyatt that has perhaps made the most contribution to this field, particularly in terms of independent film. In Wyatt's (1998b) essay, 'From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, Marketing/Distribution Innovations' and his later revisionist essay, published in 2005, he explores distribution strategies used in US film – both in the mainstream and independent arenas – during the 1970s. These essays chart changes within strategies adopted within the sector, linking them to both the industrial climates of the time and to the types of films being released. As well as providing a historical overview of formerly adopted distribution practices, Wyatt links trends in the independent sector to those evident in more mainstream arenas, and vice-versa. This approach sees both parts of the US film industry as intrinsically linked (and to a certain degree, co-dependent) and has informed the way this thesis has approached examining the distribution of American independent cinema. Rather than see practices evident in American Independent Cinema as operating within a vacuum, this study follows Wyatt's approach, and instead situates them with a broader context, discussing them alongside the distribution activities of major studios.

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<sup>44</sup> Here, the term distribution company is used to refer to those outfits that employ thousands of workers, those that are embodied by an individual filmmaker/collective of filmmakers and those operating between these two aforementioned polar ends of the distribution company spectrum.

In terms of examining Hollywood distribution strategies, Wasko's *How Hollywood Works* (2003) contains a useful chapter on distribution that addresses how it fits into the industry's economic frameworks. Wasko's analysis provides a historical understanding of how the major studios have come to dominate the distribution of US film from the 1950s onwards through becoming parts of diversified conglomerates with interests in a range of entertainment fields that have enabled them to exploit 'concepts' across a plethora of industries and markets (2003: 59). The key argument Wasko presents is that distributors' position as "middlemen", and as parts of larger corporate structures, enables them to exert a significant amount of power over the US film industry in terms of the types of films that are released (2003: 84). Whilst Wasko's writings provide a solid overview of mainstream distribution from a power relations and economic perspective, she largely overlooks cultural and textual considerations and as such the chapter's outlook on what distribution is (or perhaps, more aptly, was), is slightly limited.

In McDonald and Wasko's edited collection *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (2008), essays by Phil Drake and Frederick Wasser take a closer look at relatively contemporary distribution strategies used in the mainstream arena and examine the growing importance of ancillary markets. Whereas studies such as Klinger's *Beyond the Multiplex* (2006) and Aaron Barlow's *The DVD Revolution* (2005) look largely at the consumption cultures that have emerged within the ancillary market of home video/DVD, these two essays instead address the impact that these markets have had at a more industrial level. Both essays highlight the theatrical market's decline and look towards the home entertainment field as being the dominant (in terms of revenue) distribution arena. Wasser's essay explores how Hollywood learned from the lessons of video (that saw two competing formats initially adopted) with DVD, and instead saw all parties – studios and hardware producers – agree on universal formats (2008: 128). He implies that home entertainment and the DVD sector has been a double-edge sword for the independent sector with it, on one hand, contributing to the decline of art cinemas and on the other hand offering cheaper distribution opportunities for independent filmmakers (2008: 129). Drake's essay extends this argument further, suggesting that the home entertainment market has had a negative impact on the whole of the US theatrical market with ancillary channels largely out-performing domestic theatrical grosses (2008: 81). Both authors correctly identify that the role of theatrical distribution within the wider film distribution landscape is lesser than it once was. Yet theatrical



distribution is still a commonly used distribution method, and yields a significant degree of status within the film industry, despite recent innovations.

In the latter 2000s, a body of work emerged that examined film distribution from a ‘pseudo-business’ studies angle. Kunz’s *Culture Conglomerates: Consolidation in the Motion Picture and Television Industries* (2007) falls within this category. The study looks at the merging of the entertainment industries in-line with the formation of the multinational conglomerates, addressing within it issues of ownership and regulation in the distribution sector. Similarly, Ulin (2010) too examines the commercial side of film distribution, providing overviews of areas such as synergy, conglomeration of the entertainment industries, and branding. Assessing film distribution from a legal perspective, Andrew Sparrow (2007) examines the legal issues that are embroiled within new forms of distribution. Whilst these works are useful in terms of their insight into specific industrial aspects of distribution and provide functional overviews of the areas they detail, it is these types of works that open up industry studies to fierce academic critique.

This type of work is what Caldwell would describe as an industry study that “naively” overlook established theoretical frameworks and traditional close textual analysis and instead provide a “more commonsensical, empirical approach to “real world” institutions” (2013: 157). Studies such as Kunz (2007), Sparrow (2007) and Ulin (2010) lack the depth, analysis, and discussion that more traditional film studies scholarship would pride itself on. Essentially, they write about the industry as it appears in official records, in some ways divorcing it from the social, cultural, and political contexts in which it exists. The aforementioned publications are more in-line with industry and film journalism publications such as *Variety*, *indieWIRE* and *Filmmaker Magazine* in terms of their style, tone and coverage of topics. This thesis sees no issue with using these types of publications as source material for understanding what is happening in the industry. However, such publications should be perceived as what they are; indicators of activity occurring within an industry, not critical understandings of such activity.

Fortunately not all of the contemporary work on film distribution is akin to this “pseudo-business” studies approach. In recent years, studies that address how the distribution sector works, whilst taking social, cultural and political aspects into consideration, have begun to emerge and fit largely into the contemporary media industry studies agenda. Two key studies that exemplify this were published in 2012,

namely Lobato's *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* and Iordanova and Cunningham's edited collection, *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line*. Lobato's work examines "the circulatory dynamics of cinema", which essentially is about "how movies travel through space and time, and what happens to them (and us) along the way" (2012: 1). Principally what Lobato is describing here is film distribution in its broadest sense. Lobato's study analyses the multifaceted ways in which people now encounter films and the proliferation of film consumption practices that have consequently emerged in recent decades across different geographic contexts. Lobato draws upon his earlier work, positioning these practices as existing on a spectrum of formality, with some being more formal than others (2009, 2012). For Lobato, formal film distribution is regulated, measured, and controlled by corporate organisations, regulatory bodies and/or the state, whereas informal film distribution is characterised by being substantially less controlled, less monitored, and *sometimes* less legal – hence, the phrasing "shadow economies of cinema" (2012: 4).

Through looking at less formal distribution practices, the author seeks to upheave some of the traditional approaches in film studies that have marginalised some of the most widespread and integral ways in which people currently consume films, and instead rightfully places "the shadow economies of cinema" at the centre of his analysis (2012: 1). Although these "shadow economies" and the activities they encapsulate operate on the fringes and, in some cases, outside of the film industry, Lobato still chooses to use the term distribution within his study as he feels the term retains the significance of agency in how content moves from production to exhibition (2012: 2). Despite acknowledging his own aim in moving discussions surrounding film distribution closer to media and cultural studies' scholars' notions of circulation, Lobato does express a fear that some studies adopting the term circulation also have the tendency to overlook the importance of agency (ibid).

Iordanova and Cunningham's (2012) edited collection has strong parallels with Lobato's study. Whilst the collection does not necessarily focus on "the shadow economies of cinemas", it does firmly address film distribution that is largely outside of Hollywood and that occurs within an online environment through a mixture of essays and case studies. The collection aims to explore how people experience cinema as a consequence of digital innovation, and also charts the "possibilities for the global circulation of film" (2012: 1). It is this broad scope that inevitably means that some areas, issues and debates are barely covered or not addressed at all. The impact of

changes in film distribution on film form and storytelling practices, for example, is not addressed. Echoing the sentiment of Lobato's ideas on the diversification of distribution circuits, lordanova states that a new film circulation environment has emerged and within it "a plethora of circuits and, possibly revenues streams" have materialised (2012: 1) In-line with this, she argues that the traditional film distribution model of hierarchical window releasing is under threat by digital distribution (2012: 1). Yet, unlike Lobato, lordanova does not feel the need to retain the phrase distribution to describe such changes (or disruptions, as she would perceive them), and instead enthusiastically replaces it with circulation throughout her chapter - a reoccurring trend in the collection's other essays.

The concept of circulation has gained currency in academia in recent years due to the publishing of Jenkins, Ford and Green's *Spreadable Media: Creating Meaning and Value in a Networked Culture* (2013). In this study the authors present a case for seeing the movement of media content within this contemporary era of convergence as a process of circulation rather than distribution. For Jenkins et al, the term distribution is representative of a process "where the movement of media content is largely - or totally - controlled by the commercial interests producing and selling it" (2013: 1), whereas circulation is symptomatic of a "mix of top-down and bottom-up forces [that] determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways" (ibid). While there are grounds for the argument that a paradigmatic shift has occurred in terms of how media content flows and connects with consumers, this should not necessarily suggest that notions of distribution are defunct. Rather, as this chapter demonstrates, and as the case studies in Chapter Six will exemplify, both these practices exist within the contemporary media landscape.

This shift from distribution to circulation is associated with a "movement towards a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of pre-constructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined" (Jenkins et al, 2013: 2). By its very definition, culture is a construct of people, but what Jenkins et al are proposing is that consumers are reshaping contemporary media culture in previously unseen ways (ibid). Furthermore, what the authors propose (as Chapter Five explores) is that the individuals who are reshaping the media landscape are not necessarily doing it in isolation, but are in fact operating as part of "larger communities and networks, which allow them to spread content well beyond their

immediate geographic proximity” (ibid). It is this that makes the way in which consumers can now share and discuss content, fundamentally different to previous eras.

Jenkins et al (2013) use the term “spreadability” to describe different forms of content circulation. For them, spreadability refers to:

...the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community’s motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes (2013: 4).

The term accounts for both the technical and cultural factors that support consumers in sharing content for their own reasons (Jenkins et al, 2013: 3). Central to the spreadable media model is the blurring of roles between the producer and consumer (Jenkins et al, 2013: 7), and as such the authors distance their notions of how content spreads from earlier conceptualisations of viral media. For Jenkins et al, “viral” suggests notions of “infection” and “contamination” that “overestimate the power of media companies and underestimate the agency of audiences” (2013: 21). In contrast, “spreadable media” moves away from the passive audience member being injected with a viral message, to a process in which “audiences play an active role in “spreading” content” (ibid). Circulation of content acknowledges that individual audience members choose to “spread” content and messages for “their own purposes and through their own relationships” (Jenkins et al, 2013: 22). Basically, the collective mass decides what is valued, and what is spread.

In some ways Jordanova’s adoption of the term circulation in *Digital Disruption* is generally akin to Jenkins et al’s (2013) writings, with both studies highlighting that significant change has occurred (and is still occurring) in terms of how media content flows through platforms and connects with consumers. The repeated emphasis on “disruption” in Jordanova’s chapter in *Digital Disruption*, firmly emphasises the collection’s main argument – that the traditional film distribution model of hierarchical window releasing is “radically undermined” by technological innovations (2012: 1). With the Internet offering numerous ways that content can be shared (in some cases without the creator’s consent), the hierarchies and traditional gatekeepers of film distribution are at the very least being challenged. Linked to this, Cunningham and Jon Silver’s (2013) chapter in *Digital Disruption* accounts for how some of Hollywood’s initial ventures into online film distribution, such as Pop, have not worked out as planned. The authors suggest that Hollywood’s attempts in this market were undermined by two factors: first,

their dominant target audience (under 25's) were the same demographic who are mostly likely to participate in illegal film downloading and, second, the software/technology supporting the illegal market developed more rapidly than that of the legal one (2012: 50). It could also be argued that Hollywood's ventures into online film distribution were far too focused on a traditional distribution mindset (e.g. a top-down approach) and did not offer the more participatory and portable offerings that other (more successful) online film distribution platforms and services provide (e.g. a mixture of top-down and bottom-up approaches).

With digital technologies offering new possibilities (both legal and illegal) within film distribution/circulation, Jordanova calls the movement of film online a "democraticising process", empathically declaring that film and its distribution is now unshackled from the "tyranny of geography" (2012: 23). To a certain extent this is true: for example, day-and-date releasing facilitated by technological developments erodes the windowing system and peer-to-peer file sharing disrupts the individual territory releasing strategies that had previously dominated global film distribution. Yet, we must be careful not to overstate such democratisation and enter into similar discourses that Gray alludes to in his critique of "You-topian rhetoric" (2010: 163). As Tryon argues, the "various modes of digital delivery are designed in part to provide media conglomerates with greater control over the distribution, circulation, and exhibition of their movies" (2013: 50). While the branding of the associated technologies and platforms may promise freedom and mobility, this may not actually be the case (Mosco cited in Tryon, 2013: 50). The geo-blocking of certain content on platforms such as YouTube aptly demonstrates this. A balanced view then is required when proclaiming the impact of digital innovation. This stance is particularly appropriate given that many of the 'old' or 'traditional' gatekeepers of film distribution still have significant power and control in the arena and (as will be discussed in this thesis's conclusion) because new gatekeepers of distribution have begun to emerge within the online arena.

Emerging during a similar timeframe as the aforementioned studies is Tryon's *On Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies* (2013). Here Tryon introduces the notion of "platform mobility", a model that conceptualises the current cross-platform distribution and consumption of film (2013: 4). Tryon's "platform mobility" argument goes beyond discussing the mere technological infrastructures that facilitate cross-platform delivery and consumption, and builds on earlier discussions about multi-platforming, participatory culture and on-demand access to content from scholars such

as Jenkins (2006) and Hills (2009). For Tryon, “platform mobility” includes “the social, political and economic changes that make mobile access more desirable” (2013: 4). What is particularly interesting about Tryon’s work is his perception of the “individualised consumer”, who is an agent in control of their own viewing experiences, interacting more capably with media content than in previous eras, whilst simultaneously using digital tools to remain in social spaces with friends and family (ibid). As Part Two of this thesis will examine in detail, the newer forms of distribution that this chapter will outline, have played a fundamental role in creating an environment for these individualised consumers to perform a significant role in constructing today’s multifaceted distribution environment.

Tryon’s study suggests that contemporary consumers are dispersed across a range of platforms. With this has come the question; how can distributors ensure that their film firstly reaches consumers and secondly enables them to secure the revenue they need in order to sustain their work? The concept of the ‘Long Tail’ which was initially discussed by Chris Anderson in a 2004 article for *Wired* and then later expanded upon in the book, *The Long Tail: How endless choice is creating unlimited demand* (2006) goes some way to answering this query. Anderson’s (2004, 2006) ‘Long Tail’ model argues that the future of the entertainment industry is not in selling high volumes of a few mainstream products, but is instead in niche markets. Underpinning the logic of the ‘Long Tail’ economy are three governing principles, namely, enhanced availability, low prices and effective search mechanisms (ibid). Essentially, what Anderson is arguing is that the digitalisation of media, coupled with the enhanced online search facilities that allow consumers to locate specialised products, means that it is now highly possible for the aggregated sales of many niche products to be a viable revenue stream, providing that both production and sales costs remain low.

Yet whilst the ‘Long Tail’ model is generally considered to have quite a bit of merit to it, it also has its limitations. Critiquing it, Lobato notes that the ‘Long Tail’ model “works for self-consciously marginal cultural production with high levels of (sub)cultural prestige” and is not necessarily fitting with other niche markets such as the straight-to-video economy, which do not demand such worthiness (2012: 36). Rather than being “undiscovered gems”, Lobato suggests that markets such as the straight-to-video economy are more about surplus product and as such are not necessarily best understood through the ‘Long Tail’ approach (2012: 36). Furthermore, films released by

straight-to-video specialists The Asylum and Maverick Entertainment have little to do with the “(sub) cultural prestige” that Lobato refers to.

However, Anderson’s model should not be dismissed entirely. The implications of this alternative economic model for the media and entertainment industries are aptly summarised by Marijke de Valck:

Nowadays, thanks to digital technologies, media products can easily and inexpensively copied and distributed across various platforms. The result is a media economy in which niche products can be extremely profitable, and therefore are of interest to commercial parties as well (2012: 119).

The Long Tail model can be linked to Broderick’s (2008) notion of “hybrid distribution” that is central to his conceptualisation of “The New World of Distribution”. This new world is characterised by a power-to-the-filmmaker ethos and offers filmmakers the opportunity to bypass the old gatekeepers of distribution and to “reach audiences directly”; its predecessor was “a hierarchical realm where filmmakers must petition the powers that be to grant them distribution” (ibid). Hybrid distribution provides filmmakers with the scope to:

....split up their rights, working with distribution partners in certain sectors and keeping the right to make direct sales. They can make separate deals for: retail home video, television, educational<sup>45</sup>, nontheatrical, and VOD, as well as splitting up their digital rights. They also sell DVDs from their websites and at screenings, and may make digital downloads available directly from their sites (ibid).

The main benefit of this type of distribution is that the filmmaker can retain more control over their film; they can search around for the best distribution in each sector and make separate decisions about each market. With digital technologies (as de Valck outlines) offering easy accessibility to cross-platform distribution and Anderson’s ‘Long Tail’ model presenting a framework through which the cross-platform targeting of niche consumer bases can be economically viable, it could be argued that the distribution stumbling block that parts of American independent cinema have struggled with for decades, is being eroded. The following section will outline the extent to which this is true, whilst simultaneously providing a macro-based analysis of the wider distribution landscape in terms of key practices and trends evident within this thesis’s sampled film corpus, coupled with reference to specific film distributors contained within the corpus and the

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<sup>45</sup> Educational distribution involves licensing or selling a film to educational establishments for a much higher charge than a single DVD. As Broderick (2008) outlines, through this independent filmmakers can still garner decent returns, however, they may have to compromise by delaying the general DVD release.

ways in which they are releasing their films. The films and distributors discussed within this review are representational of wider industry behaviours, and have been selected for their diversity and ability to represent the multitude of ways in which American independent cinema is now distributed.

### **Where is American Independent Cinema? An overview of distribution companies, methods and strategies**

From a macro perspective, contemporary US film is currently dominated in terms of market share, power, reach, and control by six major studios; Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox, Sony Pictures and Universal. In 2010 these studios (minus their specialty divisions) had a combined US box office share of 82.44%, which would not seem so impressive if there were only a handful of other distributors who released films theatrically in the same year (The-numbers.com – Market Share 2010, 2011). However, as an additional 130 companies also distributed films theatrically that year, the majors' dominance of the theatrical market is clear (ibid). The 130 other distributors that released films theatrically had a combined market share of 17.56%, which on average was 0.135%<sup>46</sup> of the market per distributor (ibid). Whilst the six majors reaped the largest financial returns from the box office they by no means released the most films. According to the *MPAA Theatrical Statistics 2010*, its members (the six major studios) released 104 films, whereas the combined releases of what could be termed independent distributors (an amalgamation of the major studio's specialty divisions *and* companies with no affiliations to the majors) was 456 (2010: 13). Therefore, it can be stated that on average, a major studio release will garner larger box office takings than an independent film would. What this first part of this distribution sector overview will provide is a comprehensive outlining of the types of distributors involved in the theatrical market (discussing them in reference to the sector of American independent cinema in which they operate), the types of films they release and the strategies that underpin these releases. It will draw on films and distributors listed in the tables in Appendix Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 using them as key exemplars of wider industry trends.

Although most major studio releases perform better at the box office than the output for independent distributors, not all independent films sink without a trace at the US box office. Referring back to the Venn of Independence's categories, there are sectors

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<sup>46</sup> Rounded to three decimal places.



of the independent film landscape that challenge the six majors' dominance of the theatrical terrain. The category of the "mini-majors" (Hillier, 1994: 21), which includes companies such as Summit Entertainment and Lionsgate, is a case in point. In 2010, Summit Entertainment's highest grossing film was *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* (Slade, 2010), which achieved \$300,531,751 at the US box office alone (The-numbers.com – Market Share 2010 Summit Entertainment, 2011). In the same year, Warner Bros. was the top grossing major studio, yet their highest gross release that year - *Inception* (Nolan, 2010) – did not equal the takings of *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, as it only took \$292,568,851 at the US box office (The-numbers.com – Market Share 2010 Warner Bros., 2011). Films that do this, such as *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, are the exception rather than the rule. *The Expendables*, which was released by Lionsgate, was the only other independent film to appear in the top 25 grossing films of 2010 (MPAA Theatrical Statistics, 2010: 14).

The specialty divisions of the major studios also, to a lesser degree, challenge the majors at the box office. In 2010 these companies released a total of 37 films, yet despite links to the majors and many of them achieving relative financial success, none of them were included in the top 25 grossing films of 2010 (ibid). The films released by these divisions (with the exception of genre labels) largely tend to differentiate themselves from the blockbuster/event movies generally released by the majors and the mini-majors. As discussed in Chapter One, films such as *Black Swan* and *The Kids Are Alright* (Cholodenko, 2010) tend to be more plot and character-driven, often explore taboo issues, and are less reliant on spectacle. In terms of their box office grossing per annum, these distributors usually sit behind the six major studios and the mini-majors. In 2010, the top six grossing distributors were the major studios, followed by Summit Entertainment and Lionsgate in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> position, Fox Searchlight in 9<sup>th</sup> position, Sony Pictures Classics in 12<sup>th</sup>, Focus Features in 13<sup>th</sup>, and Paramount Vantage lagging slightly in 19<sup>th</sup> position as they only released 3 films during this year (the-numbers.com – Market Share 2010, 2011). The genre divisions that existed during the years 2006 and 2010 tended to occupy a similar location in the box office chart, ranging from 10<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> position, but ascertaining a box office pattern for them is difficult because they were often relatively quickly shuttered or sold during these years.

In the mid-scale independent category a number of box office patterns are visible, dependent on whether reference is being made to companies at the top-end of this category, such as Magnolia Pictures who release a steady stream of films per annum, or

those at the bottom-end such as Argot Pictures who only release one or two films into the theatrical market each year. In 2010, Magnolia Pictures was placed 26<sup>th</sup> in the box office takings chart (ibid) and released a mixture of US films such as Casey Affleck's directorial debut, *I'm Still Here* in addition to non-US fare such as the Irish film, *The Eclipse* (McPherson, 2009). While distributors such as Magnolia Pictures have a regular film slate, their box office revenue is substantially lower than that of larger distributors such as Summit Entertainment. Magnolia Pictures, in 2010, had a box office gross of \$8,667,644, which was dwarfed by Summit Entertainment's gross of \$519,928,031 (the-numbers.com – Market Share 2010, 2011). In terms of box office takings, a significant gap exists between the mini-majors and the top-end, mid-scale independents. Furthermore, a relatively large disparity exists between top-end mid-scale distributors and bottom-end mid-scale distributors; Argot Pictures, for example, was positioned 63<sup>rd</sup> in terms of 2010's box office takings, garnering \$307,097 that year (ibid).

Moving onto the low-end independent distributors such as Lavender House Films, one can see that an even bigger inequality of box office grosses exists. Outfits such as these emerge frequently, release one or two films and then disappear without a trace. In the case of Lavender House Films, the company only released one film into the theatrical market, *The Rise and Fall of Miss Thang* (Hawkins, 2007). It was released in one theatre, in 2008, and made a mere \$581 at the box office (Box Office Mojo – *The Rise and Fall of Miss Thang* (2007), 2011).

Given the diversity in distributors releasing films into the theatrical market, it is not surprising that there is a range of release strategies in operation. The two largest forms of theatrical release are known as super-saturation and saturation releases. These are commonly used by the major studios when distributing their blockbuster and event films. A saturation release plays in 2000+ theatres, whereas a super-saturation release is shown in over 3000 theatres simultaneously (Drake, 2008: 67). In 2010, Paramount released *Iron Man 2* (Favreau, 2010), which at its widest release was playing in 4390 theatres across the US (Box Office Mojo – *Iron Man 2*, 2011). Whilst these types of release strategies are rare within the independent sector, some independent films do utilise them. *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* and *The Expendables* were both given a super-saturation release, which saw the films open on 4380 and 3270 screens respectively (Box Office Mojo – 2010 Domestic Gross, 2011). It is these distributors' mini-major status that provides them with the means to adopt similar release strategies to the major studios – something many other independent distributors do not have the capacity to do.

The wide release is the next largest theatrical distribution strategy, which according to *Box Office Mojo*, refers to films released simultaneously on over 600 screens (*Box Office Mojo – Top Weekend Averages, 2011*). However, given that super-saturation releases have frequently been playing in 4000+ theatres, it is perhaps appropriate to suggest that a wide release now equates to 1000+ theatres. The wide release strategy is adopted by a number of distributors including specialty divisions and mini-majors. When Rogue Pictures was the genre division of Universal<sup>47</sup>, it chose to open *The Return* in 1986 theatres across the US (*Box Office Mojo – The Return (2006) Weekend Box Office History*) – just shy of a saturation release and in 2007 the then Disney-owned Miramax released *Gone Baby Gone* (Affleck, 2007) in just over 1700 theatres (*Box Office Mojo – Gone Baby Gone (2007) Weekend Box Office History, 2011*). Additionally, the mini-majors occasionally adopt a wide-release for some of their ‘smaller’ films such as Lionsgate’s *Precious* that opened in 1003 theatres (*Box Office Mojo – Lionsgate, 2012*). Despite these examples, between the years of 2006 and 2010, the number of films given a wide release was relatively low, with distributors generally opting for one of the saturation releases or for smaller-scale theatrical distribution.

The limited release strategy is most often adopted by mid-scale and low-end independents. Drawing on research produced by Daniel R. Fellman, Kerrigan writes that a limited release “sees a film opening on between 50 and 700 screens” (Fellman, 2006 paraphrased by Kerrigan, 2010: 161). Many of the independent films released in this way only play on a handful to a couple hundred screens at most. *I’m Still Here*, for example, opened in just 19 theatres and played in just 120 theatres at its widest release (*Box Office Mojo – I’m Still Here (2010) Weekend Box Office History, 2011*). The logic underpinning this is an economic one. As Ulin describes:

Opening a film in a nationwide and worldwide manner is the most expensive avenue...if a picture is opened in limited release, targeting critics and key cities and hoping that reviews and word of mouth will create momentum, the costs are dramatically reduced (2010: 384).

Essentially, if a film only plays in 70 theatres simultaneously the prints and advertising costs (P&A) are far less than if a film was playing in 3000 theatres, therefore reducing the upfront investment. Furthermore, while digital distribution has reduced the print

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<sup>47</sup> In late 2008, Rogue Pictures was sold to Relativity (Cieply, 2009).

costs<sup>48</sup>, it has not reduced the advertising spend and therefore “P&A budgets [remain] relatively high” (Kerrigan, 2010: 102). With a limited release, as Kerrigan notes, the prints can be moved around from location to location, with some revenue from each area being reinvested in a local marketing campaign in the next area (2010: 161).

Bearing some similarities to the limited release, the platform release sees a film released in a select number of theatres, with the intention to widen its release over the course of its theatrical run. The strategy, according to King, “was designed to allow independent films to build an audience from relatively smaller beginnings than is generally permitted in the commercial mainstream” (2005: 29). Again, this option is favoured by mid-scale and some low-end independents, as it allows them to “gradually build up the audience for a film and as revenue comes in, the distributors can afford to increase the size of the P&A budget” (Kerrigan, 2010:102). More so, positive word-of-mouth surrounding a film will give smaller independent distributors more negotiating power with theatres, as they would then have a proven demand for the film.

The platform release has also been adopted by the major studios’ specialty divisions. In 2007, Miramax released the Coen Brothers’ *No Country for Old Men*. The film opened in just 28 theatres, building gradually to it being played in over 2000 theatres (Box Office Mojo – *No Country for Old Men* (2007) Weekend Box Office History, 2011). Miramax (with the backing of its parent conglomerate) would have been capable of releasing the film in a wider release from the start of its theatrical run. In not choosing this strategy, Miramax’s distribution decision could have been linked to the brand identity that the distributor wanted to give the film. Through opening the film in a small number of theatres, Miramax sought to differentiate *No Country for Old Men* from its own and Disney’s other more mainstream or genre-based films, which adopt wide/saturation release strategies. In doing so Miramax sought to enhance the film’s independent credentials as the platform release is generally associated with independent film.

An alternative and less frequently adopted theatrical release strategy deployed in independent film is ‘four-walling’. This strategy is when a (usually) D.I.Y. filmmaker or low-end independent, rents a theatre, provides their own copy of their film and handles the

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<sup>48</sup> For example, using DVDs to send out films to exhibitors is less expensive than sending film prints in terms of the cost of production and the logistical costs in transporting them. Furthermore, high definition digital mastering that involves compressing and encrypting film films so that they can be sent via online systems to exhibitors has the potential to reduce the costs associated with production and logistics further. Whilst this process may initially be expensive from a production perspective, as with any technological development, costs reduce rather substantially with time. This method also negates any need for postal or transportation costs, in essence putting the logistics of sending films to exhibitors at the click of a button.

box office takings. The distributor/filmmaker will keep the total box office takings but will have to pay an initial fee to the theatre for its rental. This is not common practice, but as Phil Hall suggests, the four-walling option is a viable in at least two markets – New York and Los Angeles (2006: 186). The Quad Cinema in New York offers such a package via its 4-Wall Select Programme that allows filmmakers to screen their film whilst retaining all control and rights for the film all platforms (Quad Cinema 4-Wall Select, 2011). This venture is risky, as it exerts greater pressure to get an audience for the film as the exhibition venue has been paid for upfront; however, the reward is that the total box office revenue from the screening can be retained (Wyatt, 1998: 73). With other alternative distribution methods open to independent filmmakers that require less initial investment (namely in the online arenas), this practice may eventually become redundant. Yet as Chapter Six will detail in relation to *10mph* (Weeks, 2007), approaching the logistics of distribution in alternative manners, such as theatrical road tours of films and the four-walling booking strategy, can be good ways of raising awareness of a film and pushing sales in other, ancillary markets.

On rare occasions different theatrical distribution strategies can be used with films over the course of their theatrical run, with some defying categorisation. One such example is *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (Bousman, 2008). The film was originally given a limited release by Lionsgate, which opened the film in only 8 theatres across the US (Box Office Mojo – *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008) Weekend Box Office History, 2011) despite the distributor's tendency to opt for wider release strategies and the director's previous box office successes including *Saw II* (2005), *Saw III* (2006) and *Saw IV* (2007). By the end of *Repo! The Genetic Opera*'s initial 5-week theatrical run the film had garnered a meagre \$146,750 at the US box office (Box Office Mojo – *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008), 2011), which means that with a budget of approximately \$8,500, 000 it could not be considered a box office success (IMDb.com – *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008), 2011). Despite its initial poor reception, Bousman was convinced the film had an audience, and consequently took the film on a nationwide tour, screening it in key cities and theatres (The Hollywood Reporter – *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008), 2011). The logistics of theatrical distribution – whether digital, semi-digital or analogue – is predominantly handled by the film's distributor, yet as Lionsgate's initial strategy did not seem to connect the film with an audience, Bousman took this into his own hands and did a theatrical tour of the film himself. This has resulted in *Repo! The Genetic Opera* garnering a cult following akin to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975, Sharman). Since

Bousman's road tour, the film continues to play on a regular basis in theatres across the US, with the film was still attracting around 150 people per month to the Vista Theatre in L.A. (The Hollywood Reporter – *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008), 2011). This unconventional theatrical distribution demonstrates the necessity of choosing the 'right' distribution strategy in order for films to connect with an audience. As will be discussed in latter parts of this chapter, attracting core audiences is a key part of a successful distribution campaign for many independent films.

Connecting films to core audiences does not necessarily have to occur through theatrical distribution. Films that are given a theatrical release are then usually distributed in other ancillary markets via a window-releasing approach, or, as discussed earlier, are released simultaneously across a number of markets via the day-and-date strategy. Regardless of strategy, however, the film will be licensed in each market (in different territories) in specific ways. For example, *Bottle Shock's* (Miller, 2008) theatrical distribution in the US was handled by Freestyle Releasing, who agreed a 2% fee of the net of the box office takings as well an undisclosed upfront fee (Film Independent – *Bottle Shock*, 2009). With offices across the country, Freestyle Releasing made the deals with individual theatres, opening it in around 50 theatres and then expanding out in a platform release strategy (ibid). In addition to this, the filmmakers licensed the film's DVD release to Fox Filmed Entertainment, with the LLC who owns the film receiving 40% of the DVD sales, struck a fixed-term exclusive deal with Netflix for the films online distribution and licensed Out Lot Films to handle the foreign sales of the film across different markets (ibid). This type of fragmented licensing agreements, which sees films handled by a multitude of distributors – in the broadest sense of the term – across different markets and geographies is particularly common in the independent sector, more so nowadays with the array of distribution channels available.

There are also many films that are produced specifically with the intention to bypass theatrical distribution altogether. With reference to some of the films and distribution/production companies contained within this thesis's non-theatrical corpus (see Appendix Item 8), this section of the distribution overview will examine the various avenues and strategies involved in distribution American independent cinema outside of the theatrical realm (although cross-over, in some instances, occurs). The straight-to-video and television markets are both representative of distribution possibilities outside of the theatrical realm. Operating within this terrain is The Asylum that release 10 – 15 films per year, usually via US television channels such as Syfy, Lifetime, Starz, and

Showtime (The Asylum – Company, 2011). They specialise in modern day exploitation films and ‘mockbusters’ such as *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus* (Perez, 2009) and *2012 Doomsday* (Everhart, 2008). These films and their distribution and marketing strategies are reminiscent of the 1950s exploitation films produced by prolific producers such as Roger Corman and Sam Katzman. According to Thomas Doherty (1986), exploitation filmmaking practices (especially ones that targeted youth audiences) first emerged in American cinema during the late 1950s with films like *Rock Around the Clock* (Sears, 1956) being released that had various topical and sensationalist elements that could be exploited to make a quick return. *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus* is one of The Asylum’s best-known films; the film’s brash title and marketing campaign, which exploits the monster element and cheap production values, garnered quite a bit of attention from online fan communities. The film has subsequently spawned an exploitation trilogy with *Mega Shark Versus Crocosaurus* (Ray, 2010) and *Mega Shark Versus Mecha Shark* (Edwin Smith, 2014). The “truism of exploitation filmmaking”, as Doherty describes, is to “be the first, not the best; quickness counts more than quality” (1986: 305). The Asylum has adopted this concept when releasing a number of their mockbusters. *2012 Doomsday*, for example, was produced on a reported production budget of \$250,000 and was released in February 2008 (IMDb.com – *2012 Doomsday* (2008), 2011), a whole year before the blockbuster it mocked – *2012* (Emmerich, 2009) – was released in cinemas (Box Office Mojo – *2012* (2009), 2011). Such cheap productions with rapid release strategies, allow The Asylum to capitalise on the marketing ‘buzz’ surrounding the Hollywood blockbusters on which their mockbusters are loosely based.

Maverick Entertainment is another company that exists on the edges of the US film industry, specialising in distributing US and foreign low-budget straight-to-DVD fare such *Robbin’ in da Hood* (Quake, 2009). Writing about Maverick’s releases, Linden Dalecki (2012) too draws links between its films – particularly their ‘urban’ releases – and Doherty’s (1988) work on the 1950s “teen pic”. Writing about the 1950s teen-pic, Doherty declared that:

Teen-targeted material has mainly meant teen protagonists coping with teen dilemmas in a teen milieu. The sine qua non is a certain verisimilitude in the stylistic expressions and cultural rites of the moment, notably the inside-dope details of vernacular, fashion and music” (1988, 207).

As Dalecki observes, the phrase “teen” could be replaced with the phrase “urban teen” and it would aptly describe films such as Maverick Entertainment’s *Robbin’ in da Hood* (2012: 374). Maverick Entertainment has also extended their distribution into the online arena. In 2008 it simultaneously released *Army of the Dead* (Conti, 2008) on DVD and on iTunes. Maverick Entertainment’s exploration of new markets could be due to the US home video market’s decline. Despite the home-viewing market superseding the US box office by about 2 ½ times in 2010, Peter Caranicas (2010) reported that rentals in the first quarter of 2010 dropped by 14%, and sell-through numbers by 11%. Potential reasons for this downturn could include competition from other forms of media entertainment (e.g. computer games), and the illegal distribution and consumption of films via peer-to-peer file sharing sites and pirated versions of DVDs.

The television market also offers opportunities for film distribution and is particularly important for documentaries. Whilst a theatrical distribution deal may be the ‘holy grail’ to documentary filmmakers, Claire Aguilar (Programming Vice President of Independent Television Service) suggests that successful theatrically-released documentaries are rare (Aguilar quoted in Albinak, 2011). Television, to a certain degree, seems to offer more realisable opportunities. Senior Vice President of National Geographic’s Global Development, Bridget Hannicutt, has suggested that the television route should be part of any documentary’s distribution strategy from the beginning due to its ability to generate buzz around a film (Hannicutt, quoted in Albinak, 2011). This should not suggest that the theatrical realm is a ‘no-go’ area for documentaries because some documentaries do achieve commercial success in the theatrical arena – *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006) exemplifies this. However, what is being suggested is that the theatrical market may not necessarily be the most suitable distribution channel for certain films in terms of connecting them with an audience.

Television also offers opportunities to screen film on dedicated film channels. The Independent Film Channel, for example, specialises in “television programming that challenges the conventions of storytelling” through the broadcasting of both films and TV series (IFC – About, 2011). The IFC is part of the larger IFC Entertainment that has a variety of subsidiaries operating within its corporate structure, such as the previously mentioned IFC Films (ibid). The channel and its corporate siblings recently ventured into day-and-date releasing. Films such as *Life During Wartime* (2009, Solondz) were released theatrically via IFC Films in theatres as well as on the channel’s On Demand platform (IFC Films – About, 2011). This move, by a number of independent distributors,



to the simultaneous cross-platform releasing of films is symptomatic of many of the conceptualisations of today's media consumption culture such as Hills' (2009) notion that today's consumers require on-demand access to content and Tryon's (2013) account of "platform mobility".

Film festivals such as Sundance can also be considered as film distributors given their role in the distribution process. The festival circuit, according to Michael Z. Newman, is "a distribution network parallel to commercial, theatrical distribution" (2011: 56) and is a staple part of American independent cinema. It offers opportunities for independent filmmakers to be 'discovered' and for films to be picked up by distributors and offered distribution deals. Soderbergh's *sex, lies, and videotape* is often cited as an independent film festival success story. In 1989, the film won the Audience Award for Best Feature at the then named US Film Festival (now Sundance). Despite having already sold the home video rights, which according to Yannis Tzioumakis "made the possibility of a theatrical distribution deal very difficult", the film was picked up by Miramax which "agreed to purchase all remaining rights for \$1 million, while also investing an extra \$1 million in print and advertising costs" (2006a: 273). The film took just under \$25 million at the US box office (Box Office Mojo – *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989), 2011), and can be linked to a "change in landscape of commercial independent cinema" and Hollywood's entry into the independent sector (Tzioumakis, 2006a: 275).

Another significant film festival in the independent landscape is Tribeca. Robert De Niro, Jane Rosenthal and Craig Hatkoff established the festival in 2001 after 9/11, aiming to "spur the economic and cultural revitalization of the lower Manhattan district through an annual celebration of film, music and culture" (Tribeca Film – About, 2011). Film festivals such as Tribeca and Sundance were perhaps the traditional route that consumers looking for specialty or niche films would go down. However, given the rise of the Internet as a site for searching for, streaming and downloading films, the introduction of specialised film channels and other similar innovations that cater for niche markets these types of film festivals seem to be under threat (de Valck, 2012: 120 – 121). For de Valck, the main reason for this is that film festivals may not be able to offer the commercial opportunities offered by the 'Long Tail' model and digital methods of film distribution (2012: 126).

Such anxieties are questionable however when examining the current industrial structures of both of these aforementioned high profile film festivals. Sundance and Tribeca have both become quite diversified as a result of industrial and technological

convergence, and have subsequently expanded their role within film distribution. Tribeca Festival is part of Tribeca Enterprises who operate “a network of branded entertainment businesses” that includes the aforementioned festival, Tribeca Cinemas, and Tribeca Film (a distribution initiative), as well as its “strategic partnership with the Tribeca Flashpoint Media Arts Academy” (an educational institution offering a range of programmes in media and film) (ibid). The various subsidiaries and initiatives operating under Tribeca Enterprises are similar to those incorporated in The Sundance Group, which includes the festival with which it shares its name and a cinema chain.

These festivals have also ventured into online film distribution. In 2011, Tribeca launched the Tribeca Online Film Festival that ran alongside the offline one. As Ben Childs (2011) reported, the online festival streamed six feature films and nine short films ‘live’ from the festival and also made previous short films from the festival available. Tribeca Enterprises has also entered the field of cross-platform film distribution in 2010 with the launch of its own distribution arm, Tribeca Film, which is “dedicated to acquiring and marketing independent films across multiple platforms, including theatrical, video-on-demand, digital, home video and television” (Tribeca Film Press Information, 2011). In 2011, Tribeca Film released *Beware the Gonzo* (Goluboff, 2010) on their video-on-demand service during August, September and October, whilst simultaneously distributing the film theatrically with a limited release during September (Tribeca Film – *Beware the Gonzo* (2010), 2011). Similarly, in 2011 Sundance announced that it would be expanding its Artist Services Initiative to “bring independent films to digital platforms” (Macaulay, 2011). As part of the licensing deal, filmmakers were able to retain ownership of their films whilst simultaneously using the Sundance brand to connect with consumers across platforms such as iTunes and Hulu (ibid). This means that the filmmakers were able to pursue distribution deals for their films outside of these agreements, rather than being tied into an ‘all rights’ agreement with Sundance/Artists Services. Essentially, this programme acted as the aggregator to get these films on online platforms, whilst allowing the filmmakers to retain overall rights to sell and distribute their work in other markets.

Online film distribution has caught the attention of organisations associated with the Internet such as Google and Amazon. Amazon’s Instant Video service, for example, offers a wide array of films and television programmes that can be streamed to laptops, Internet-enabled televisions and so on (Amazon Instant Video, 2011). Such online video-on-demand services – or “streaming multiplexes” as Tryon (2013: 27) refers to them –

are common. Google's subsidiary, YouTube now has full feature-length films available to watch online either for a fee or for free (YouTube – Movies, 2011) despite being originally more about personal video sharing and hosting. More recently, mobile applications have emerged for audio-visual consumption, such as the mobile version of Babelgum (an Internet television platform) that launched in the US in 2009 (Andrews, 2009). Its first feature film, *Rage* (Potter, 2009), was released in September that year (Kay, 2009). These online and mobile distribution both contribute and respond to the on-demand access to content that scholars such as Hills (2009) has described as being evident in this era of convergence<sup>49</sup>.

While many of the aforementioned online (and mobile) distribution methods, as King identifies, “are likely to become increasingly central to the Hollywood economy”, these same methods are also extremely useful for “smaller scale or emerging filmmakers seeking to bypass the control of the existing dominant players” (2014: 79). Nowadays filmmakers do not need to secure a traditional distribution deal at all in order for their films to reach consumers, as alternative distribution methods that largely fall into Broderick's (2008) conceptualisation of ‘The New Word of Distribution’ and hybrid strategies have emerged which enable filmmakers to release films themselves. The ease and cost at which DVDs can be produced, for example, makes this distribution route just as accessible to those operating at the bottom of the film industry hierarchy as those at the top. As Broderick (2008) notes, filmmakers have sold their films on DVD from their own websites and at festivals, cutting out the middleman and keeping the full revenue (ibid). The ensemble of filmmakers responsible for *Lumo* (Perlmutter, Walker, Abelman and True, 2007) adopted this strategy and sold their film directly to consumers at festivals, as well as selling their film directly from their website, making it available on Netflix and having it broadcast on PBS (Broderick, 2008). This type of distribution strategy inverts traditional notions of the logistics and licensing of film distribution in the sense that for certain distribution avenues the filmmakers themselves were handling the logistics of the distribution (e.g. selling the film from their site and at festivals) and also in terms of them dividing the rights to the films across different distribution markets such as providing PBS with the television rights to distribute the film as part of their P.O.V. documentary series whilst simultaneously reserving the rights to sell the film directly from their own website.

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<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the DVD kiosks run by companies such as RedBox that allow people to rent and return DVDs via a 24-hour satellite pick-up and drop-off points (see Tryon, 2013), can also be seen as a response to this consumption culture, albeit in a less immediate way than online distribution provides.

The positive attributes of Broderick's New World include a visible reduction in distribution costs due to the digitalisation of film, the increased viability of non-theatrical distribution routes, and the ability to "keep control of their content" for filmmakers (ibid). Through using social media tools for marketing and the Internet as a distribution system, filmmakers are increasingly able to tap into core audiences. While attracting core audiences is not a new strategy in independent film (as Broderick himself acknowledges), the use of social media in order to directly connect with fans and niche demographics is. As Tzioumakis (2012a) has observed, the main change between the old world and the new one is found in the relationship between the people making the films and those consuming them. As Chapter Six examines, Robert Greenwald adopted a similar strategy – using digital tools to connect with and renegotiate the producer's relationship with consumers – when releasing films such as *Iraq For Sale* (2006) and *Rethink Afghanistan* (2009). Greenwald bypassed theatrical distribution with both of these films and instead used social networking sites, the digitalisation of the film content, and the Internet to self-distribute (with others). Jenkins et al's (2013) notions of "spreadable media" and "circulation" are particularly relevant to understanding how these strategies work.

It has been suggested that the same technological advancements – namely the digitalisation of film content and the Internet – that have opened up new distribution opportunities to D.I.Y. filmmakers (amongst others) have also had detrimental consequences for the film industry. Pirated DVDs and what Sparrow has termed "the illicit distribution of film via the Internet" are presented by the industry as a genuine threat (2007: 34). Whilst this is to some extent corporate hype and despite copyright infringement having long since been an issue for the industry, the Internet has seen a proliferation in which films can be distributed and downloaded illegally, and a much quicker rate and on a more global scale than before. Digitalisation "enables information, software, text, pictures and, importantly, films, to be copied millions of times without loss of quality, downloaded without the knowledge of the copyright holder and transmitted around the world instantly over networks" (Sparrow, 2007: 1). A recent example of this practice occurred with the leaking of *Sicko* (Moore, 2007) online. As Tryon describes, the film was "leaked briefly to the video sharing site YouTube...several days before critics and political pundits were slated to see it", prompting the distributor, Lionsgate, and production company, The Weinstein Company, to bring forward the release date (2009: 1). The Weinstein Company had similar issues with its genre label's film *Grindhouse*

(Rodriguez and Tarantino, 2007), prompting the company to “ask that YouTube remove some unauthorized footage that had leaked on to the site” (Zeitchik, 2007a).

A large number of peer-to-peer Internet services exist that allow people to access and download media in contravention of copyright (Sparrow, 2007: 34). In a report on the economic cost of media piracy to the US economy, Stephen E. Siwek presents the argument that \$58 billion per year is lost to such illegal activities (2007: i). Using figures from Box Office Mojo, The Rentrak Corporation and Peer Media Technologies, the MPPA suggests that whilst 9.4 million people watched Fox Searchlight’s *127 Hours* (Boyle, 2010) at the US box office, the same film was illegally downloaded on bit torrent and other peer-to-peer applications 6.6 million times in one month alone (MPAA – Content Theft by Numbers, 2011). The use of online content sharing sites that infringe copyright, according to Sparrow, is “fuelled by the fact that, from the early stirrings of e-commerce, much of the content available from the Internet was free” and therefore users generally do not morally feel that they are doing anything wrong (2007: 34). To maintain the economic viability of online distribution, Sparrow suggests that a “culture of proper respect for creativity and effective protection of copyright is essential” (2007: 34 – 35). The media industries have tried to establish this culture by improving encryption services, enhancing the user-friendliness of legal downloading platforms, reducing prices and seeking the prosecution of people participating in piracy and companies that support it. The *MGM v. Grokster Ltd* (who developed a peer-to-peer file sharing platform) legal case is representative of the US film industry’s attempts to see copyright law enforced.

However, it should not be assumed that each ‘illegal’ view of a film would have otherwise equated to a paid-for view. Thus the claims such as the ones made in Siwek’s report, are perhaps overstated. As Lobato suggests, reports produced by and for the industry tend to be biased, and equating a pirated film to a lost sale is too simplistic as it “ignores the influence of pricing levels and distributive contingencies in media consumption” (2012: 73). For example, whilst someone may download a film via illegal means for free, it does not necessarily mean they would have otherwise gone to the theatre and purchased a ticket. Furthermore, there is also the argument that leaked material may actually help promote the film. Due to the complexity of what the industry would deem as piracy and what others may describe as sharing, Lobato’s (2012) conceptualisation of such activities is particularly useful. Rather than perceiving piracy as a singular act, Lobato instead argues that it needs to be reconceptualised as ‘piracies’ which he segments into six ethical and philosophical stances; (1) piracy as theft, (2)

piracy as free enterprise, (3), piracy as free speech, (4) piracy as authorship, (5) piracy as resistance and finally, (6) piracy as access (2012: 69 – 91). The perception of piracy as a multidimensional practice, progresses the discussion surrounding it from the binaries that the industry purports of illegal and legal, and good and bad etc. What Lobato's discussion achieves is bringing forms of piracy into the discussion of contemporary film distribution practices, justly elevating their status to the same level that more formal, legitimate methods of distribution have previously been afforded<sup>50</sup>.

While the 'illicit' or 'illegal' distribution of film content may dent (rather than diminish) the profits made by major studio releases, or more high profile independent films such as *127 Hours* and *Sicko*, allowing films to circulate freely through informal networks can in some instances be both a viable and successful strategy for certain types of films. This move from distribution (e.g. formal and controlled means of connecting content with consumers) to circulation (e.g. less formal and controlled means of connecting content with consumers) is more closely examined in Chapter Six of this study, but a few words are apt here. Filmmakers operating on the edges of the industry such as Robert Greenwald, Susan Buice and Arin Crumley, and Nina Paley have successfully negotiated their way around the evolving distribution landscape and have adopted more informal means through which they have connected their films with consumers in tradition-challenging ways. Furthermore, allowing some content to spread online for free can prove to be an astute marketing strategy – as Jenkins et al suggest, “if it don't spread, it's dead” (2013: 1). For example, prior to theatrically distributing *The Darjeeling Limited* (Anderson, 2007), Fox Searchlight released *Hotel Chevalier* (Anderson, 2007) – a short prequel of sorts to the film – for free in iTunes. As Carolyn Jess-Cooke notes, “few blockbuster trailers can claim a download rate as impressive as *Hotel Chevalier*” (2009: 107) and therefore through deploying strategies prevalent within discourses of circulation and Broderick's (2008) “New World of Distribution” a traditional distributor successfully negotiated its ways around the new distribution landscape.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the distribution sector of US film has changed substantially, and as de Valck outlines, the governing rules of the physical world are not the same as those of the digital one (2012: 117). Changes in the ways that consumers

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<sup>50</sup> Lobato argues that informal methods of film distribution should be afforded the same critical attention in discussions of film distribution as more formal methods. The logic supporting this stance is that informal distribution methods are altogether more common than the formal ones (2012: 4).

can now access films has led to a “radical shift that forces cultural organisations and media companies to reposition themselves in regards to new platforms, new rules and new players” (ibid). With this has come a new set of organisations that can be described as film distributors. Writing about this, King suggests that “[n]ew initiatives towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century saw a number of established online enterprises joining the ranks of more traditional distributors in search of promising material on the film festival circuit”(2014: 104 - 105). Whilst companies such as Netflix, Google and its subsidiary YouTube, and Amazon all operate to varying degrees within film distribution, half a decade ago such organisations would not have been considered as distributors.

The Amazon conglomerate, for example, holds a significant stake in film distribution through the range of companies it has within its corporate structure. In addition to selling DVDs as part of its online retail emporium, Amazon also runs Amazon Instant Video – an online store that provides the renting and buying of digital downloads of films for US consumers. For geographic locations further afield, Amazon purchased Lovefilm in 2011 for a reported £200 million (Bradshaw and Birchall, 2011). At the time Lovefilm, subsequently written as LOVEFiLM, operated in UK, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, allowing customers to rent films on DVD (LOVEFiLM – About US, 2013). Furthermore, LOVEFiLM Instant provided a service that allowed consumers to stream films (ibid). Amazon’s acquisition of LOVEFiLM was an attempt by the retail giant to compete with Netflix – an originally US-based organisation that offers similar services. Nowadays, LOVEFiLM has been absorbed into Amazon Instant Video and subsequently as a separate entity is defunct (LOVEFiLM, 2014).

Outside of these markets, Amazon has other distribution and film industry ventures. In 2006 Amazon-owned video on-demand publishing platform, CustomFlix (now known as CreateSpace) partnered with Withoutabox<sup>51</sup>, in a deal that, according to Alex Fischer saw filmmakers provided with the option to use CustomFlix when preparing their application to film festivals via Withoutabox (2012b: 159). In 2008, Amazon acquired IMDb.com (the parent company of Withoutabox), further consolidating the relationship between CustomFlix and Withoutabox and providing Amazon with a festival distribution platform to add to its list of services (ibid). Then in 2010, Amazon established Amazon Studios – a film studio (of sorts) that invited filmmakers to submit ideas, scripts, trailers, films etc. and courted audience feedback on them (Amazon Studios – About US, 2013).

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<sup>51</sup> Withoutabox is an online film festival submission service.

In order to distribute their films by more traditional means, Amazon Studios engaged in a 'first look' deal with Warner Bros. (Thompson, 2010).

The subsidiary companies within the Amazon conglomerate allow the enterprise to operate in the distribution realms of home entertainment, online distribution, festival distribution and now, to a lesser degree, the theatrical realm. The same logic of industrial convergence that has seen the major studios become subsidiaries of much larger conglomerates underpins Amazon's expansion and acquisitions, but many (if not all) of these ventures support certain forms of independent film to greater or lesser degrees. What this brief examination of Amazon suggests is that the types of organisations involved in the US film industry (and beyond) are changing, or at least diversifying – as are the ways in which film is now distributed. This should not however suggest that traditional distribution methods or gatekeepers of distribution are extinct; the opposite is in fact true. Today's converged media landscape is home to both a variety of ways of distributing film and companies operating within this field. Traditional distribution approaches to licensing and logistics still remain, with distributors in some instances acquiring all rights to a film (generally in a specific geographical territory) and releasing the film across a range of markets with minimal or no input from the filmmakers. Yet at the same time, more fluid and fractured approaches to distribution are in operation, as exemplified by films such as *Lumo*, in which the filmmakers are handling parts of the logistical elements of distribution themselves via selling their film directly to consumers and are dividing up the rights to a film across different companies, over multiple markets. From theatrical distribution through to more D.I.Y. methods, the various guises of independent film are visible in all of these spheres and as will be examined in the second half of this study, the recent changes in the distribution of American independent cinema have impacted on the storytelling practices evident in it, and the relationships that exists between films, producers and consumers. All of this contributes to a reconceptualisation of what American independent cinema is, and the role that changes within distribution have played in this.



### CHAPTER THREE

## MARKETING AMERICAN INDEPENDENT CINEMA IN THE ERA OF CONVERGENCE: AN OVERVIEW OF MARKETING METHODS AND STRATEGIES 2006 - 2010

In 1999 Artisan Entertainment released the low-budget feature film *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sánchez, 1999) and its marketing campaign has influenced independent and studio-produced films alike. *The Blair Witch Project* presented a fictional film as a documentary, supposedly made by a group of students investigating the Blair Witch legend. As part of this pseudo-real investigation, the students visited the alleged 'home' of the Blair Witch in woodland outside a town named Burkittsville, and were never seen again. The video footage recorded during this search is all that was recovered and its contents provided the material for the film. The film's marketing campaign combined a mix of traditional marketing methods such as TV spots, posters, and billboards, with new marketing possibilities offered by the growth of the Internet. Together this mixture of tradition and innovation sought to perpetuate the myth of the Blair Witch and construct a fake 'reality' around the film.

As part of the marketing campaign, a mock-documentary – *Curse of the Blair Witch* (Myrick and Sánchez, 1999) – was televised on the Sci-Fi Channel. The documentary promoted the myth of the Blair Witch and sought to persuade people that the events of the film were real. Similarly, the film's website - [www.blairwitch.com](http://www.blairwitch.com) - presented it not as a fictional film, but as real 'found footage'. The website contained further information on the Blair Witch legend, providing 'backstory' and other extra-textual information such as photographs of the student filmmakers, their abandoned car and one of the students' journal (purported to have been found in the Burkittsville wood). These marketing elements, and other offline ventures, such as the displaying of 'missing' posters for the student filmmakers, were an integral contribution to the creation of the story world surrounding *The Blair Witch Project*. As J. P. Tellote has described, "the selling of *The Blair Witch Project* and the telling of that film, its narrative construction, were from the start a careful match" (2001: 34). Furthermore, Amorette Jones, the head of the marketing team behind the film's campaign described this combination of marketing and story world, as doing commercial things in "a non-commercial way" (Amorette cited in Tellote, 2001: 33). What Tellote and Jones are suggesting is that both the film and its marketing campaign are intrinsically interconnected in terms of the film's story world.

The cross-platform marketing strategy adopted for *The Blair Witch Project* is symptomatic of contemporary film marketing. While traditional marketing mediums such as television, radio and billboards still command significant amounts of film marketing budgets (Kerrigan, 2010: 102), other (sometimes less expensive) promotional avenues have opened up online. Writing about these trends, Pamela McClintock (2009) suggests that cross-platform marketing uses different mediums to target specific demographics, as opposed to a one-size fits all approach. Following *The Blair Witch Project*, the utilisation of online elements in marketing campaigns continued (and proliferated), ranging from innovative ventures such as the game-based website that accompanied the release of *Donnie Darko* (Kelly, 2001) to more mundane efforts, such as Miramax's website for *No Country For Old Men* (2007, Coen and Coen), which saw the distributor's site host a web-page with nothing more than general information about the film, cast and crew. Furthermore, the trend of incorporating marketing components into the story worlds of films is also a distinct feature of contemporary film (and other media) marketing. This strategy is most common in other found footage films, horror, sci-fi, and disaster films such as *Cloverfield* (Reeves, 2008), *District 9* (Blomkamp, 2009), *2012* (Emmerich, 2009) and the Norwegian feature film, *Troll Hunter* (Øvredal, 2010).

Writing about the "obstructed spectacle" in *Cloverfield*, Daniel North suggests that for many consumers the urge to find out the 'truth' or crack the enigmas of the film's story world started with the premiere of the film's teaser trailer (2010: 79). North argues that "the marketing campaign provides information that will equip the committed spectator with broader context and clues for finding the solutions to questions left unanswered by the film's restricted narration, urging potential viewers to work for those solutions, to take up roles as investigators" (ibid). Similarly, the campaign surrounding *2012* sought to expand the concept of the film (that the world would come to an end in 2012 as per a Mayan prophecy) into our own reality. In this campaign, consumers could engage with interactive elements such as a lottery draw to be 'saved' from the end of the world, an election for the president of the 'new world' that would be created post-apocalypse and read a blog from one of the film's peripheral characters. All of these marketing activities sought to extend the story world of the film beyond the film itself and merge it (to some extent) with our own. Similarly, *Troll Hunter* used its premise – that there are select people recruited to hunt and monitor the whereabouts of trolls in Norway – to overspill the film's fictional world into reality. Accompanying the UK release of the film, for example, marketers posted an advertisement for a troll hunter on recruitment

website *Guardian Jobs*. The marketing campaign for *District 9*, a film about extra-terrestrials living as second-class citizens on earth, took a similar approach. The film's marketing campaign included posters on phone booths and stickers on public benches, declaring such areas no-go zones for aliens.

These increasingly prominent forms of marketing represent a more sophisticated and integrated approach to film promotion than those encountered in earlier eras. Despite this, novel approaches to film marketing have been common for decades. For example, during the late 1950s and 1960s, William Castle's production company was well-known for their gimmickry when it came to marketing. Tzioumakis observes how Castle would use his own persona and showmanship to help sell tickets for his film, such as appearing in a cameo and introducing his films (2006a: 154). Castle once took out an insurance policy in case anyone died of fright while watching one of his horror-thriller films (ibid). However, where new novelties of film marketing differentiate from these is in their increasingly complex way of intertwining the fictional story worlds of films with the reality of the consumers' worlds; in essence, bringing the film to life.

Furthermore, consumers are increasingly becoming key components in the spreading of marketing messages and content. Almost a decade after *The Blair Witch Project's* success came the release of another supernatural horror movie, *Paranormal Activity* (Peli, 2007). Produced for a mere \$15,000, the film went on to achieve more than \$190,000,000 at the worldwide box office (Box Office Mojo – *Paranormal Activity* (2007), 2012). Prior to its national release, *Paranormal Activity* had played in a select number of locations at midnight screenings across the US (McClintock, 2009). An online campaign asked “moviegoers to demand via *eventful.com* that the movie play in their local town” and the locations that generated the most “demands” received a screening (Thompson, 2009). Seeing that *Paranormal Activity* was generating significant hype, its distributor – Paramount Pictures – agreed that if the film received one million demands it would release it nationwide (ibid). At the end of October 2009, *Paranormal Activity* was released nationally having reached its target (Box Office Mojo – *Paranormal Activity* (2007) Weekly, 2012)<sup>52</sup>. Anne Thompson suggests that the success of this film can be attributed to Amy Powell's marketing strategy, which opted for a “grassroots movement propelling its own decisions about what to see” instead of the traditional top-down approach in which the studio tells the audience what film to see (ibid). This move

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<sup>52</sup> The film had a 17 week theatrical run playing in over 2700 theatres at its widest release (Box Office Mojo – *Paranormal Activity* (2007), 2012). This was the widest release Paramount Pictures gave a horror film that year (Box Office Mojo – Paramount Pictures 2009, 2012).

demonstrated the relevance of the long-held belief that positive word-of-mouth sells films. What the marketers behind the release of *Paranormal Activity* did was exploit this concept online where consumers can spread the word at a click of a button (ibid)<sup>53</sup>. Individual consumers were key components in the marketing of the film and their role within its campaign continued with its nationwide release (and that of its sequels) with consumers being courted to use Twitter, to ‘tweet their scream’ when watching one of the franchise’s instalments.

The aforementioned examples demonstrate the diversity and complexity of contemporary film marketing practices. Adding to the overview of distribution practices from the previous chapter, this chapter will examine the varied ways that American independent cinema is marketed. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, there are a myriad of companies involved in the marketing of films in addition to marketing departments within distribution companies themselves. For example, it is common practice for distributors to outsource the editing of their trailers to specialist ‘trailer houses’ and for key or innovative digital marketing services that exploit new mediums, outside digital agencies may be commissioned to undertake this work. To discuss all of these companies in detail is beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, this chapter investigates the methods and strategies adopted in the marketing of American independent cinema rather than the specific companies who may have created elements of these campaigns. However, where relevant, the outsourcing or commissioning of such activities will be highlighted. Specifically, this chapter explores conventional elements of marketing campaigns such as trailers and posters, coupled with discussions of newer, more interactive marketing techniques and platforms. To conclude, the chapter will discuss how film marketing campaigns and the paratextual entities included within them have become more integral to the film’s story world within this converged media landscape. Echoing Gray’s sentiments in his call for an “off-screen studies” (2010: 4), this concluding section will seek to elevate these paratexts to the level of study and attention that film studies has always and almost exclusively reserved for the film itself. This approach allows for an intricate understanding of how the industrial area of marketing exists in symbiosis to other areas of the distribution arena. This in turn will introduce how the relationship between, and changes within film distribution and marketing, have together impacted on the formal and aesthetic characteristics of films and their reception that latter chapters will develop.

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<sup>53</sup> Chapter Five discusses this further.

## **Marketing: A review and discussion of**

Writing in *Marketing: Application and Theory*, Gerald I. Eyrich and Walter B. Wentz define the marketing as the “interface between supply and demand” (1970: 2). This statement positions marketing as the connection between the organisation supplying the product<sup>54</sup> and the consumer of the product. This definition is generally still true. A more recent study, for example, authored by Karl Moore and Niketh Pareek, describes marketing as “the intermediary between the customer and the business” (2006: 8). Furthermore, the authors suggest that marketing “is responsible for communicating to the consumer the benefits of the product”, as well as how the product is different from its competitors (ibid). What Moore and Pareek are describing here is the central role of marketing – to make potential consumers aware that the product exists and why they should choose to purchase it over other, similar products. Despite writing 36 years earlier, Eyrich and Wentz develop this further, proposing that marketing does not just present consumers with products to purchase, but also has the potential to influence the demand for a product through manipulating consumer taste (1970: 2). If marketing is assumed to have such power (and this assertion has some credibility) then the vital role that it plays in connecting consumers with products becomes distinctly visible. In terms of the film industry, given that we consume more marketing campaigns than films themselves, as Gray suggests, sometimes our entire judgement and perception of a film will be based entirely on its marketing (2010: 46), thus highlighting the importance of studying how this area works.

Whilst the fundamental function of marketing as a connection between consumer and product has changed very little over the last few decades, the types of marketing methods and strategies used have. Much of this change, according to Paul Smith and Jonathan Taylor, can be attributed to the “[n]ew insights, new tools, new opportunities and new challenges” that have emerged throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2004: 4). Marketers must therefore continue to embrace developments within the field – specifically in the online arena – and respond to the challenges that materialise (ibid). This “continual change”, as Smith and Taylor (ibid) have termed it, has not only impacted on the marketing methods and strategies used, but has also led to a reworking of conceptual frameworks that had previously informed marketing operations. Although this

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<sup>54</sup> The term ‘product’ is used here to include both physical products (e.g. clothing) and experiential-based products (e.g. tours).

chapter will proceed onto addressing film marketing, it is useful to understand how this forthcoming discussion relates to recent deliberations in the wider discipline of marketing studies, hence the following short literature review.

Looking firstly at the “online opportunities” that Smith and Taylor refer to, the changes that have occurred are highly visible, such as viral and social media marketing campaigns. Although technological developments have facilitated such developments, the contemporary hybridisation of the roles of consumers and producers has also played its part (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2007). For example, viral marketing campaigns rely on consumers acting as marketers for a product. As Tom Hutchinson describes, viral marketing is just another term for one the most traditional marketing methods – word-of-mouth (WOM) (2010: 318). WOM predates the Internet and is a consumer-driven form of communication in which consumers spread marketing messages to other consumers (Brown et al, 2007: 4). Its assumed independence from the market means that consumers perceive it to be more credible than marketing communications driven by industry organisations (ibid). Through using the Internet, viral marketing strategies exploit the concept of WOM online, as demonstrated by the campaign that preceded *Paranormal Activity*'s nationwide release.

Related to this, David Meerman-Scott suggests that media convergence has played a role in bringing together the worlds of marketing and public relations (2007: 26). He states, that “[i]n an offline world, marketing and PR are separate departments with different people and different skill sets, but this is not the case on the Web (ibid). The UK fashion brand Dorothy Perkins’ utilisation of social media epitomises this. The brand uses its Facebook page to market its products to potential customers, posting status updates about new clothing and accessories, offers, and competitions, which will appear in the news feeds of users who have ‘liked’ its page. While also being a form of targeted marketing, the fact that potential consumers can interact with the brand on the social networking site (e.g. commenting on posts, liking posts, etc.), indicates that the line between marketing and public relations has become blurred. Consequently, the traditional institutional frameworks of how organisations structured their departments are being modified, if not dismantled.

According to Smith and Taylor, marketing has recently been through a transitional period and during this time, it has “moved from ‘customer acquisition’ (winning new customers) through ‘customer retention’ (keeping customers for life) towards ‘customer selection’ (dumping unprofitable customers while selectively keeping the more profitable

ones)” (2004: 4). Whilst this transition may not be a direct effect of convergence, manifestations of convergence can be used to facilitate this process. For example, as Peter R. Peacock states, data-mining is a term used to describe “knowledge discovery in databases” (2001: 165) and can be used to abandon unprofitable customers:

Some customers cost more than they contributed and should be encouraged to take their business elsewhere...When data mining is applied to the purchase history of such customers, their negative impact on the bottom line often becomes evident (2001: 167 – 168).

Furthermore, data-mining can be used to select which customers could be profitable and thus aim marketing at them (ibid). More so, Peacock suggests that data-mining can be used to identify “associations between product purchases in point-of-sale transactions” and as such “retailers and direct marketers can spot product affinities and develop focused promotion strategies that work more effectively than traditional “one-size-fits-all” approaches” (ibid). In the online world the results of these practices are visible. For example, when purchasing a DVD at an online store such as Amazon, consumers are also shown a number of other products that other consumers who purchased that DVD have also bought. These ‘recommendations’ are the result of data-mining techniques and aim to instigate further purchases. Similarly, Hotmail has used tailored advertisements on the sidebar of users’ inboxes based on the personal data it has collected on them. This type of targeted marketing is commonplace and as will be discussed later, it is a strategy that some marketing campaigns for independent films adopt.

In recent years, new fields within marketing have emerged. Outlining these developments, Pauline Maclaran and Elizabeth Parsons describe how areas such as “relationship marketing, services marketing, and the network perspective on business-to-business marketing” have emerged and coinciding with this, the terminology used in sector has also been adapted (2009: 1 – 2). In 2004, the American Marketing Association (AMA) released a reworking of their definition of marketing, which asserted that:

Marketing is...a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders (AMA cited in Parson and Maclaran, 2009: 2).

This definition acknowledges that the relationship between organisation/product and customer is not fixed and as commentators such as Kerrigan have observed, highlights

(to a certain degree) how marketing has moved away from a linear exchange theory model<sup>55</sup>, towards a more multifaceted relationship-centred approach (2010: 3 – 4). However, the AMA's reworked definition did have detractors. As Parson and Maclaran note, one of the main areas of contention with the 2004 definition was that it positioned the consumer in a role where they had "value delivered to them" (2009: 2), and the passivity of this position was too similar to notions of 'effects theories' for many commentators<sup>56</sup>.

Given the critiques of the 2004 definition of marketing, the AMA reworked it again in 2007:

Marketing is the activity, conducted by organisations and individuals, that operates through a set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging marketing offerings that have value for customers, clients, marketers and society at large (AMA cited in Parsons and Maclaran, 2009: 3).

The AMA still currently uses this definition, despite it having its critics<sup>57</sup>. Writing about the 2007 definition Kerrigan argues that it does not seem to acknowledge the "role of the consumer" in the process of marketing and has been written solely from the marketer's perspective (2010: 4). In this respect the AMA have, at the very least, not fully acknowledged and, at the worst, disregarded, the intrinsic role that consumers can play in the marketing arena – from spreading marketing messages in the offline world to circulating marketing content online. This oversight perhaps still harbours subtle sentiments of previous exchange-based assumptions on how marketing works.

One of the fundamental conceptual frameworks prevalent in marketing studies – the marketing mix – has been adapted over the years to acknowledge consumers' roles in marketing processes. Neil Borden first coined the term 'marketing mix' during a speech at the American Marketing Association in 1953 (Dominici, 2009: 17) and as Smith and Taylor outline, it is a methodological approach that assists marketers in designing strategies (2004: 6). There have been numerous scholarly accounts of the

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<sup>55</sup>Michael J. Baker has stated that the essence of marketing is "the act of exchange between a seller and a buyer" (1998: 5). Whilst this is fundamentally true, more contemporary approaches to marketing have seen this exchange process as a multidirectional relationship rather than a linear process.

<sup>56</sup>Graeme Burton summarises the various theories relating to the effects model as assuming that "the media do things to people, that audiences may be passive, and that the media producers have a power which audiences cannot resist" (2005: 98). The wording of the AMA's 2004 has such connotations as it does not seem to acknowledge the individual consumer's ability to reject such values and to negotiate their own relationship with the product/organisation.

<sup>57</sup> See <https://www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=M&dLetter=M>, accessed 24/08/2012.



marketing mix since the term was first used, but it is E. Jerome McCarthy (1960) who is generally credited with outlining its components as product, price, place and promotion – otherwise known as the 4 Ps. Within this framework the product can be physical or a service, pricing refers to the cost of the given product, place accounts for where people access the product and its distribution and promotion is how people know about the product.

These original components of the marketing mix have been the subject of revision, adaptation and criticism since McCarthy's original piece and yet as Barker describes, this framework still carries much currency despite the fact that many commentators agree that the components at the very least need to be expanded (2008: 248). For example, Gandolfo Dominici, describes how the application of McCarthy's original conceptualisations of the 4 Ps to contemporary marketing practices has its limitations since McCarthy was writing in the 1960s in a "manufacturer context" when today's "interaction with the customer and the communication capabilities of Internet were unimaginable" (2009: 8). Yet despite this, he too acknowledges the easy adaptability of the 4 Ps that allows them to be applied to different contexts than they were originally intended (ibid). Contemporary scholarly discussion on the 4 Ps can generally be divided between the two camps of the "conservatives" and the "revisionists" (Dominici, 2009: 18). The "conservatives" argue that the 4 Ps continue to be relevant in digital contexts due to their capacity for widening their meaning and through including sub-mixes within them (ibid). The "revisionists" propose that the original 4 Ps are obsolete and instead seek to add and change elements of the original mix (ibid). Some revisionists such as Chaffey et al. (2000) have proposed entirely different marketing mixes to McCarthy's 4 Ps, yet as Dominici notes, many "revisionists" (see Lawrence et al, 2000, Kalyanam & McIntyre, 2002) keep the 4 Ps as part of their new conceptualisations of the marketing mix (ibid). Rather than disregard product, price, place and promotion altogether, numerous revisionists instead add other components to the mix such as payment systems and personalisation (Dominici, 2009: 19). Despite differing revisionist approaches, the common denominator is that they argue that the marketing mix today needs to have a more "explicit customer orientation", specifically because of the increased interactivity of marketing in an online environment (ibid).

Given this call for "explicit customer orientation" it is unsurprising, as Baker states, "most observers would agree that at the very least [the Ps] need to be extended to include consideration of People" (2008: 248). For Baker, the inclusion of people into

the marketing mix is essential for the following three key reasons: (1) marketing is an activity done by people, for other people; (2) it is people (or different demographics of people) who provide the basis of differentiation between the various services providers/retailers/manufacturers from whom consumers make their product choices; and (3) it is people who design and deliver marketing mixes, strategies and campaigns (2009: 253). Adding to this list of reasons for including people into the marketing mix, it is perhaps the consumers' role in participating in contemporary marketing practices that is the strongest argument for the inclusion of 'people' into its framework. Given contemporary marketing's push to be increasingly interactive, consumers are becoming increasingly involved in marketing processes rather than being mere recipients of its messages. Furthermore, even in the offline world, WOM has also played a vital role in the marketing of not just films, but commodities and services from a diverse range of industries. Consequently, in a world where we are being told we are increasingly connected to one another, the role of the consumer in the process of marketing should not be overlooked. The implications of this within the film industry, specifically in relation to American independent cinema, will be explored in Chapter Five.

### **From the poster to the tweet: Marketing American independent cinema**

The ways in which the various incarnations of American independent cinema are marketed within the period under examination in this thesis represents a mix of tradition and innovation; a hybridity of well-established marketing activities and experimentation with new opportunities presented within the era of convergence. The review presented here will draw on the thesis's film corpus across both theatrical and non-theatrical markets and present an overview of key marketing activities undertaken or commissioned by the distributors identified in the corpus in relation to the releasing of specific films. Examples chosen for discussion represent the diverse terrain, or perhaps 'brands' of independent cinema, discussed in both the Introduction and Chapter One. Thus, this review provides both a macro-level overview of the marketing operations of this sector of the US film industry and more nuanced, micro-level discussions about how such operations work in relation to individual films.

Posters were one of the earliest forms of film marketing to emerge and they have been responsible for embedding iconic film images into the general public's psyche. The poster for *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) in which Jack Nicholson's character has his head squeezed through a smashed door frame, and the poster for Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*

(1975) with the image of a shark looking up from the depths of the sea to a young woman swimming are specific examples of this. These posters' images would be easily recognisable even if the text were removed. Writing about the evolution of the film poster, Gary D. Rhodes describes how, from the days of silent film through to contemporary cinema, the film poster has been "a centrepiece of feature motion picture marketing" with their images acting as "embodiments of their films for collective memory" (2007: 228). According to Rhodes, the film poster was an extension of the "show printing" tradition that saw advertisements for shows and circus acts; the size of these prints having similarities to those adopted as the standard measurements of US film posters (2007: 228 – 229). The initial adoption of the film poster – in the very early 1900s – saw them being used to announce that films were being shown at a venue, rather than what specific films were being shown (Rhodes, 2007: 229). This situation however, quickly changed. The increasing involvement of emerging studios in the design of posters throughout the early 1900s led to such companies teaming up with lithographic organisations and a type of standardised film poster emerged, ultimately leading to individual film posters being produced for each release (Rhodes, 2007: 230). The practice of producing individual posters for film releases is nowadays a standard process, and with developments in printing technology and distribution processes, posters can now be produced, distributed and exhibited with relative ease, making them a viable option for all kinds of film distributors and filmmakers.

The development of the film poster brought about certain conventions. As Kerrigan notes, whilst film posters aim to "create 'want to see' in the mind of the consumer" and sell the elements of the film such as cast and genre, this must be communicated alongside other considerations (2010: 131). One such consideration is the location of casts' names on a film poster. Drawing on Marich's (2005) work, Kerrigan outlines how the left side of the poster has more status and therefore if two actors' names are to be presented as having equal status then the one on the right side should be elevated more than the one on the left to depict this equality (Marich paraphrased by Kerrigan, 2010: 132). Similar considerations are also evident in the positioning of the director's name (*ibid*). Furthermore, with actors' images being a key aspect of their career it can cause problems when designing film posters as the "designer must balance the need to communicate the unique selling point to the target market with the contractual restrictions regarding font, images and positioning" (Kerrigan, 2010, 132).

*Defiance's* (Zwick, 2008) posters exemplify some of these contractual obligations and considerations of star power. All of the posters display Daniel Craig's name with great prominence and on most, he is the only cast member to be named (see Appendix Item 11). More so, the font size used to depict Craig's name is the second largest on the poster – dwarfed only by film's title. Given that Craig played the lead role in this film and his star status in relation to other actors in it, it is unsurprising that his name was given this prominence. Furthermore, the image used of Craig's character on the poster in Appendix Item 11 takes up approximately 75% of its space and is positioned centrally. This layout is duplicated in other posters for the film, with Craig's character being the dominant image even when other characters from the film are also included. From this brief typographical and layout analysis we can see the marketers were using Craig's star power to sell the film, possibly hoping to capitalise on the success of Craig's role as James Bond in *Casino Royale* (Campbell 2006) and the publicity surrounding the then recently released *Quantum of Solace* (Forster, 2008)<sup>58</sup>.

While the director's name is not displayed on the posters – perhaps because Edward Zwick is not a household name – his directorial CV is given prominence. For example, many of the posters released contain the quote “From the Director of *Blood Diamond* and *The Last Samurai*”; both of which were relatively high-profile releases. The film titles within this caption are in some cases the same size as Craig's name and on others, slightly smaller. Through linking the film to Zwick's previous work, it gives potential consumers a hint of what *Defiance* will be like. Referring back to Moore and Pareek's understanding of marketing as being a means of communicating a product's “benefits” (1970: 2), we can see that film posters (and film marketing in general) operates with very similar principles. In *Defiance's* case, the “benefits” of the film being communicated are its lead actor and its genre/style, with the latter ascribed to the director. In terms of branding, the poster links *Defiance* to the ‘quality’ strand of American independent cinema that is often associated with the specialty divisions and certain larger mid-scale independents. Whilst both of the films that the poster links *Defiance* to were distributed by a major studio – Warner Bros. – they are not necessarily akin the spectacle-driven blockbusters and events films typically associated with the majors. Instead, both *Blood Diamond* and *The Last Samurai* focus much more on character-driven storytelling (despite moments of spectacle), and both received a

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<sup>58</sup>*Quantum of Solace* was released in late 2008 and saw Craig continue in his role as Bond. The Bond franchise adopts lavish marketing campaigns for its films. *Defiance's* marketers were probably hoping to capitalise on the inevitable buzz around Craig that the release of *Quantum of Solace* brought.

number of nominations at both the Academy and Golden Globe awards. Essentially, the poster tries to establish *Defiance* as a film for the ‘discerning viewer’ in a similar way to how the IMDb reviews from Chapter One discussed independent film.

In stark contrast are the posters released by distributors such as The Asylum, whose films generally contain no major stars and whose directors have little (or no) star power<sup>59</sup>. The poster used to promote the release of *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus* is indicative of general trends in exploitation film marketing. Although the lead actors’ names are displayed on the poster (see Appendix Item 12) as per contractual obligations and poster-design standards, the primary element being sold is the monster/action genre indicated by the image of a battling shark and octopus that dominates approximately two thirds of the poster. This example, and other posters of other contemporary exploitation films operate in opposition to the posters produced for ‘quality’ branded independent film. In essence, exploitation posters seek not to highlight the quality of the film, but indeed the lack of quality. *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus*’s poster promotes the spectacle and ludicrous nature of the film’s story, rather than emphasising complex character-development or meaningful story topic.

Similarities exist between this poster design and the ones adopted by previous exploitation film marketers from the fifties. In his work on this area, Bradley Schauer describes how American International Pictures (AIP) – one of the key producers/distributors of exploitation films in the 1950s – used poster images that represented a “sensational narrative sequence” (2009: 402). Writing about the *Attack of the Puppet People* (Gordon, 1958), Schauer describes how the “poster depicts a group of tiny people attempting to spear a giant snarling dog” (ibid). The sensationalist sequence is similar to the image depicted on the *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus* poster. Furthermore, when also writing about 1950s exploitation film marketing, Tzioumakis analyses how the typography and visuals on the *Rock Around The Clock* poster played a part in attracting the target audience of teenagers (2006a: 162). The use of “images of dancing couples” and the large size of font used to display the names of the bands/performers from the film – namely, Bill Haley and the Comets – were key elements to attracting consumers (ibid). What this demonstrates is that the elements of construction used in film posters, such as selection (i.e. what elements are used), compositions (i.e. the way they are arranged on the poster) and combination (i.e. the

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<sup>59</sup> Whilst the directors and talent in such films may be recognizable to a cult following, wider, mainstream audiences would not usually know their names.

different elements that are used together) are carefully chosen in order to maximise a film's appeal to its target audience.

A recent example of a marketing campaign that sought to attract a strong core audience is *Fireproof* (Kendrick, 2008), which was aimed at the evangelical Christian community. Claude Brodesser-akner (2008) accounts for how the team behind its release not only managed to attract evangelical Christians (an audience that most major studios struggle to reach), but also simultaneously marketed the release of a self-help book – *The Love Dare* (Kendrick, 2008) – by integrating the book within the film's narrative. This synergistic campaign ultimately led to the book entering into the top-15 best-seller list on Amazon (ibid). Kris Fuhr, Vice President of Provident Films – the production company behind the film, has spoken about how one of the fundamental elements to the success of the marketing campaign<sup>60</sup> was in its ability to connect with and mobilise the grassroots evangelical Christian community by tapping into the fans of the production company's previous release - *Facing the Giants* (Kendrick, 2006) (Furh cited in Brodesser-akner, 2008). 2008). In a similar fashion to *Paranormal Activity's* more prominent campaign, the fans were asked to get at least 1000 people to commit to seeing *Fireproof* in order for a print to be sent to their town (ibid). This resulted in 98 screens out of the 839 screens on which the film was shown, having “already sold 1,000 tickets before the film even opened” (ibid). The targeting of this core audience continued after the film's theatrical run with a campaign kit being distributed for use in churches to promote the message of *Fireproof* and *The Love Dare* book.

Similarly, Fox Searchlight sought to tap into the lucrative Hispanic market when releasing *Under the Same Moon* (Rigen, 2008). Writing about this strategy, Rebecca Winters Keegan (2008) explains:

[Film producers have]...good reason to court the Hispanic audience. Latinos buy more movie tickets per person than any other segment of the U.S. population. The median age of Hispanics in the U.S. is 27.4, nearly 10 years younger than the U.S as a whole, putting them squarely in the date-night demographic.

In order to capture this relatively under-tapped audience, Fox Searchlight utilised both the Hispanic media and grassroots strategies, working with the Mexican soft drink – Jarritos – to host screenings in key cities, and arrange screenings for key members of the Hispanic community such as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (ibid). There

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<sup>60</sup> The marketing campaign can be deemed a success as the film garnered \$33,456,317 on a production of just \$500,000 (Box Office Mojo – *Fireproof* (2008), 2013).

are clear parallels between this strategy and those that Perren (2004) writes about in relation to *My Big Fat Greek Wedding's* (Zwick, 2002) marketing. It is worth noting here however, that this type of grassroots marketing or specific demographic targeting is not just confined to the independent sector. When releasing *G. I. Joe: Return of the Cobra* (2009), Paramount Pictures placed posters and advertisements in military newspapers and magazines – only extending to the wider outlets shortly before the film's release (Candler, 2009). Again, this bears similarities to *My Big Fat Greek Wedding's* campaign, which saw printed promotional materials placed in “Greek churches, dances and ethnic festivals” (Perren, 2004: 27). The main aim of such techniques – whether from the independent sector or Hollywood – are to tap into lucrative core audiences and then when (hopefully) positive word-of-mouth spreads, the audience base will expand.

Trailers are another significant component of film marketing campaigns. As film is strongly associated with visual culture, radio trailers are sometimes overlooked when discussing film marketing, yet they have played (and still do play) their own role in promoting films. Writing about US radio, William A. Richter (2006), suggests that in the mid-2000s radio reached “roughly 277, 990, 086 American twelve years old and older each week” (2006: 1) and from morning to early evening, more people consumed radio content than they did output from television, magazines and newspapers (2006: 2). While some radio networks in the US do offer the opportunity to advertise films to mass audiences, certain state/area specific stations or stations that attract a specific community of interest offer opportunities to target specific demographics. The cost of radio advertisements varies greatly from station to station and is linked to the station's listenership. Advertising on smaller radio stations with a limited reach may be an affordable marketing option for independent film distributors operating on smaller P&A budgets and choosing the right radio station(s) may be instrumental in connecting films with their target demographics. Referring back to *Fireproof*, the marketers used radio advertisements to further connect with an evangelical Christian audience through having them aired on Christian radio stations (Brodesser-akner, 2008). Furthermore, *Fireproof's* marketing campaign and the placement (physically and digitally) of its components were instrumental in establishing the film as belonging to another sub-sector, or brand, of independence – the Faith/Christian film. Whilst such films are generally produced outside of the major studios and thus form part of the canon of American independent

cinema, such films (like exploitation films) are rarely discussed in studies on this area<sup>61</sup>, thus highlighting how textual and cultural approaches to looking at independent film have the tendencies to exclude much of the independent film world from their discussions.

Writing specifically about audio-visual trailers, Lisa Kernan argues how neither advertising nor film narrative theories adequately addresses the analysis of film trailers, and as such her study seeks to understand how trailers work through simultaneously addressing the viewer as both spectator and consumer (2004: 2). For Kernan, the trailer is “a unique form of film narrative, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined” (2004: 1). The cinema trailer for *The Mist* (Darabont, 2007) exemplifies this dual narrative purpose and mode of address well. It opens with brief glimpses of the distributor’s logo before entering directly into the film’s story world, quickly establishing the narrative’s concept that a mist has descended upon a small town. The division between the film’s characters, separating those who believe the mist is supernatural or indicative of a forthcoming judgment day, and those who look for more logical or scientific explanations, is also quickly founded. The first 1 minutes and 23 seconds of the trailer draws viewers in as spectators of a micro-film; uninterrupted they are invited to watch as the story unfolds, the main characters are introduced and the film’s genre is depicted through the non-diegetic soundtrack, narrative events and cinematography.

This opening part of the trailer supports Mary Beth Haralovich and Cathie Root Klaprat’s (1981/82) assertion that the structure of film trailers generally mirror film narrativisation. Yet at 1 minute 24 seconds this conventional narrative presentation is interrupted by the intertitle “Belief divides them”. From this point onwards, the dual mode of address and purpose ensues. The editing and non-diegetic pace quickens, further intertitles interrupt the live-action scenes that help to frame the narrative and film, and further (more explicit) indications of the film’s genre are included. At 1 minute 47 seconds, the fictional world of the film is further interrupted by the intertitles “From master of terror, Stephen King” “and Frank Darabont...the Screenwriter and Director of *Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*”. The trailer ends with a whispering of “Don’t let the monsters get me” playing underneath the film’s title card “Stephen King’s *The Mist*”, which is preceded by an end title card detailing key organisations and individuals involved in the production of the film. From 1 minute 47 seconds onwards,

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<sup>61</sup> A recent exception to this statement is James Russell’s (2013) essay ‘In Hollywood, but not of Hollywood: independent Christian filmmaking’.



the trailer addresses the viewer much more as a consumer and the narrative (although still offering pleasure) becomes much more promotional. This is achieved through tactics such as trying to appeal to the fans of King's and Darabont's previous works. In short, the trailer moves from offering mainly narrative pleasure and addressing the viewer primarily as a spectator through to becoming a more obviously promotional narrative and positions the viewer more aggressively as a consumer. Therefore, Kernan's understanding of the narratology of trailers is more convincing than Haralovich and Klaprat's.

The format of *The Mist's* trailer is symptomatic of how many trailers are produced. As Kernan describes:

Most trailers have in common a few generic features: some sort of introductory or concluding address to the audience about the film either through titles or narration, selected scenes from the film, montages of quick-cut action scenes, and identifications of significant cast members or characters (2004: 9).

Like posters, trailers too seek to sell the key talent involved in a film and give a sense of its tone, genre and story, ultimately seeking to sell these attributes to potential consumers. Audio-visual trailers are essentially "free samples" of films, and as Kernan suggests, characterise viewers as window shoppers (2004: 6). Similarly, as Gray suggests, people's decisions about what films to watch are based on speculative consumption in the sense that they buy a cinema ticket, DVD or download a film based on the possibility of enjoying it through their understanding of the potential pleasures it may offer (2010: 24). Such speculative consumption decisions are based viewing the marketing materials that surround media products.

In the same way that other forms of film marketing try to promote certain films to specific demographics, film trailers also follow suit. As Kernan explains, "[d]ifferent markets are made visible in trailers by textual evidence of "targeting", or appeals to specific genders, age groups, or other categories of subjectivity within trailers' overall mission to expand the audience" (2004: 14 - 15). For example, the trailer for *The Puffy Chair* (Duplass, 2005) clearly situates itself within the 'mumblecore<sup>62</sup>' trend, aiming itself at discerning film consumers in their twenties who are of a similar age to its post-college/early adulthood characters. Appealing to a broader demographic, *I Hate Valentine's Day's* (2009, Vardalos) trailer presents itself as a romantic comedy for 25 -

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<sup>62</sup> Dennis Lim (2007) describes this style of filmmaking as being characterised by "low-key naturalism, low-fi production values and a stream of low-volume chatter often perceived as ineloquence".

54 year olds, whilst also targeting the audience-base of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*<sup>63</sup>. Taking a different approach, Summit Entertainment's trailer for *Sorority Row* (Hendler, 2009) was produced to appeal to the late-teen/early twenties market and fans of the high school horror film, and as such ensured these genre elements were highlighted within it. In appealing to specific demographics – some of which are larger than others – film trailers can play an instrumental role in the speculative consumption decisions that people make when choosing which films to watch. As Olen J. Earnest outlines, a trailer:

...typically generates the highest interest in seeing level because it shows the cast in the characters they will portray on screen, it is able to outline the story and its elements in greater detail, and, by showing extended scenes from the picture, the trailer gives the potential moviegoer a better idea of the film's production values (1985: 8).

Yet we must not over-exaggerate their influence as other elements (many of which are outside of the official marketing strategy's parameters) also play a role in determining people's film consumption. Choices could also be based on what films are being shown at local cinemas, who they are going to see the film with, what other people have told them about the film and how the film has been received by critics.

Despite these external factors, film trailers use a number of techniques in order to appeal to consumers. One such strategy is adoption of the "vaudeville mode" (Kernan, 2004: 18). According to Kernan this mode of address situates the film as an "event" (ibid) and "emphasises the role of attractions along with narrative and generic elements, all considered as equally desirable aspects of commodified spectacle" (2004: 19). In Summit Entertainment's trailer for *Twilight Saga: Eclipse* (Slade, 2010), the film's romance, fantasy and drama genres and love-triangle/good versus evil plotline are clearly sold to the viewer through dialogue and visuals<sup>64</sup>. At 31 seconds into the trailer the viewer is reminded that the film is based on a worldwide best-selling book by an intertitle and at 1 minute 28 seconds the date of the film's release is shown on-screen. More so, the film's three stars – Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, Taylor Lautner – are given ample amounts of screen time and close-ups, selling their presence in the film to

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<sup>63</sup> The voiceover in the trailer states "[t]he stars of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* are reuniting in a romantic comedy with no strings attached".

<sup>64</sup> The opening line of dialogue in the trailer states, "I promise to love you, every moment, forever", clearly emphasizing the love story/romance plot that is central to the film and franchise. The features of this genre are continually sold until 1 minute into the 1 minute 33 seconds trailer with the fantasy elements only alluded to through dialogue. At the 1 minute mark a change of tempo and soundtrack moves the trailer into the fantasy/drama genre (e.g. quicker edits, dramatic soundtrack, visuals of the character of Victoria (a vampire) conquering a super-human jump across a river).

the fan bases they have accumulated since the first installment of the franchise. The combination of the vaudeville elements of the trailer – the event (depicted through the date of release), the attractions (the talent and the film’s origins as a bestselling book), the genre (romance, fantasy, drama) and the narrative (love story/good versus evil) – are blended together relatively evenly. In essence, the narrative and genres of the film are equally emphasised alongside its spectacle.

Trailers that emphasise a film’s spectacle, and are more hyperbolic in their nature can be situated within the “circus mode” (Kernan, 2004: 20). In this mode trailers suggest that films will “provide unqualified pleasure and undisputed excitement to all” (2004: 21) and in doing this present “cinematic events that transcend narrative” (2004: 23). The trailers for Lionsgate’s *Punisher: War Zone* (Alexander, 2008) and *The Expendables* are exemplars of this. Both trailers overtly emphasise the spectacle of the films – mainly explosions, fight sequences and weapons – over other elements such as the film’s narrative. The trailer for *The Expendables* starts by establishing the main characters of the film and a basic idea of the narrative, but from 1 minute 47 seconds through to the end of the trailer at 2 minutes 34 seconds any consideration of storytelling diminishes as spectacle unashamedly takes over. This change is heralded by the line of dialogue “In ten seconds you won’t believe what’s going to happen”, which is followed by a rapidly edited series of images of gun fire, explosions and fight sequences with a rock music soundtrack. *Punisher: War Zone*’s trailer adopts a similar strategy; the first section of the trailer establishes the main characters and tone of the film and then at 45 seconds a change in pace is signalled by the soundtrack building to a dramatic pause that is mirrored on-screen with a cut to black. Following this momentary break is the dialogue line, “This is only the beginning” and from this the trailer descends into a series of explosions, fight sequences and chaos as the viewer is invited to revel in a spectacle of destruction and violence. Throughout the latter sections of both of these trailers, their narrative trajectories become chaotic and the viewer is encouraged not to particularly engage with (or think about) where and how these sequences relate to the film’s story, but rather sit back and enjoy the spectacle. This type of trailer, and to a certain degree the vaudeville mode, is more akin to the trailer styles for films released by the major studios, namely in reference to the blockbuster and event films that they release. In adopting similar strategies in the trailer edits of many of their films, mini-majors such as Lionsgate and Summit Entertainment brand their output in a very similar way. The aforementioned trailers have very little to do with the aesthetic and ideological

indicators of independence as discussed in Chapter One and the IMDb case study, and as such this type of branding distances itself from the popular notions or discourse of independence and could perhaps explain why such films are rarely included in work on American independent cinema.

Writing about the dissemination of film marketing materials with particular reference to film trailers, Stefan Palko describes how the Internet is now a key platform via which they are distributed (2010: 14). According to Palko, the iTunes Movie Trailers page is “one of the most visited sections of Apple’s Website” and by 2010 the page’s Twitter account had over 2.32 million followers (ibid). In previous decades, film trailers would have been reserved for screening in cinemas or broadcast on television, but now the online audience of film trailers is one that is becoming increasingly courted given the significant reach that this form of distribution can have. For example, Fox Searchlight’s official trailer for *Black Swan* has had over 23 million views on Fox Searchlight’s own YouTube channel alone, whilst the trailer to *The Big Gay Musical* (Andreas and Caruso, 2009) – a film with a significantly lower-profile and P&A budget than *Black Swan* – still managed to amass over 1 million views to date on the film’s official YouTube channel. The popularity of online consumption or downloading of trailers, according to Palko, can be attributed to two factors: first, many online trailers are released in high-definition and are of a good quality and second, they are specifically designed for consumption on mobile hardware such as laptops, smartphones and media players (2010: 14). Such consumption of trailers, as Palko describes, is symptomatic of how access and viewing of film marketing has become increasingly digital (ibid).

A sign of the digital times is indicated by the widespread incorporation of a website into films’ marketing campaigns. Whereas two decades ago a website for a film would have been quite rare, nowadays most US films – even those produced on smaller budgets – will have a web presence. As previously outlined, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were some particularly creative websites released to market and support films’ story worlds such as the ones launched with *The Blair Witch Project* and *Donnie Darko*. These innovative ventures are still rare, but the independent sector has seen some more unorthodox sites in recent years. For example, the website for *Food, Inc.* (Kenner, 2008) – a film about corporations and the US food industry – has grown since the film’s release into a centralised online destination for a campaign inspired by the film. The campaign’s aim is to promote healthier living and have a positive impact on the

food industry, and is part of the larger Take Part campaign<sup>65</sup> (Food, Inc. – Home, 2013). The website both promotes the film and the cause that inspired it. The site has pages dedicated to how people can get involved in the campaign and also information on the Food, Inc. Awards that recognise people’s achievements in promoting healthier lives and changing the way the US food industry works. As will be explored in Chapter Six, online platforms have opened up new spaces for activist filmmakers to connect their films and the messages they contain with audiences, thus promoting collective action. These types of films (most of which are documentaries) form another ‘brand’ of independent film, one that could be referred to as activist filmmaking or as Tryon (2011) refers to them, “transmedia documentaries”.

On the more creative side, the websites for SilkTricky’s interactive films *The Outbreak* (Lund, 2008) and *Bank Run* (Lund, 2010) are integral to both films’ narratives and exhibition. The website for *The Outbreak* for example breaks the film up into different sections. At the end of each section the consumer is presented with different options; their selection choice will determine how the narrative progresses and which on-screen events they will watch next. The website also contains conventional marketing materials such as credit information, contact details for the company, the project’s trailer, and a link to its MySpace account. Two years later SilkTricky extended its work in interactive film with *Bank Run*. The film’s website contains the first part of the interactive film where, again, viewers at various intervals have to make choices that determine how the film progresses. However, whereas *The Outbreak* played out in its entirety online, *Bank Run* is split into two with the first half being as described above but the second half switching platforms and being only available via purchasing an iPhone app. In this sense the marketing of the film and its form are being conflated, as on one hand, the website is distributing and exhibiting the film, and on the other acting as a promotional tool to encourage consumers to purchase the second half of the interactive-film-come-game as an iPhone app. In some ways this is emblematic of Tryon’s notion of “platform mobility” (2013:4), but whilst consumer control is central to Tryon’s work, in the case of the *Bank Run* it is the producers who have forced the mobility onto the consumer. In essence, the film must be started online and completed through purchasing an app; therefore, notions of empowerment are undermined. The ways in which these types of novel practices impact on film form will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter, but for

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<sup>65</sup> The Take Part campaign encourages people to take social action that makes society a better place to be (Take Part – About Us, 2013).

now, what it is interesting to see in these two films is the mirroring of the increased mobility of film marketing strategies across different platforms and the increased mobility of film form itself.

During the marketing campaign of *For Colored Girls*, the film's distributor, Lionsgate, partnered with Augme Technologies<sup>66</sup>, Inc (a technology service provider) to use QR codes and SMS as integral part of its marketing campaign (Lionsgate/Augme Technologies, Inc, 2010). As part of the campaign QR codes were printed on the film's posters and linked users directly to a mobile-optimised site for the film where people could access more information about the film. Alternatively people could also text 'COLORS' to 30333 to be directed to the site and also "set text reminder for the movie's release date" (ibid). In their article on QR code marketing strategies, Shintaro Okasaki, Hairong Li and Morikazu Hirose explain how they currently are being utilised:

The primary benefit of QR code is its pivotal role as a bridge between offline and mobile media in multichannel marketing. In fact, QR code is one of the few alternatives that enables customers to transfer from one medium to another, more or less instantaneously – one of the most suitable tools for multichannel marketing (2012: 102).

In line with this, Osasaki et al suggest that "Internet-enabled mobile phones have become an increasingly popular platform for sales promotion in major world markets" (2012: 102). With the penetration of Internet-enabled phones (or smartphones as they are commonly known) into the US continuing – 10% more people owned a smartphone in 2013 than in 2012 (Nielsen – Mobile Majority, 2013) – it is likely that such marketing strategies are set to increase.

Referring back to the use of such technology in the marketing campaign surrounding *For Colored Girls*, the QR codes were used to transport potential consumers from the offline marketing domain of the film's posters to the online world of the film's website. Lionsgate perhaps envisaged that in providing consumers with easy links between the different elements of the marketing campaigns that they would consume more of the marketing materials and consequently be more likely to consume the film. Furthermore, in providing an option for consumers to set a text reminder to alert them about the film's release, Lionsgate were opting for a "customer selection" model of marketing as described by Smith and Taylor (2004). In essence, customers who signed up to this text alert option are more likely to turn out to be profitable, as they have

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<sup>66</sup> Augme Technologies is now HipCricket, and offers similar services.

indicated an interest in purchasing a cinema ticket through signing-up. Therefore, when sending a text message about the film's release date, Lionsgate's marketing becomes more targeted than if they were sending out text messages or emails to a general database of people. This targeted model also underpins much social media marketing. Many film distributors and individual films have official accounts on various social media platforms. For example, Facebook pages for films allow other Facebook users to 'like' them, while Twitter accounts invite other users to follow them; both of these methods allow marketers to cultivate an audience that have declared an interest in their products. Essentially, these outlets provide opportunities for filmmakers and marketers to build a fan base for their films "who will invest, emotionally and hopefully financially" in the product (*Aesthetica*, 2009: 42).

Fox Searchlight, for example, uses their Facebook page to promote their latest releases. The page contains posts linking users to other web-based information about the film such as interviews, trailers, festival screenings, reviews, purchasable merchandise, and behind-the-scenes images. The page has two main aims. First it generates buzz around Fox Searchlight's films and their associated products, and second it promotes the consumption of them. In terms of its Twitter account, Fox Searchlight uses it in a similar fashion, however it does seem to interact more with its followers on this platform through re-tweeting tweets from high profile individuals or those who align themselves with its marketing messages. In a similar way to how DVD special features have targeted what Dale Hudson and Patricia Zimmerman (2009) describe as the "contemporary cinephile" or what Klinger (2006) terms the "film connoisseur", Fox Searchlight also appears to be tapping into these types of film consumers through publishing pieces of behind-the-scenes information, exclusive content and extra-textual information through their social media channels. The type of film consumer who could be termed a "cinephile" or "connoisseur" and to whom this extra information would appeal, would also broadly fit into Fox Searchlight's target audience demographic of more discerning viewers who tend to watch the types films released by the distributor<sup>67</sup>. This subsequently brands the distributor's output as belonging to the 'quality' sector of independent and distances its releases from the output of its corporate sibling and major studio, Twentieth Century Fox.

MGM used social media to appeal to a different demographic when marketing *Hot Tub Time Machine* (Pink, 2010). The marketers behind the film utilised existing social

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<sup>67</sup> See Chapter One for further discussion on the topic of 'discerning' audiences and independent film.

media practices, most commonly associated with the teenage/young adult demographic that the film targeted, in order to generate online buzz around the film<sup>68</sup>. *Hot Tub Time Machine* is a film set in contemporary times and follows a group of men, who, whilst bonding in a hot tub, get transported back to 1986. The Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts for the film all sought to engage with and promote fan activity around the film. The film's Facebook page contains posts asking fans to write comments about their favourite scenes from the film, promotional offers related to prominent fandom-oriented annual event – Comic-Con – and the promotion of the Eventful.com preview screenings. The Twitter account for the film acted in a similar way to the Facebook page, but also makes use of social media customs that are specific to that platform, such as hashtags. One of the most popular hashtags used by the account is #ThrowbackThursday, which is a trend that sees users, every Thursday, tweet photographs from the past; this custom links well with the film's narrative events. The trend is also common on other platforms such as Instagram, on which the film has an official account on titled grtwhbuffalo (great white buffalo)<sup>69</sup>. This account also participates in #ThrowbackThursday through posting stills from the 1986 scenes of the film, such as an image of a man using a cassette tape. Additionally, the grtwhbuffalo Instagram account also post memes<sup>70</sup> based on the film. MGM also used online event organising site Eventful.com (as Paramount Pictures did with *Paranormal Activity*) to offer fans the chance to volunteer to host a preview screening for themselves and nine friends (Warren, 2010). Participation in these activities is typically seen as being 'grassroots', but through tapping into such networks and activities, the professionals behind the marketing strategies of *Hot Tub Time Machine* were seeking to exploit them to increase word of mouth and cultivate a fan base around the film. As Tryon notes, although social media can facilitate fan activity, we must also be highly aware of how they are being used by corporate companies as a means of "generating publicity for upcoming films and television shows" (2013: 118). MGM's social media activities are quite different to how Fox Searchlight used its social media channels for its releases. This firstly indicates that the distributors were trying to attract different audiences and secondly that they were branding their films differently.

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<sup>68</sup> In Lenhart et al's (2010) report on US social media usage, the highest demographics who were online were 12 – 17 year olds and 18 – 29 year olds at 93% (2010: 5). Furthermore, these same age groups used social media the most (2010: 21).

<sup>69</sup> Great White Buffalo is a colloquialism used to describe a first love, or the 'one-that-got-away'. The phrase is used in dialogue in the film.

<sup>70</sup> Memes are images, videos, hashtags etc. that spread online. In the case of the grtwhbuffalo Instagram account, the memes are all image-based, using images from the film with key lines of dialogue or 'funny' comments added to them.



The social media output by Fox Searchlight tended to highlight markers of quality and prestige, whereas MGM's activities around *Hot Tub Time Machine* were more playful and juvenile, and thus can be linked to how both distributors would like their films to appear in the eyes of potential consumers.

The generation of publicity can also be achieved by offline activities. Joaquin Phoenix's appearance on *The Late Show with David Letterman* (1993 - ) in 2009, for example, garnered a significant amount of attention. The actor appeared as a guest on the talk show in order to promote his new 'career' as a rap artist and to declare that his (then) current film, *Two Lovers* (Gray, 2008) would be the last he would appear in as an actor. During the programme, Phoenix looked uncharacteristically disheveled and, at some points, appeared quite hostile towards the host and audience. This generated speculation as to whether Phoenix was putting on a performance or possibly suffering from mental health issues. A search for Joaquin Phoenix's name on Google Trends demonstrates how much online attention this appearance attracted as Phoenix's name has never been searched for as much as it was in February 2009 (see Appendix Item 13). In 2010, it was revealed by Casey Affleck and by Phoenix himself (on *The Late Show with David Letterman*) that the film and his 'career' as a rap artist had all been a hoax and was a piece of performance art for his role in *I'm Still Here*. Therefore, Phoenix's earlier appearance on the show had been a publicity stunt and a successful one in terms of the amount of the online interest it generated.

The awards season also plays a key role in raising the profiles of films and their stars. It has been known for films' theatrical runs to be extended after receiving an award or nomination. As Kerrigan notes, "winning an award is presumed to have a positive impact on the success of a film in the marketplace" and therefore planning a film's release and marketing campaign with the awards season in mind is an important consideration for marketers (2010: 169). Drawing on work from John Durie, Annika Pham and Neil Watson (2000), Kerrigan explores how being nominated for a major award and/or winning one brings about increased media attention that can play an important part in the film's financial success, particularly for more art house or niche audience films (ibid). Eva Deuchert, Kossi Adjamah and Florian Pauly's (2005) study<sup>71</sup> into the correlation between Academy Awards and a film's financial success found that

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<sup>71</sup> The study focused on the films released between 1990 and 2000, examining the 204 most successful films each year (2005: 161), considering only their US box office revenue (2005: 172).

whilst winning an Academy Award does have significant impact on revenue, “the main box office effect is generated primarily by the nominations” (2005: 172).

Taking a look at the winners of the Academy Award for Best Picture between 2006 and 2010, we can see how nominations and awards are being used to market the films and how they impact on a film’s distribution strategy. The 2006 Academy Award Best Picture winner *Crash* (Haggis, 2005) had an initial US theatrical run that started in March 2005 and ran until September 2005, but after winning the Academy Award it was again released in theatres in March 2006 (Box Office Mojo – *Crash* (2005) Weekend Summary, 11/10/2013). *The Departed* (Scorsese, 2006) won Best Picture in 2007 and was initially released in super-saturation release (playing in over 3000 theatres) in October 2006 (Box Office Mojo – *The Departed* (2006) Weekend Summary, 11/10/2013). In early January 2007 the film was still on its theatrical run but was in just over 100 theatres (ibid). Upon the announcement of the Academy Awards’ nominations for that year in late January the number of theatres playing the film increased to over 1000 (ibid). The 2008 winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture – *No Country For Old Men* (Coen and Coen, 2007) – displays similar results. The film opened in November 2007 and adopted a platform release strategy (Box Office Mojo – *No Country for Old Men* (2007) Weekend Box Office History, 12/11/2011). By early January 2008 it was playing in over 800 theatres and upon their nomination for Best Picture this increased to over a 1000 theatres (ibid). The film continued to play in theatres until April 2008, with further increases in the number of theatres playing the film around the time of the Academy Awards (ibid). Again, the 2009 winner of Best Picture – *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle, 2008) – repeats this pattern, with its US box office showing an initial platform release strategy followed by peaking in theatres when the award nominations were announced and then again upon winning the award (Box Office Mojo – *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) Weekend Summary, 11/10/2013). Akin to *Crash*’s re-release strategy, the 2010 winner – *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow, 2009) – was initially released theatrically in the US between June and November 2009 and then re-released theatrically in March 2010 following an Oscar win (Box Office Mojo – *The Hurt Locker* (2009), Weekend Summary, 11/10/2013). These five examples demonstrate how the awards season – epitomised by the Academy Awards – is important to film marketers and distributors. Films that are perceived to have a good chance of garnering a nomination or award are sometimes released shortly before voting for the nominations begins in the October/November (as was the case with *No Country For Old Men*, *Slumdog Millionaire* and *The Departed*) in order to be fresh in

the minds of voters. Marketers can then use a nomination for an award as part of the film's marketing campaign. Films that do not follow this strategy, instead tend to have a second theatrical run as demonstrated by *Crash* and *The Hurt Locker*.

John C. Dodds and Morris B. Halbrook (1988) suggest that when looked at from a marketing perspective, Academy Awards can be seen "as a potential public relations device in which one can spend money on advertising, free screenings, and other promotional activities to campaign for votes that can ultimately bring big increases in a movie's distribution and revenues" (1988: 72 – 73). With the potential to increase a film's revenue, Dodds and Halbrook go on to assert that "movie marketers spend lavishly on advertising, free screenings, and other PR efforts intended to improve a film's chances for nomination and victory" (1988: 73). Although Dodds and Halbrook's study was published in 1988, the sentiments of their findings still hold currency today. For example, the marketing and distribution strategy for *No Country For Old Men*, according to Thompson (2008a) was designed around the Academy Awards. Thompson outlines how the film's campaign involved touring the autumn festival scene before its platform theatrical release that was set to widen in-line with award nominations – a strategy based on the way in which Harvey Weinstein had previously launched *Life Is Beautiful* (Benigni, 1997) (ibid). More so, with award nominations being markers of prestige or quality they are useful in distinguishing films from others in the market.

This strategy of differentiation was also utilised through other means in the marketing of *No Country For Old Men*. As Thompson describes, the campaign "tried to balance the Coens' core of sophisticated film fans against a broader audience [and] the film's high culture against its crowd-pleasing genre elements" (ibid). This strategy is seen at work in the film's poster (see Appendix Item 14). The key text on the poster indicates that the film is by the Coen Brothers (an indicator of perceived 'quality' in itself) and a critic's quote states that the film is "An instant classic"; both of which appeal to the Coen Brothers' core audience base. In contrast, the main image and tagline ("There are no clean getaways") on the poster alludes to the film's crime/thriller genre roots and seeks to widen the film's appeal beyond its primary target market. In essence, markers of quality and differentiation are being adopted within this marketing campaign to make *No Country For Old Men* stand out from other films, whether it be through physical marketing materials such as posters or less tangible means such as PR and word-of-mouth.

Using Wyatt's (1991) adoption of Hirshleifer's (1980) notions of 'variety' and 'quality' (as outlined in Chapter One), we can see how the marketing campaign for *No*

*Country For Old Men* embodies both these forms of differentiation. On the one hand, the attributes of the film as a commodity are being sold (e.g. through its genre characteristics) and on the other hand markers of quality are being sold (e.g. the use of the complimentary critic's quote). Such strategies are not limited to this film's marketing campaign or those chasing awards, but are instead embedded into most films' marketing campaigns. As was argued in Chapter One, product differentiation is key to 'branding' a film, and also in creating the 'brands' of independent film that are evident today. In essence, film marketing and its adoption of product differentiation has two aims; first, to make the film stand out in a crowd and second, to appeal to target demographics. A successful marketing campaign will generally meet both of these aims and ultimately result in the film being connected with an audience. In the digital age, as Kerrigan terms it, marketing "can no longer remain as marketing as numbers" and each individual film (more so than in previous decades) "needs to develop their audience in a way which is more appropriate for the target audience and the type of film" (2010: 209). What Kerrigan is suggesting is that film marketing needs to be more targeted as consumers are increasingly fragmented across numerous mediums and platforms in this era of convergence. As such marketers must increasingly make use of data-mining strategies and developments in the informatics fields to understand their target market more thoroughly, utilising such findings and new marketing opportunities to connect with consumers.

## **Conclusion**

What this chapter has demonstrated is the diversity of US film marketing strategies and methods, yet in some ways it has only scratched the surface of this multidimensional and ever-changing field. The strategies and concepts explored in this final section of Part One of this study will be referred to in the proceeding chapters, which unpick them further in relation to specific areas of investigation. The four-year timeframe that is the focus of this thesis falls into a period of film marketing that Kerrigan (2010) suggests had three key trends. First, film marketing (alongside other marketing arenas) has moved from a passive mode in which messages are broadcast from companies to consumers (who receive them acceptingly) to a scenario in which "consumers are actively engaged in promoting products and services, whether consciously or unconsciously" (2010: 193). The social media marketing campaigns for films such as *Hot Tub Time Machine* are representative of this trend. The second trend that Kerrigan observes (and in some ways

it is linked to the first) is that “lines between the producer and consumer are becoming blurred” due to consumers in some cases financing films, participating in marketing activities, contributing content to films and so on (2010: 193 - 4). *The Take Part* and *Food Inc.*, campaign are emblematic of this and Chapter Six will explore the implications of this trend further. This type of involvement in the marketing and distribution of films makes it more difficult to distinguish between the role of the filmmaker/producer and the role of the audience/consumer, and is symptomatic of what Jenkins (2006) terms “participatory culture”.

The third tendency in contemporary film marketing involves another blurring of boundaries, in this instance between the creative process of film production and what some would perceive as the less creative realm of film marketing. What Kerrigan suggests is that there are a growing number of filmmakers and marketers who perceive marketing activities as being potentially as creative as the actual making of films (2010: 209). According to Kerrigan, they “do not see ‘marketing’ as oppositional to the creative practice of filmmaking” and instead perceive it as being part of it (ibid). The examples cited in this chapter such as *Cloverfield*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *Donnie Darko*, *District 9*, and *Troll Hunter* are all representative of this evolving approach to film marketing. In essence these films’ marketing campaigns are integral to the overall story world of the film, contributing and interplaying with the films’ narratives and stories on different levels. Such practices tend to be utilised mostly in relation to genre films, particularly those sci-fi and horror films (ibid).

With the marketing materials produced for contemporary film releases not purely being situated within the promotional arena but instead straddling both creative and advertising realms, their impact on the narratives and story worlds of the films they relate to and on the consumers’ overall entertainment experience needs to be examined further. Gray (2010) begins to examine this arena through analysing the various marketing materials – or paratexts as he terms them – that surround films and television programmes. He suggests that a field of study, which he terms “off-screen studies” needs to be developed, that focuses on the role of paratexts in the creation of textuality (2010: 7). Off-screen studies provides a way for scholars to discuss “the wealth of other entities that saturate the media, and that construct film and television” (2010: 4). Films such as the previously discussed *Outbreak* and *Bank Run* (which could equally be labeled as apps, multimedia media products, or games) and earlier examples such as mold-breaking films such as *Donnie Darko* demonstrate the need to include the

paratextual entities surrounding such films into any discussion of their textuality. With this context in mind, Chapter Four will unpick further the relationship between distribution and marketing practices, and storytelling in American independent cinema. Overall what such discussions represent – as has been alluded to in this chapter – is the continuing development of ‘film’ into a fluid, cross-platform entity.

## PART TWO: ISSUES AND DEBATES

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FILM, BUT NOT AS WE KNEW IT? THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENTS IN FILM DISTRIBUTION METHODS AND MARKETING APPROACHES ON STORYTELLING PRACTICES

“I wanted to do *CSI* on cocaine” is how Anthony E. Zuiker described his motivation and vision for creating the *Level 26* cross-platform experience (Zuiker interviewed in *Examining Level 26 with Anthony E. Zuiker*, 2009). The project – a joint venture between Zuiker’s production company, Dare to Pass, and Dutton publishers (an imprint of the Penguin group) – started with *Level 26: Dark Origins* (2009, Zuiker). *Level 26: Dark Origins* is what has been termed a “digi-novel”, a move that the producers felt would revolutionise the world of publishing (ibid). Zuiker describes the “digi-novel” as an experiment with “cross-platform storytelling” that involves reading twenty-pages of a novel, logging into a website, watching filmed content (“cyberbridges”) that audio-visually represent something that has happened in the novel or was alluded to, and then repeating the cycle (ibid). Upon completing the digi-novel, consumers are invited to explore [www.level26.com](http://www.level26.com) further, unlocking additional content, engaging with Facebook profiles and contributing content themselves (ibid).

This cycle of consumption was illustrated through a trailer, which was produced to promote the digi-novel. As the trailer builds to its musical crescendo and visual climax, the words “read”, “watch”, and “log-in” appear one-by-one on-screen (*The Official Level 26 Trailer*, 2009). The fact that the trailer format was used to advertise the digi-novel is quite interesting in itself. As explored in Chapter Three, the trailer format is most commonly associated with film marketing and the *Level 26* trailer displays many features associated with them, including introducing the key characters, setting the genre and tone, using key talent attached to the project to ‘brand’ it, alluding to its narrative and storyworld<sup>72</sup>. Film trailers generally operate in the middle-ground of advertising and storytelling (Kernan, 2004: 1); the *Level 26* trailer is no different. It simultaneously ‘sells’ the project and its attributes to potential consumers and conflates its narrative into 2 minutes 13 seconds of audio-visual content. If the intertitles referencing novels and reading, and the end card were removed from the trailer then the remaining visuals and soundtrack would suggest that it was advertising a new film release. It is interesting

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<sup>72</sup> The *Level 26* trailer introduces the key protagonists, villain (Sqweegal) and principal detectives, situates the story as belonging to the thriller genre, emphasises that it has been created by the talent behind *CSI*, and establishes that the project’s story world involves the hunt for a serial killer.



then, that a project given the label “digi-novel”, which clearly situates itself within the literature world (albeit selling itself as a more interactive way of ‘reading’ a novel), chooses to use marketing techniques generally associated with film. In short, the trailer predominantly sells the *Level 26* experience as an audio-visual one, presenting the project more as a filmic text than novel, and emphasises its creator’s work in television by connecting the project to *CSI*.

This link to audio-visual media was emphasised further with the release of a second *Level 26* instalment – *Level 26: Dark Prophecy* (2010, Zuiker). To coincide with this release, Michael Anderson (2010) noted that the serial killer – Sqweegal – from *Level 26: Dark Origins* made an appearance in *CSI* (2000 -). Furthermore, the integral nature of the filmed content in the sequel is far more pronounced. Whereas in *Dark Origins* the cyberbridges were “out-of-context” yet in some way added to the ‘reading’ (or perhaps more apt, consumption) experience, the cyberbridges for *Dark Prophecy* were actually a 56-minute film, sliced up into a number of segments, which added more distinctly to the narrative and story world of the project (Zuiker cited in Morris, 2010). Whereas the cyberbridges in *Dark Origins* seemed supplementary to the narrative, the ones in *Dark Prophecy* were integral to the overall narrative and when viewed together, created a short film in its own right (Trongo, 2010).

An iPad application was also launched following the *Dark Prophecy*’s release, which had a number of interactive elements:

Words pulse as you read them and you can flick your finger and a gunshot hole appears on the screen. It allows you to collect evidence that leads to a separate storyline (Zuiker cited in Morris, 2010).

The application also contained cyberbridges as a feature, allowing consumers to read the digi-novel in a standard way without the interactive or enhanced features (Morris, 2010). The *Level 26* experience is symptomatic of how entertainment experiences have become increasingly more cross-platform as part of an era that has seen the proliferation in the distribution avenues available *and* the increasingly digital nature of media content; both of which have both played a role in creating the types of consumption practices largely linked to Tryon’s notion of “platform mobility” (2013: 4). So, how should we approach a discussion of *Level 26* and other similar cross-platform experiences – as pieces of literature, as films, or as something different?

This question is one still being discussed across various interconnected disciplines and is too large to answer, in its entirety, within this chapter. Furthermore,

such concerns about film form are not necessarily at the heart of what this thesis seeks to cover, as it is more concerned with topological issues than ontological ones. As the Introduction outlined, there has been a shift in recent film scholarship, from a resurfacing of André Bazin's query – "what is cinema?" – to the adaption of this question to, "where is cinema?". What this chapter will articulate is how both these queries are intrinsically linked together by changes within film distribution. In essence, distribution has facilitated the movement of film into new physical and digital/online spaces, and as part of this movement, film's form has altered in significant ways. By using distribution as an entry point for these considerations, it negates the need to define and delineate along ontological grounds – an approach that in today's multimedia environment can become problematic to scholars. As Hilmes suggests, this approach breaks away from "conceptual silos", providing researchers with a way of examining how "media function in the real world" (2013: 177). Therefore, distribution studies, both because of it not being medium specific and because of its interlinking position between production/textual studies and exhibition/reception studies, seems a useful approach to adopt when entering into such discussions. The discussions presented within this chapter will build on the work of studies that are located on the peripheries of distribution studies, namely paratextual studies, such as Gray (2010) and Grainge (2011), to present a case for how topological approaches through negating the need for ontological discussions can provide a framework about how multimedia products – of which film is just one part – are created, and consumed, in today's converged media landscape. In this sense, the chapter (as does the thesis) seeks to align itself to the current trend in distribution studies – represented by the work of Tryon (2013) and Jenkins et al. (2013) amongst others – that are sympathetic to the tripartite relationship between distribution, production and exhibition.

Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate how relatively new innovations within the distribution sector of American independent cinema (as outlined in Chapters Two and Three) have manifested themselves in changes in film form itself, and also film's consumption. From this, we can ascertain the intricacies and wider impact that the changes in the ways that American independent cinema is distributed have had. Such trends, however, are not just restricted to this sector of US film, but are also evident in Hollywood and world cinema. Additionally, the increasing cross-platform expansion of many media products is a topic that has dominated discussions across a range of media scholarship, and therefore when exploring similar developments in film, it is important to

relate them to and discuss them alongside with wider contextual considerations. Furthermore, as the Introduction argued, assessing one media industry or media form in isolation, is questionable within this converged media landscape. The following literature review will demonstrate that significant work has already been conducted on the topic of media products in a converged media landscape, namely in terms of transmediality. While much of this work focuses on the textual qualities of the media products, what this chapter seeks to do is use distribution as a lens through which such practices can be better understood, and thus demonstrate the wider impact that media convergence at industrial, technological and sociocultural level has had on American independent cinema. Post-literature review, the chapter will provide an overview of this aforementioned relationship between distribution, film form and consumption practices, before presenting a case study on the enhanced transmediality of *The Hills Have Eyes* franchise, in the late 2000s.

### **Out of this world or, at least, out of this medium: Transmediality and Distribution Studies**

Today's converged media landscape makes discussing any media product increasingly more complex, and central to this conversation is the notion of transmediality. Much scholarship exists on this topic, and other areas that are both pertinent and interlinked to it, making a full review of existing literature on the field too expansive for the scope of this chapter. Therefore, the review presented here will focus on some of the key approaches to and studies on transmediality that have informed this chapter's discussion on how changes in distribution and marketing have impacted on film form and consumption. Furthermore, the review will highlight the close relationship between transmediality research and the field of distribution studies. As a starting point, Elizabeth Evans describes transmediality as "the increasingly popular industrial practice of using multiple media technologies to present information concerning a single fictional work through multiple textual forms" (2011: 1). In this sense, transmedial practices includes an array of activities and products, such as "franchising, merchandising, adaptations, spin-offs, sequels and marketing" (Evans, 2011: 2). In her work, Evans examines two distinct incarnations of transmediality at work, namely, transmedia storytelling and transmedia distribution/engagement (ibid). This chapter and literature review will also bring paratextual study into this discussion, as paratexts can be part of both transmedia storytelling practices and transmedia distribution strategies.

According to Evans, transmedia storytelling refers to a story told across different platforms (ibid). This understanding – as have many other scholars’ writings – has largely been drawn from Jenkins’ conceptualisation of the practice. Jenkins suggests that a transmedia story “unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole” (2006: 97 – 98). For Jenkins, the idea behind this practice is one in which:

...each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction (ibid).

The key to creating a successful transmedia story is to ensure that each individual element is self-contained, and understanding of the individual parts is not dependent on having consumed all other parts of the story world (Jenkins, 2006: 98). This approach ensures that each individual element can serve as an entry point into the storyworld, offering new experiences to the other elements and can be consumed independently or as part of a collection (ibid). In 2011, Jenkins issued an updated understanding on transmedia storytelling, describing it as “a process where integral elements of fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins, 2011). Through referring to the role of “delivery channels” in these practices, Jenkins acknowledges how distribution has played a part in making them possible. With the emergence of new digital delivery channels over the last decade or so, the number of distribution options has proliferated and as such transmedia storytelling practices have too evolved and intensified. It is this link between distribution method and storytelling practice that makes transmedia storytelling an apt topic for discussion under the banner of distribution studies.

Carlos Alberto Scolari’s work is similar to Jenkins’ writings in the sense that it proposes that transmedia storytelling is “is not just an adaptation from one media to another”, but a practice in which different media forms all “contribute to the construction of the transmedia narrative world” (2009: 587). Here Scolari emphasises that transmedia storytelling is a different phenomenon to adaptation; whereas transmedia stories develop and expand across different media, adaptations are simply representations of the same story in different media. Although much of Scolari’s essay is interested in theoretically approaching transmedia storytelling through semiotics and narratology, which is not too relevant to the industrial focus of this thesis, his point here regarding the difference between transmedia storytelling and adaptation is, however,

particularly key. Not all media products that display indicators of transmediality are necessarily transmedia stories. As will be discussed in the following section of this chapter, the adoption of DVD distribution and certain DVD releases of films may in fact contribute to new forms of storytelling and consumption experiences, but this does not always equate to them being transmedia stories, at least not in the way Jenkins and Scolari define them. As a study on distribution, this thesis is not necessarily keen to engage with theoretical discussions within the realms of narratology about these new story forms and storytelling practices, but rather to understand the role that changes within film (and media) distribution have had on their development.

Offering a divergent approach to understanding the way in which stories are told across different media, Christy Deny (2006) introduces the term “transfiction”:

By transfiction I refer to stories that are distributed over more than one text, one medium. Each text, each story on each device or each website *is not* autonomous, unlike Henry Jenkins’ transmedia storytelling. In transfiction...the story is dependent on all the pieces in each medium, device or site to be read/experienced for it to be understood.

Both Jenkins’ (2006, 2011) conceptions of transmedia storytelling and Deny’s notions on transfiction practices are relevant in today’s media landscape. Story worlds, such as *The Hills Have Eyes* (as will be explored later in this chapter), are more akin to Jenkins’ model, while others, such as *Bank Run*, are better understood through Deny’s notion. Thus, rather than see these two concepts operating in binary opposition to one another, it is perhaps more apt to perceive them as conceptualisations of interlinked, yet different forms of contemporary storytelling practices.

Whereas transmedia storytelling practices involve the telling of a story *across* different media, transmedia distribution refers to the retelling of a story *on* different media and platforms. The digitalisation of content has made it easier in terms of both quickness and cost, than in previous eras for transmedia distribution to occur. Addressing the scope and implications of this expansion is a call that distribution studies, such as this thesis, must answer. Essentially, transmedia distribution is concerned with “changes in distribution and reception practices as content is made available simultaneously or near-simultaneously on multiple platforms” (Evans, 2011: 2). Distinguishing between the two interconnected yet distinctly different practices of transmedia storytelling and transmedia distribution, is particularly important when exploring how new distribution strategies have impacted on storytelling practices. For

instance, a film that adopts a day-and-date releasing strategy is not necessarily an example of transmedia storytelling; rather it is an example of transmedia distribution. Furthermore, transmedia distribution can also refer to the cross-media exploitation of a media product; for example, a film may also have an accompanying soundtrack. Such practices are more commonly discussed as franchising, which, whilst being connected to, is still a different practice than, transmedia storytelling. As Jenkins (2011) explains:

Franchising is a corporate structure for media production, which has a long history... Most previous media franchises were based on reproduction and redundancy, but transmedia represents a structure based on the further development of the storyworld through each new medium.

As a film's soundtrack does not extend the story world of the film it cannot be considered a form of transmedia storytelling, but it does extend the film's 'brand' or concept into another media form.

This type of transmedia distribution is largely linked to the concept of synergy, which, as the Introduction outlined, seeks to see brands flow through companies' corporate structures (Grainge, 2008: 10). In his semiotic analysis of how branding works in transmedia storytelling, Scolari suggests that "the brand is a device that can produce a discourse, give it meaning, and communicate this to audiences" (2009: 599). In transmedia storytelling, "the brand is expressed by the characters, topics, and aesthetic style of the fictional world" and this set of characteristics can be easily moved between different media and platforms (Scolari, 2009: 600). Whilst there are some links between franchising (and transmedia distribution) and transmedia storytelling – as the forthcoming *The Hills Have Eyes* case study will demonstrate - it is important to not conflate both of these practices to being the same thing.

Situated within both transmedia storytelling practices and wider transmedia distribution methods are paratexts. Paratexts can form part of a transmedia story world such as online webisodes that accompanying a television programme, or they can contribute to wider transmedia distribution practices through their manifestation as branded products such as ringtones. The overall relevance of the study of paratexts to the wider field of distribution studies cannot be overstated. Paratexts are integral to the marketing campaigns that surround the release of media products such as films and television programmes, and they can also be fundamental part of the telling their stories. While previous work on paratexts has tended to focus on their usage as marketing tools, or treat them as synergistic properties that aim to increase revenue, Gray (2010) takes a

different approach, preferring to explore how paratexts also generate textual meaning. This should not suggest that all paratexts should be discussed as transmedia storytelling, but rather indicate their importance of framing consumers' understanding of a media property. Gray examines paratexts as textual entities in their own right, exploring how they "create texts"<sup>73</sup> by informing the way in which consumers understand the film or television programmes which the paratexts surround (2010: 6). In order to understand how paratexts work, Gray divides them into two categories; entryway paratexts and media res paratexts (2010: 23). Entryway paratexts are those that "grab the viewer before he or she reaches the text and try to control the viewer's entrance to the text" (ibid), such as many of the marketing content discussed in Chapter Three. Media res paratexts, however, "flow between the gaps of textual exhibition, or...come to us "during" or "after" viewing, working to police certain reading strategies" (ibid). Gray's choice of the term "policing" is perhaps not appropriate in all instances. For example, Gray's study also includes a section on user-created paratexts and as such their aim may not be to "police" readings, as producer-created paratexts would. User-creations may be more about self-expression and artistic creation. Nonetheless, understanding the difference between pre- and during/post- consumption paratexts is key to assessing how they work.

Entryway paratexts are related to the concept of speculative consumption. Consumers base their decisions on whether or not to consume media texts through judging what type of pleasures they will provide, and entryway paratexts are vital in making such judgements (Gray, 2010: 24). Drawing on Gerard Genette's work, Gray describes how entryway paratexts "condition our entrance" to media products by giving consumers a flavour of what to expect (Gray, 2010: 25). The trailer for *Splinter* (2008, Wilkins), for example, establishes that the film belongs to the horror genre and as such a viewer watching it would be able to determine from this whether the film is likely to offer them pleasure. Contrastingly, media res paratexts condition consumers' readings and understandings of media products either during or after they have consumed them. For example, reading critical reviews after viewing a film may indeed change consumers' interpretations of what they have already seen or participating in a live-online discussion whilst watching a television programme may inform a consumer's readings of it.

Whilst Gray's study presents a convincing argument for an "off-screen studies" that examines the textuality of paratexts (2010: 22), and outlines an effective blueprint for

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<sup>73</sup> Gray uses the term "text" to describe the sum of all the paratexts that contribute to a particular story world, from a film to its trailer (2010: 6 – 7). As such, the text is a "contingent entity" that is fluid rather than fixed (2010: 7).

examining paratexts, his approach does overlook economic and industrially informed understandings of paratextuality. Gray's decision to divorce paratextual study from this is because he perceives such approaches as drafting "an insufficient picture not only of any given text, but also of the processes of production and reception to that text" (2010: 22). The contradiction here is that Gray's own approach, too, paints an "insufficient picture" of paratexts and their role within the contemporary media landscape because he examines them largely outside of the various contexts from which they emerge. Therefore, this chapter seeks to build on Gray's work by situating textual discussions of paratexts within specific industrial, technological and sociocultural contexts.

Answering Gray's (2010) call for more "off-screen studies", and adopting a more multifaceted approach<sup>74</sup>, is Grainge's edited collection, *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube* (2011). The collection approaches the concept of ephemeral media as content that can be "consumed in seconds or minutes", and whose visibility and use might have previously been fleeting, but within an online context its permanency or life-span has been extended (Grainge, 2011: 3). This newfound permanency of ephemeral media, such as idents and promos, is linked to media archives such as YouTube and its conglomerate owner, Google (ibid). Both are online spaces at which the latest content can be accessed (and thus related to concepts such as Hill's (2009) notion of on-demand access) and also hubs at which media content can be archived for future consumption and reference (ibid). Some of the paratexts discussed by Gray could belong in this category and in this sense, and in their shared goal of heightening the status of these 'surrounding' texts (Grainge, 2011: 10), these two studies are similar. However, *Ephemeral Media's* point of departure from Gray's work is both in its scope and in how the collection approaches studying these media forms. Whereas Gray discussed paratexts in relation to how they are part of the "'DNA' of discrete film and television shows", the discussions evident within Grainge's collection are more concerned with how such products are connected to "the durational and circulatory temporalities of media that they shape" and how they relate to the increasingly mobile and fragmented ways consumers encounter screen-based media (2011: 11). In this respect, this thesis's overall approach to paratextual discussions is more in-line with Grainge's study. However, this thesis still largely retains the use of the

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<sup>74</sup> Grainge's collection chooses to reflect on the media content itself, and the technological and economic environments in which it functions (2013: 12).



term paratext, as its definition is more inclusive (and thus suits the scope of this thesis more aptly).

Nele Simons (2014) proposes a six-category model for understanding the transmedial expansion of the TV drama in all of its forms. Simons' model – an abridged version of a similar framework developed by Ivan Askwith (2007) – broadly summarises the different ways that television drama has been expanded across different media and platforms, as outlined below:

1. Repackaged content: Content that is a variation of the television programme's core content, repackaged for another medium (e.g. Episode descriptions).
2. Ancillary content: Content that extends on the television programme and presents new material and knowledge (e.g. behind-the-scenes documentaries).
3. Branded products: Content affiliated to the television programme, but is not necessarily related to its content (e.g. merchandise).
4. Related activities: Activities that don't have a direct relation to the programme, but are linked in some way either by its brand or theme (e.g. programme-related user generated content).
5. Social interaction: The interactions that exist between consumers of the programme, consumers and the actors within the programme, and consumers and characters from the programme (e.g. social media connections).
6. Interactivity: Mechanisms that support consumers to interact (in different capacities) with a media product (e.g. contributions to the programme) (2014: 2223 – 2224)

Rather than suggest that the core elements of transmediality – namely, the cross-platform distribution of content, transmedia storytelling practices and paratextual entities – operate in isolation within these categories, Simons instead identifies their close relationship to one another. For example, ancillary content can be both content that extends across different media the story world of the television programme, such as webisodes that develop sub-plots or peripheral characters further (e.g. transmedia storytelling), or can be supplemental information such as behind-the-scenes documentaries on how the programme was produced (e.g. paratextual content) (ibid). Both of these can be distributed across a range of media. Despite Simons' model being constructed specifically for television drama, the schema proposed is one that can arguably be adapted as a way of framing similar developments in other media forms. It

has specific relevance for structuring discussions of comparable trends within film, as its application to this chapter's main case study will demonstrate.

### **From DVD to online distribution: Different delivery methods, alternative storytelling practices**

Changes in film distribution have undoubtedly impacted on both the storytelling practices being adopted, and the consumer's experience of a particular film. VHS, DVDs, DVRs, digital downloads and online streaming, are ways in which technological developments have changed the way in which film content is delivered to consumers, thus transforming viewing conditions. As Warren Buckland suggests, new media has created a situation where our "experiences are becoming increasingly ambiguous and fragmented", and consequently, "the stories that attempt to represent those experiences have become opaque and complex" (2009: 1). The technologies used to deliver and present stories have played an instrumental role in enabling them to be told. Yet, as Molloy suggests, the expansion of "post-theatrical exhibition platforms" such as DVD and digital downloads has also provided "a profitable after-market for films" (2010: 47). So while technological developments have provided new ways of telling stories, it is also important not to overlook how their revenue potential has been key to seeing them adopted on a wide-scale.

VHS was perhaps the first distribution technology to have a significant impact on the presentation and viewing conditions of film as it enabled consumers to changing the film's temporal flow through rewinding to re-watch sections, or fast-forwarding through parts they didn't enjoy. Its contemporary counterparts – DVD and Blu-Ray – have extended this further, making rewinding, fast-forwarding and scene selection easier. Writing in a period before DVD, Bordwell argued that "[u]nder normal viewing circumstances, the film absolutely controls the order, frequency, and duration of the presentation of events", suggesting that when watching a film "the viewer submits to programmed temporal form" (1985: 74). Yet, nowadays, as Chris Dzialo suggests, digital technologies provide a "chance to tell complex stories...which allow for a high degree of temporal manipulation by the viewer" (2009: 110). According to Dzialo, filmmakers no longer feel bound to produce films which tell stories that are understandable in singular, linear viewing akin to a theatrical screening (ibid). Instead, digital technologies offer consumers the opportunity to re-watch particular scenes or view additional content, therefore opening up different storytelling possibilities.

Since the introduction of DVDs in the mid-to-late 1990s, a wave of films with ‘complex’ stories emerged. *The Matrix* (1999, Wachowski and Wachowski), *The Sixth Sense* (1999, Shyamalan), *Memento* (2000, Nolan), *Donnie Darko* (2001, Kelly), *Vanilla Sky* (2001, Crowe), *The Butterfly Effect* (2004, Bress and Gruber), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004, Gondry), *Moon* (2009, Jones) and *Inception* (2010, Nolan) all exemplify this. These films span across a range of genres and US film industry sectors. Buckland describes these examples as “puzzle films”, arguing that the way that the story is presented – its “puzzle plot” – goes beyond Aristotle’s complex plot “in the sense that the arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing” (2009: 3). In short, the events presented to the consumer are “not simply interwoven, but entangled” (ibid). A number of these films fit Thomas Elsaesser’s understanding of the “mind game film” that plays games on two levels; first the character(s) within the film are having games played with them, either consciously or unconsciously and, second, the audience is also being played with through the ambiguous presentation of information (2009: 14). Films such as *Memento* and *Vanilla Sky* fall into this category.

Exploring the viewer’s experience of these films, Stefano Ghislotti suggests that they challenge the viewer because they ask them to perform different mental tasks than they normally would when watching a film (2009: 87 – 88). Citing *Memento*, Ghislotti suggests that when watching the film, viewers are not able to construct a coherent fabula<sup>75</sup> because the film’s story is presented as an unsolved puzzle and the attraction is in finding its solution (ibid). The Internet and video games, according to Molloy, have potentially provided consumers with the skills to solve such puzzles and understand these types of films (2010: 38). Furthermore, it is plausible to suggest that puzzle films are likely to encourage repeat viewings – either through attending multiple cinema screenings or through watching via ancillary markets, thus increasing consumption. While some of these films are transmedia stories, such as *Donnie Darko* whose story is told across film and the Internet, others, such as *The Butterfly Effect* are examples of transmedia distribution – the same story told on different media.

This wave of filmmaking is still evident in American independent cinema today; *Black Swan* exemplifies this. The film’s protagonist – Nina Sayers – is a ballet dancer whose fragile mental state is put under further pressure when she is given the Swan Queen role in a production of *Swan Lake*. As her health deteriorates so does the linearity

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<sup>75</sup> Bordwell (1985) uses the Russian Formalist’s terms *syuzhet* to refer to the film’s plot and *fabula* to refer to actual story. For Bordwell, the *fabula* is constructed by the viewer, whereas the *syuzhet* is “the actual arrangement and presentation of the *fabula* in the film” (1985: 50).

of the film's narrative. When watching the film, it is unclear as to whether the narrative segments are Sayers's delusions or actual events in the film's world. In this sense the 'real' world in the film and Sayers's paranoid delusions become entangled, with the 'puzzle' being the deciphering of what actually happens and what is happening in Sayers's mind. With these types of stories, consumers can heavily invest themselves in their worlds and characters (Elsaesser, 2009: 13). This can manifest itself in online forums that dissect these films in detail (ibid). The frequently asked questions section on *Black Swan's* IMDB entry, for example, has numerous posts on what happened in the film, interpretations of specific scenes, and discussions of the film's ending (*Black Swan* (2010) – IMDB FAQ, 2014).

DVD functions, such as scene selection, allow viewers to re-watch particular scenes to try and understand their meaning or position with the film's story, thus supporting them in solving the 'puzzle' of films such as *Black Swan*. The content contained with special features such as directors' commentaries may also aid conceptualisations of a film. Elsaesser describes such films as being DVD-enabled in the sense that they:

- Need and reward multiple viewings;
- Include integral, paratextual or bonus materials;
- Respond to the consumption demands of multi-platform film;
- Engage online fan communities in discussions about the DVD presentation of a film;
- Become game-like (2009: 38).

Essentially, the DVD-enabled film is a film that exploits the opportunities offered by this distribution method and the sociocultural context in which it is received, providing new pleasures for consumers rather than the remediation of a film onto another media form. Such DVD releases are not merely repackaged content, but are more complex examples of transmediality and can contribute to a number of the categories that Simons' identified in the cross-platform expansion of television, such as ancillary content, social interaction, and interactivity (2014: 2223 – 2224).

Recent examples of this practice from within American independent cinema include the DVD releases of *Repo! The Genetic Opera*, *Be Kind Rewind* (2008, Gondry), and *The Mist*. *Repo! The Genetic Opera's* DVD contained a sing-a-long feature that incited the consumer to participate in the performance of the film, akin in some ways to Klinger's (2011) ephemeral media discussions of fan re-enactment of films. Although

this feature does not impact on the story being told, it does change the viewing context, as the consumer is encouraged to adopt the role of a participant in the performance sequences. Furthermore, this feature could also be aimed at increasing sales of the film's accompanying soundtrack, and thus be seen as an act of franchising through the reproduction of already existing content into another media form (Jenkins, 2011). Outside of the realm of redundancy, special features can also provide new content. *Be Kind Rewind's* DVD, for example, included a behind-the-scenes documentary of the making of the film and short documentary on how the film's production impacted on the community where the film was shot. The Collector's Edition of *The Mist* contained a black and white version of the film, deleted scenes, a featurette examining the special effects and a filmed conversation between Stephen King (the author of the novel the film has been adapted from) and the film's director. None of these paratexts would have been present during a theatrical screening. These types of special features (that have now become standard content) take the DVD presentation of films beyond remediation – a description that is more fitting for VHS releases of films. They do not simply represent films on a new medium, but add to them through ancillary products that frame people's understanding of films akin to Gray's (2010) discussions on how “media res” paratexts work.

Many DVD special features promise to deliver ‘inside’ knowledge about the film, and therefore position DVD collectors as modern day cinephiles. As Hudson and Zimmermann explain, “cinephilia in an era of DVDs is associated with ownership in the home space, rather than with spectatorship in the theatrical space” (2009: 138). These cinephiles, or “film connoisseurs” as Klinger terms them, are being “positioned by the industry as privileged subject” (2006: 85). Through the inclusion of directors' cuts, extra features, and the release of ‘special’ or ‘collectors’ editions of DVDs, they are branded with the pretence that they are offering consumers ‘exclusive’ content. Furthermore, such ‘special’ or ‘collector’s’ editions branding is underpinned by product differentiation and an “economic logic”, that, as Pavel Skopal states, underpins the multi-edition releasing of DVD (2014: 186). For example, distributors can choose to release several editions simultaneously allowing them to distinguish between “low-value and high-value consumers”, or they can release ‘standard’ editions of the DVD that are then followed, at key moments in the film's life cycle, by ‘anniversary’ or ‘collector’s’ versions (ibid). With special editions usually being priced higher than standard releases, the opportunity to increase revenue is clear. Furthermore, different versions of the DVD may also drive

multiple purchases amongst keen cinephiles. The key to promoting these variations within the same market, according to Skopal, is highlighting not that one is better than the other, but that they are different (ibid). However, the implicit reference with 'special' editions of DVDs is that they will bring the consumer to the truest understanding of the film through paratexts such as directors' commentaries and cuts, and therefore they do, although subtly, purport a rhetoric based on privilege and hierarchy. In essence, the consumers of such content are raised from being an average film consumer to a more knowledgeable position. This type of film consumer is very much akin to consumers being depicted in the *IMDb* reviews dissected in Chapter One, who were articulated to be the "right crowd" who were "serious about film" (Anon, 2005). The elitist tendencies evident in the *IMDb* reviews are what tend to inform how special features position the consumer.

Some DVDs also contain hidden extras, commonly known as 'Easter eggs'. Easter eggs can include standard special features such as behind-the-scenes documentaries, but can also include content that develops the film's story world. The hunt for such Easter eggs on DVDs is game-like and goes some way to merging together film and game, combining the role of a viewer with that of a player. For example, the DVD release of *Clerks 2* (2006, Smith) contained a number of Easter eggs including a hidden link to a video containing Kevin Smith stating that the film was the end of the View Askewnverse bible<sup>76</sup>. To access this content the consumer must go through a series of actions using the DVD player remote control akin to how a video game player would use a control pad. Websites dedicated to Easter eggs, such as [www.eeggs.com](http://www.eeggs.com), are in their abundance and listed on their databases are descriptions of how to access hidden content. These websites depend upon users submitting accounts of discovered Easter eggs and building up a database of knowledge and are an example of Pierre Levy's (1997) notion of "collective intelligence". In updating and accessing information on these websites, users are able to use the community's collective knowledge to enhance their understanding of a film and its DVD.

The DVD release of *Final Destination 3* (2006, Wong) is an interesting example of how the format of DVD has been used to change the presentation of the film's narrative events from how they were presented in the theatrically released version of the film. The film's premise, as with all films in the franchise, is that a group of people who have

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<sup>76</sup> The View Askewnverse is the name given to the fictional story world that some of the characters and stories from Kevin Smith's film form part of. The View Askewnverse bible is where all the stories are allegedly written.

cheated death (usually because of a premonition by someone in group) are subsequently hunted down and killed by 'death'. In the theatrical release of the film, each person is killed by a paranormal force in the order that they were destined to die. The DVD presentation of *Final Destination 3* has a special feature which allows the consumer to play with this chronology<sup>77</sup>. Although this feature allows consumers to alter the order in which the characters die, this ultimately has no impact on the outcomes of each of the characters, or the film's ending. Referring back to Bordwell's (1985) understanding of the fabula and syuzhet, what is being transformed via this special feature is the syuzhet (the way in which the story is presented) rather than the fabula (the film's story).

In terms of interactivity, this feature is on the lower-end of the spectrum. Mark Stephen Meadows (2003) suggests that there are three types of interactive narratives – the nodal plot, the modulate plot and the open plot. The nodal plot is the least interactive and is “a series of non-interactive events, interrupted by points of interactivity” (2003: 64). At the opposite end of the spectrum is the open plot that, as Meadows describes, is “a roadmap” and usually completely disintegrates any concept of a dramatic arc, instead presents the consumer with a blueprint that they can use to explore the story world (2003: 66). The modulated plot represents a mid-point between the aforementioned forms of interactive narratives, retaining more of the dramatic arc than an open plot yet simultaneously offering more interactivity than a nodal plot (2003: 65). Drawing on Meadows' (2003) work, Sarah Atkinson asserts that *Final Destination 3*'s special feature is an example of a “nodal plot structure” that offers “limited scope for interactivity” (Atkinson, 2007: 32).

Since the DVD, new distribution technologies have facilitated the emergence of more films with higher degrees of interactivity. As discussed in Chapter Three, in 2008, SilkTricky released *The Outbreak* online. The film's premise is that there has been an outbreak of an infection, which turns people into zombies. The film is presented to the consumer in short segments ranging from approximately 50 seconds to 3 minutes. At the end of each segment, the consumer is presented with different options for the lead character to take; the film progresses based on the option selected. At first glance this seems like another example of a nodal plot given that it has a number of non-interactive sections (e.g. short film segments) that are then interrupted by moments of interactivity (e.g. the options). However, further analysis suggests that *The Outbreak* is actually a

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<sup>77</sup> This DVD is not the first to offer this type of feature. The DVD release of *Memento* had an Easter egg that when accessed presented the film's theatrical release version in a strictly chronological order.

modulated plot. The dramatic arc of the film's story is still relatively intact, in the sense that in any experience of it the exposition (people have become infected and have turned into zombies) and climax (zombies attack our lead character) remain the same. However, what does change in each experience of the film is its resolution; some experiences of the film will end in the lead character dying, and others will result in them surviving.

Meadows suggests that in modulated plots, “[t]ransitions may be made to an earlier point in the story, and time can often be looped back on itself” (2003: 65). This is also the case with *The Outbreak*. For example, whilst experiencing the film the consumer can choose to go back to a different section which they have already viewed and select a different option. What this means is that there are multiple pathways through the film, each having a different ending. The map in Appendix Item 15 outlines some of the pathways consumers could take. The blue sections indicate that the consumer has not yet visited them, whereas the red sections have resulted in death. The two white sections resulted in survival – one being for a limited time<sup>78</sup> and the other seemingly being the ‘correct’ ending as it finishes with credits, as a conventional presentation of a film would. Consequently, *The Outbreak* allows the consumer not only to alter the syuzhet but also to determine the fabula based on the options they choose. *The Outbreak* could also be described as a puzzle film (Ghislotti, 2009) in the sense that the consumer must choose the right options, in the right sequence, in order to get to the ‘correct’ ending.

Two years after *The Outbreak*, SilkTricky released *Bank Run* and as Chapter Three detailed, the film was distributed in two parts; part one appears on the film's website, while part two is accessible via an iPhone app. In a similar way to *The Outbreak*, the consumer is given various decisions to make for the lead character, but this film extends its ‘game play’ elements further by getting the consumer to use their keyboards and phone buttons to solicit various actions. For example, in part one, the consumer has to hit the space bar in order to trigger the firing of a gun. This convergence of film and game is symptomatic of the wider convergence culture in which the boundaries between different media are becoming increasingly difficult to define (Jenkins, 2006). Furthermore, this film is a prime example of Elsaesser's (2009) conceptualisation of the mind-game film, as the lead character – who has been taken hostage – is being ‘played’ with whilst the consumers play the game. Whereas *The Outbreak* is an example of transmedia distribution – in essence representing the online distribution of film content,

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<sup>78</sup> This clip ends with the inter-title “You have survived – for now”.



*Bank Run* is an example of a form of transmedia storytelling akin to Deny's (2006) notion of "transfiction".

Both DVD and online distribution have changed the types of and ways that film stories are told, and also the consumption practices and environments that surround them. Writing about DVD distribution specifically, Casetti suggests that such changes are a result of both technological and cultural changes (2009: 62 – 63). This same logic can be applied to films by newer technologies and goes some way to explain why storytelling practices in film are changing. Whereas DVD (as an enhancement of VHS) responded to the domestic sphere by increasing the way in which a consumer could temporally view a film (e.g. pausing, rewinding etc.), the online distribution of films like *The Outbreak* and *Bank Run* sees film engage with the way in which people use the Internet, computers/laptops and apps. In an online environment people click on hyperlinks to make choices about what they view, so asking consumers of online films to click on different options to dictate the progression of the film's narrative is not entirely unprecedented. People are also accustomed to using keyboards and mouse buttons to control the actions of a character in computer games, so the adoption of such practices in films such as the *Bank Run*, is again not alien. Perhaps the reason why such narratives did not really come to the forefront with DVD distribution (despite DVD's technological capabilities) is because previous viewing habits associated with the viewing of audio-visual content in the domestic sphere had been more rooted in passive models of consumption. In online environments and with videogames, consumption has always involved active participation from consumers. This section has demonstrated how technological and sociocultural strands of media convergence have impacted on film distribution, which in turn has had a ripple effect on both film form, and topics pertinent to exhibition. What the following case study analysis will demonstrate is how industrial strands – alongside technological and sociocultural manifestations – of convergence have been integral to the transmedial practices evident in *The Hills Have Eyes*, and how this relates to the franchise's distribution and marketing.

### ***The Hills Have Eyes* and the exploration of transmediality through the lens of distribution**

This case study on *The Hills Have Eyes* franchise (focusing predominantly of its incarnation in the 2000s), will examine how the impact of media convergence on the distribution sector of American independent cinema, has contributed to the enhanced

transmediality of this media property. Specifically, it will outline how industrial convergence (manifested in corporate convergence and co-option), technological convergence (exemplified by semi-digital and digital distribution and marketing practices) and sociocultural convergence (examined through consumption practices), have worked together to extend a once film-based property into a cross-platform entity. The two films that form the basis of this case study - *The Hills Have Eyes* (Aja, 2006) and *The Hills Have Eyes 2* - have been selected from the corpus of films that have been chosen to represent the theatrical releases of the specialty divisions (see Appendix Item Two). The rationale underpinning the decision to utilise these films within this chapter's main case study was due to the fact that their distribution and marketing represents a number of key transmediality practices in action, namely transmedia distribution (same story released on multiple platforms, i.e. theatrical market, DVD market) and transmedia storytelling (the story that is told within the two films has been expanded on in a graphic novel). Furthermore, the distribution and marketing activities evident in the releasing of these two films and other entities that surround them, demonstrates key aspects of the impact of media convergence such as the adoption of synergistic practices informed by industrial convergence and innovations within paratextual study. The films serve a gateway into an intricate analysis of how key practices outlined earlier in this chapter, and others within this thesis, work. The films' selection is also symptomatic of this thesis's wider goal to discuss American independent cinema in an all-inclusive manner. Both these films are commercial and are examples of genre filmmaking practices, and as such research that adopts a more elitist or conventional aesthetic or political delineation to studying independent film would generally tend to overlook them and not discuss them within the boarder discourse of independence.

In 2006, Fox Searchlight released horror remake *The Hills Have Eyes*. The original, *The Hills Have Eyes* (Craven, 1977), was released by Vanguard and was reportedly produced for around \$230,000 (IMDb.com - *The Hills Have Eyes*, 2012). The 2006 remake however, had a production budget of approximately \$15,000,000 (Box Office Mojo - *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), 2011), and was released during Fox Searchlight's more commercial years - essentially, within its indiewood phase (Tzioumakis, 2012b: 134). *The Hills Have Eyes*' commerciality is rooted in the release being a remake of an already well-known cult horror film originally directed by Wes Craven who, by the mid-2000s, was a well-known US horror filmmaker. With an easily recognisable genre, the already existing audience-base for *The Hills Have Eyes* property

and the marketability of Craven's name, the 2006 remake opened with a saturation release in 2,620 theatres across the US, achieving over \$41,000,000 at the US box office (Box Office Mojo - *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), 2011.). With the film's commercial success, it was unsurprising that a sequel was commissioned. However, this time, Fox Searchlight's corporate sibling and genre label, Fox Atomic, handled the distribution<sup>79</sup>. When releasing *The Hills Have Eyes 2*<sup>80</sup>, Fox Atomic followed a similar distribution strategy to the one Fox Searchlight adopted for *The Hills Have Eyes*, opening the sequel in a saturation release in the US (Box Office Mojo - *The Hills Have Eyes 2*, 2012). However, the box office performance of the sequel was relatively poor; this, and other commercially unsuccessful releases, led to, in 2008, the label's activities being taken over by its corporate siblings, Twentieth Century Fox and Fox Searchlight, and being shuttered a year later (Siegel, 2008)<sup>81</sup>.

The first element of transmediality evident within the 2000s incarnation of *The Hills Have Eyes* franchise is its transmedia distribution on DVD. A number of DVD versions were released including standard editions of both films and a 'special' two-disc box set; the latter of these, is discussed here. Both discs are indicative of film cinephilia or connoisseurship in the DVD age (Hudson and Zimmerman, 2009; Klinger, 2006) with them containing a number of special features – or paratexts – that allude to providing 'inside' knowledge on the filmmaking process. The rhetoric presented in many of these paratexts, is that it was Craven who was the 'vision' behind the films, despite not directing either the remake or its sequel; he instead acted as one of the producers of both of these films, and was a co-writer on *The Hills Have Eyes 2*. The paratexts on the disc-set, such as 'Surviving the Hills: The making of "*The Hills Have Eyes*"' on the first instalment's DVD and the 'Life After Movie School with Wes Craven' on the sequel's DVD, are keen to assign him a form of "industrial authorship" akin to Tzioumakis's (2006b) writings on the industrially-assigned authorship of David Mamet. This supports Gray's

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<sup>79</sup> At the time of the sequel's release both Fox Searchlight and Fox Atomic were subsidiaries of Fox Filmed Entertainment, which itself was the motion picture and television programming department of News Corp. In 2013 News Corp. was split into two companies – News Corp and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox (Abrams, 2013). News Corp. now handles all the publishing subsidiaries and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox handles the digital, broadcasting and film companies (ibid).

<sup>80</sup> It is worth noting here that the original 1977 version of *The Hills Have Eyes* also had a sequel, *The Hills Have Eyes Part Two* (1984, Craven), but its story is different to that of the 2007 sequel. While being part of the overall *The Hills Have Eyes* text, the original sequel does not fit into the transmediality that is being discussed here.

<sup>81</sup> This shuttering related to two industry trends. First, during the latter parts of the 2000s, horror film hit a rough patch (Thompson, 2007) and whereas other genre labels diversified their slates, Fox Atomic did not. Second, within the specialty sector there was widespread consolidation, with labels such as Warner Independent Pictures and Paramount Vantage closed in light of the challenges presented by the global economic crisis at the time (Tzioumakis, 2012a).

findings that paratexts are resurrecting both “aura and author”, that scholars such as Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes have, respectively, declared to be extinct (2010: 83). Gray suggests that media res paratexts in particular, such as the ones distributed within this DVD box-set, are helping to assign value to texts that entryway paratexts (aimed at generating a hype around a film or television programme) can degenerate (2010: 113 – 4).

Prior to Fox Atomic’s closure, the genre label established Fox Atomic Comics, an act of corporate convergence, which played a significant role in extending the media property’s transmediality. The new publisher created the graphic novel, *The Hills Have Eyes: The Beginning* (Palmiotti, 2007), which detailed events prior to narrative events of *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006). Even within this graphic novel, which Craven has not official role in, his authorial presence was still emphasised through other paratexts. In the special feature on *The Hills Have Eyes 2* DVD, the editor of the graphic novel, states in the opening seconds of the featurette that “One of the things about *The Hills Have Eyes* and the Wes Craven legacy is that it is graphic” in reference to the violence depicted in it. Scolari’s semiotics-based approach to understanding how branding works in transmedia storytelling focused on how ‘brands’ can be conveyed through the characters, topics and aesthetics of the story world of transmedia stories (2009: 600). This case study analysis highlights how wider understandings of transmedia branding, such as the industrial authorship assigned to Craven via the DVD paratexts, have been key to branding *The Hills Have Eyes* across different media. While this manifests itself, to certain degrees, in the textual qualities (e.g. the depiction of violence in the graphic novel), looking solely at the paratexts that expanded the story across different media (e.g. the films and graphic novel) and ignoring other paratexts (e.g. the DVD special features), would have only painted half a picture.

The graphic novel was distributed by another News Corp. subsidiary, Harper Collins, prior to *The Hills Have Eyes 2*’s theatrical run, simultaneously expanding the story into a transmedia one and promoting the forthcoming sequel. As stated earlier, franchising and transmedia storytelling are not the same entity, but in this example the relationship between them is increasingly visible. Franchising, and its related concept, licensing, are components of industrial convergence that manifest in corporate convergence and synergistic practices. As Derek Johnson (2013) suggests, transmedia storytelling builds on older practices such as franchising by adding “narrative integrality” and offering “deeper engagement” to consumers. Therefore, transmedia properties akin

to *The Hills Have Eyes* are on the one hand to be understood in terms of their creative textuality, and on the other, as synergistic practices designed to exploit a film brand across different mediums (Grainge, 2008; Keane, 2007).

In addition to the graphic novel and conventional film marketing techniques such as trailers and posters, Fox Atomic also experimented in using opportunities afforded by digital technologies as part of the sequel's marketing campaign. In 2006, Fox Atomic orchestrated the "Carnival of Lost Souls" online event to coincide with Halloween. As part of this event, the label's website hosted competitions, clips from forthcoming releases such as *The Hills Have Eyes 2*, opportunities to create content such as uploading pictures of themselves in Halloween costumes, and publishing horror stories via the "Nightmare Factory", and be interactive through creating an avatar to be a part of a *Second Life* world on "Fox Atomic Island" (Fox Atomic, 2006). This *Second Life* activity further demonstrates Chapter Three's exploration of the increasingly blurred line between the consumers' reality and the story world of media products, as in this world consumers could choose to become the lead characters from some of the label's films (Zeitchik, 2007b). Further innovative marketing and engagement activities were introduced, such as the online "blender tool" that allowed fans to "mash-up" scenes from films from Fox Atomic and Fox Searchlight's back catalogues (Kornblum, 2007) and a competition for fans to create a music video for *The Hills Have Eyes 2* (Zeitchik, 2007b). This event and other content on the label's website was advertised through MySpace, as social media platform that had been acquired by News Corp. in 2005 to tap into the lucrative 17 – 24 year old demographic assumed, at the time, to congregate on the social media platform. (BBC News – News Corp., 2011).

These interactive opportunities are related to "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006) and the technologies and communication practices associated with Web 2.0. With hardware such as digital cameras and the Internet, consumers can now access the tools required to participate in the creation of content. Furthermore, as Axel Bruns (2007) has suggested, recent years have seen consumers increasingly being involved in the production of media. As Bruns notes, there is currently a "new hybrid form of simultaneous production and usage" that he refers to as "produsage" (2007: 117). This hybrid model allows for the lack of finite products, arguing that today's production culture is collaborative in its nature and encourages the "continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement" (Bruns, 2007: 119). Whilst Bruns' work on this continuous and collaborative production culture is based on the open

source movement, its essence is applicable here. Basically, the stories ‘lived out’ on *Second Life* display elements of the collaborative and continuous production culture that Bruns describes. Additionally, while the examples of creations evident within activities such as the ‘Carnival of Lost Souls’ do not necessarily contribute to the telling of a wider transmedia story, they do support the overall transmedia expansion of the text, in the way that Gray uses the term “text” to describe the sum of all the paratexts that contribute to a particular media property (2010: 6 – 7).

Some traditional media producers do not always welcome the type of participation that Fox Atomic sought to encourage. Writing about the stances that the owners of copyrighted content take, Jenkins and Green outline how they can be divided into two camps – the first being prohibitionists and the second being collaborationists (2009: 220). The prohibitionist stance sees these consumer creations “as a threat to their control over the circulation of the production of meaning around their content”, whereas the collaborationist logic is much more permissive of consumer creations provided they can see a value in them (ibid). The approach adopted by Fox Atomic in the marketing of their films was collaborationist in its nature, choosing to see fans as “allies” with the potential to “generate value around cultural properties” (ibid). Fox Atomic’s interactive activities and co-option of fan produced content were not only used by the outfit to offer meaningful entertainment experiences for consumers, but also to establish the label’s brand identity and attempt to set them apart from other similar outfits. Jake Zim (a then executive at Fox Atomic), described the label as “the anti-studio”, insisting that rather than fight fan appropriations of their work they wanted to embrace it (Zim quoted in Kornblum, 2007), which also conveniently tried to place a studio specialty film division as an independent company, the opposite of a studio. Media convergence has thus brought about a “reconceptualisation of the audience – how it is comprised, how it is courted, what it wants, and how to generate value from it” (Jenkins and Green, 2009: 215). Although ventures such as these do open up avenues for consumers to interact with media companies and their products, as Tryon acknowledges, this does not necessarily mean that these activities were “liberating”, or that the company gave audiences uncontrolled access to this copyrighted content (2009: 171). Furthermore, as Caldwell asserts, whilst scholars such as Jenkins have celebrated the courting of user-generated-content as “fan agency”, it is important that the “unabashed corporate logic” that underpins this courting is not overlooked (2011: 191). In essence, companies such

as Fox Atomic (and its parent conglomerate, News Corp.) engaged in such practices as they felt it would lead to economic returns from increased consumer expenditure.

The enhanced transmediality of *The Hills Have Eyes* that occurred during the 2000s is symptomatic of the impact that media convergence at technological, industrial and sociocultural levels, and can be broadly mapped into the schema provided by Simons (2014). The table below situates *The Hills Have Eyes* into this framework.

**Table Two: The Transmediality of *The Hills Have Eyes* through the lens of distribution**

Type of extension	Evidence within <i>The Hills Have Eyes</i> text
Repackaged Content	Films released onto DVD
Ancillary Content	Special features on the DVDs Graphic Novel Soundtrack
Branded Products	Second Life 'Fox Atomic Island'
Related Activities	The 'Carnival of Lost Souls' event
Social Interaction	Use of MySpace The 'Carnival of Lost Souls' event
Interactivity	Blender Tool Music video competition The Nightmare Factory Second Life 'Fox Atomic Island'

This case study demonstrates how changes within distribution and marketing have a ripple effect on film form and consumption experience. Through industrial manifestations of convergence, *The Hills Have Eyes* was transformed by different subsidiaries of News Corp. into a transmedia story that spanned the film and graphic novel mediums. Furthermore, technological aspects of convergence, such as DVD distribution and online distribution of media content have both enabled the dissemination of paratextual entities that help to 'frame' and brand the media property. New technologies and innovations within the marketing arena have also provided opportunities for consumers to be involved in this 'branding' and for new forms of entertainment experiences to be

engaged with that in some way relate to the wider transmediality of *The Hills Have Eyes*, even if they are not necessarily transmedia stories in the way that scholars such as Jenkins (2006, 2011), Deny (2006), Scolari (2009) envisage them.

## Conclusion

In the years that have followed this study's period of examination, innovations such as the ones depicted in the case study are being more frequently adopted in marketing campaigns. As Jenkins et al suggest, "the new energies motivating transmedia strategies" can be linked to a move from "an appointment model towards an engagement model" of attracting media consumers (2013: 133). The former model saw consumers courted on an individual product-by-product basis, whereas the latter sees consumers engage with a particular "brand" on a more long-term basis (ibid). In a similar manner to how Fox Atomic used consumer-created-content in purporting its brand identity, Fox Searchlight also incorporated elements of this practice into its 15-year anniversary celebrations. The label had a competition where consumers could produce a montage video of their films, with the best being placed on their website (Fox Searchlight – 15 Years, 2011). Other consumer created videos related to Fox Searchlight's films that had been posted on social media platforms such as YouTube, were also incorporated on the site (ibid). Such videos can be seen as a further extension of Klinger's (2011) understandings of fan re-enactments of films, more in the realms of the remix or the reimagining than just simply recreating. Like Klinger's notion of re-enactment, these clips contribute to the "cultural visibility and memory" of the films to which they relate (2011: 209). In-line with this, Fox Searchlight's co-option of them can also be seen as a way of enhancing the cultural meaning and memory of its films by selecting content that upholds the label's brand identity of "indie", "quirky" and "hip" (Newman, 2011).

The *Twilight* Time Capsule also sought to tap into user-generated-content in an online environment by encouraging fans of the franchise (to which it shares its name), to upload their fan-produced videos and photos to a website that are then displayed alongside official promotional materials for the films. Fans can engage with each other through commenting on other people's postings and sharing across social media. This venture exemplifies the duality of online, ephemeral media that Grainge discusses as being both immediate and archival (2011: 3). As Nina Reed, an actress from the franchise stated, consumers can now "[commemorate [their] personal memories forever and become a part of 'Twilight Saga' history" (Reed cited in Vena, 2011). Outside of the



marketing realms, the way in which film is being distributed has also had a fundamental impact on consumption experiences, as well as film form. In 2011, Weiler released his short film *Pandemic 41.410806, -75.654259*, yet the film was only a small part of the larger story world of *Pandemic 1.0*, all of which premiered at that year's Sundance Film Festival (Anderson, 2011). Despite the Sundance Film Festival being synonymous with independent film, the *Pandemic 1.0* experience spanned other media such as mobile, online technologies, and gaming to engage consumers in an alternate reality (www.LanceWeiler.com – *Pandemic 1.0*, 2014).

What this suggests is that the production, distribution and exhibition contexts of film, as we once knew them have changed and because of this the ways in which 'story' is examined in film studies needs to also evolve. This chapter has gone some way to exploring the possibilities of how this is being achieved through using distribution as a lens through which changes can be identified and discussed, but further research is needed in this area to fully understand the ways in which industrial processes and consumer practices are changing traditional structures and formats. At the forefront of these changes is the fact that consumers are not just sitting back and having content delivered to them. Instead, they are actively involved in its production, distribution and exhibition. The following chapter will discuss the ways in which consumers are supporting the spreading of marketing messages in an online environment, with the final chapter examining their role within distribution and (to a certain degree) exhibition strategies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FROM WORD-OF-MOUTH TO WORD-OF-MOUSE: SPREADING THE WORD IN AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2011 at 23:35 Eastern Standard Time (EST), President Barack Obama announced to the world that US forces had killed Osama Bin Laden in a raid on a compound in Abbotabad, Pakistan (BBC World News, 2011). However, prior to this announcement, news of this secret raid was already circulating online. At around 15:00 EST, Sohaid Athar – an I.T. consultant living in Abbottabad, tweeted about a “helicopter hovering over Abbottabad”, but unbeknown to Athar at the time, what he was actually providing from his Twitter account ‘ReallyVirtual’ was a running commentary of the US raid on Bin Laden’s compound (BBC Technology News, 2011). Ignorant of the major international incident that was occurring not far from his location, Athar jokingly tweeted about getting a “giant swatter” to deal with the helicopter (Twitter – Really Virtual, 2011). It was not until the following day that Athar began to make the connections between what he had been tweeting about and the Bin Laden story (ibid). Keith Urbahn, former Chief of Staff at the Office of Donald Rumsfeld also used the microblogging site to reveal details about the Bin Laden event prior to Obama releasing the information via more traditional mediums. Urbahn tweeted that he had “been told by a reputable person they have killed Osama Bin Laden” (Twitter – keithurbahn, 2011).

Twitter and similar platforms are increasingly becoming the ‘go-to-place’ for up-to-date information and are used by news outlets, public bodies, organisations and individuals as a means of quickly releasing information to the public. Social media has also been credited as playing a part in the uprisings in the Middle East, which started in late 2010, also known as the Arab Spring. These uprisings have also been dubbed ‘Twitter Revolutions’ and are characterised according to Peter Beaumont (2011) by people uploading images to social media sites, filming action as it occurs and circulating it on the web, and distributing information about protests via social media. Describing his observations of one of these uprisings, Beaumont writes:

In Tahrir Square I sat one morning next to a 60-year-old surgeon cheerfully tweeting his involvement in the protest. The barricades today do not bristle with bayonets and rifles, but with phones (ibid).

Whilst the scope and power of the social media in these uprisings might have been exaggerated by the press, journalists and social commentators alike, the distribution of

information via social media platforms does represent a significant change in how people communicate and connect with one another, and how information and content can be transported across vast geographical boundaries. In this era of convergence, media content has become increasingly more portable (Hills, 2009; Tryon 2013). Coinciding with this has been an increased connectivity of consumers on online social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These platforms provide the infrastructure through which individuals can share content (in the widest sense of the term) across nations and time zones.

These new communication and consumption practices are not just prevalent in the current affairs realm of the media but also in the entertainment sectors. The flow of entertainment content is succinctly represented by Susan Boyle's *Britain's Got Talent* (2006, Season 3, Episode 1) audition. As Henry Jenkins, Joshua Green and Sam Ford state, the audition initially premiered on television in the UK but managed to garner a significant amount of international online attention (2013: 9 – 16). Shortly after the broadcast of the audition, it was posted onto YouTube and since then has been viewed more than 77 million times (Jenkins et al, 2013: 9). Furthermore, users from different international locations, including Brazil and Japan, have uploaded other clips of the audition and some of these clips have also been viewed more than a million times (ibid). As Jenkins et al explain:

The spread of Susan Boyle demonstrates how content not designed to circulate beyond a contained market or timed for rapid global distribution can gain much greater visibility than ever before, thanks to the active circulation of various grassroots agents, while television networks and production companies struggle to keep up with such unexpected, rapidly escalating demand (2013: 15).

The authors are suggesting here that when connected together, consumers can become a powerful collective force in terms of their impact on the discourse that surrounds media texts and the ways in which content circulates online. Content sharing, however, is not a new phenomenon. Prior to online social networks, content sharing platforms and services, smartphones and portable media devices, people still found ways to share media content via other (semi-digital and analogue) means such as recording programmes on VHS and passing them onto their peers. Furthermore, people have always 'talked' about media content, for example, around the 'water cooler' at work or with friends in social settings. What is different is that these 'offline' forms of discussion

and circulation were perhaps more localised and less measurable<sup>82</sup> than the articulations of consumption practices that happen online.

Despite there being some substance to the argument that as an online collective, consumers now have more power than in the past, this should not be exaggerated. For example, although consumers used social media to ‘demand’ screenings of *Paranormal Activity*, the film’s distributor actually orchestrated this campaign. It is therefore more appropriate to see the relationship that exists between producers and consumers in an online environment as being symbiotic as opposed to one side always controlling, or being dependent upon, the other. As part of this symbiosis producers court consumers via social media platforms in order to incorporate seemingly naturally occurring word-of-mouth activities as part of their marketing operations. This should not suggest that all online consumer activity is promotional activity or that producers have the power to control all online articulations of consumption practices. Rather it should indicate that the power relations between the two camps are complex, intricate and sometimes contradictory.

The aim of this chapter then is to make sense of this multifaceted environment through providing an overview of articulations of consumption practices specific to film consumption contexts in an online environment. Such a discussion is important to the field of distribution studies given distribution’s inextricable link to exhibition, and thus consumption practices. Through understanding the way in which consumers’ cognise their own consumption practices and how they engage in these practices, researchers working in distribution studies can decipher a number of useful findings. First, they can begin to unpick why and how certain distribution strategies and marketing campaigns are successful. Second, this approach leads to understandings of innovations within distribution and marketing that are not purely technologically derived, and instead encompass sociocultural dimensions. Third, online articulations of consumption are useful to discussions of how branding works as two-way exercise between producer and consumer, as considered in Chapter One’s main case study. The discussion presented in this chapter will draw comparisons between traditional notions of word-of-mouth and the different forms of ‘talk’ evident online. It will account both for how consumers are now using online platforms – most notably social media – to discuss films, circulate film content and associated paratextual entities, *and* also discuss how these activities are

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<sup>82</sup> As this chapter will explore, the development of data-mining software and associated research methods have led to more traceable and measurable ways of examining how content is shared and spoken about between consumers.

being harnessed by film distributors as part of marketing campaigns. To do this, the chapter will provide a literature review of existing work on word-of-mouth in both offline and online environments, before discussing examples of the 'sociality' of contemporary film distribution and marketing. It will then present an analysis of Lionsgate's Chatroulette viral marketing campaign, which was used to promote the theatrical release of *The Last Exorcism* (Stamm, 2010). This case study will use new research methods to explore the campaign's online reception, demonstrating how a mini-major has re-appropriated and exploited social media practices in the marketing of one of its releases.

### **Word-of-mouth to word-of-mouse**

Word-of-mouth is a traditional and in some ways, organic form, of marketing. It works by courting consumers to talk about a product, service or experience and when this happens 'word' will spread. Obviously, the aim is that this 'word' will be positive, and so encourage more consumers to buy into what is on offer. Brown et al, describe word-of-mouth as a "consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market" (2007: 4). As was discussed in Chapter Three, more traditional understandings of marketing identify the practice as being a communication between business/seller and customer/consumer. Word-of-mouth operates differently in that it is a consumer-to-consumer form of communication. Due to this, it is generally assumed that is more "reliable, credible, and trustworthy" than communications from sellers (ibid). However, whilst consumers are independent of the 'market' in as much as they don't work for the businesses of whose products they speak about, it is still difficult to say with accuracy, the level to which industry-driven marketing materials and other factors influence their opinions. For example, if someone says, "It's a great film", is this judgement based on their own conception of quality or have reviews they have read or the number of awards the film has received influenced their opinion? Furthermore, when word-of-mouth is actively courted by marketers – whether in an online or offline environment – its assumed independence from industry-led marketing agendas is also questionable.

Despite this, Brown et al suggest "traditional communications theory considers word-of-mouth to have a powerful influence on behaviour, especially on consumers' information search, evaluation, and subsequent decision making" (ibid). Its strength of influence, according to Jacqueline Johnson Brown and Peter H. Reingen (1987), is determined by the relationship between the source of information and the person

receiving it. The authors discuss this relationship as being either a “strong tie” or a “weak tie”, with strong ties being those connections between people and groups that are most firm (e.g. connections within a subgroup of people) and weak ties being connections that are looser (e.g. connections between different subgroups of people) (ibid). The authors suggest that whilst weak ties do play “a crucial role in the flow of WOM information across groups”, it is the strong ties that are more likely to influence behaviour and consumption/purchasing decisions (1987: 306). A possible reason for this could be that stronger ties – those that represent closer relationships – are perceived as being more credible sources of information than those with whom the recipient of the information has a less well-developed connection to (ibid). Other studies such as Elihu Katz and Paul Felix Lazarfeld’s *Personal Influence* (1955), Sidney Feldman and Merlin Spencer’s (1965) essay on how people select services, and Johan Arndt’s (1967) study on the word-of-mouth that surrounds new products, also found word-of-mouth to be an important source of information in determining consumers’ purchasing decisions.

With new, online communication practices emerging, long-held understandings of how word-of-mouth works have begun to be questioned in terms of their relevance within this environment. Brown et al’s (2007) work goes some way to addressing this by proposing a model through which online interaction can be examined. Their work focuses specifically on consumption-related online communities (as discussed in Chapter One) and involved the undertaking of two research studies. Study one opted for a series of qualitative interviews with, initially, personal contacts, which snowballed to involve other people (30 in total), in which participants “were asked to relate and describe their interactions with various online community sites on the Internet” with the aim of discovering “how consumers interact on different communities, and the key factors impacting on their behavior and interactions” (2007: 7 - 8). Study two saw the researchers explore a specific online consumption community by harvesting posts on threads on a forum for fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997 - 2003) over a three-month period (2007: 8).

The findings from both studies largely support the notion that word-of-mouth communications influence consumers’ decisions. (2007: 15), but how this works in an online environment does deviate from how it works offline. For example, Brown et al found that whilst in the offline world consumers take the credibility of other consumers into account when judging whether or not to be influenced by word-of-mouth, in online environments, the credibility of the website on which the word-of-mouth communication

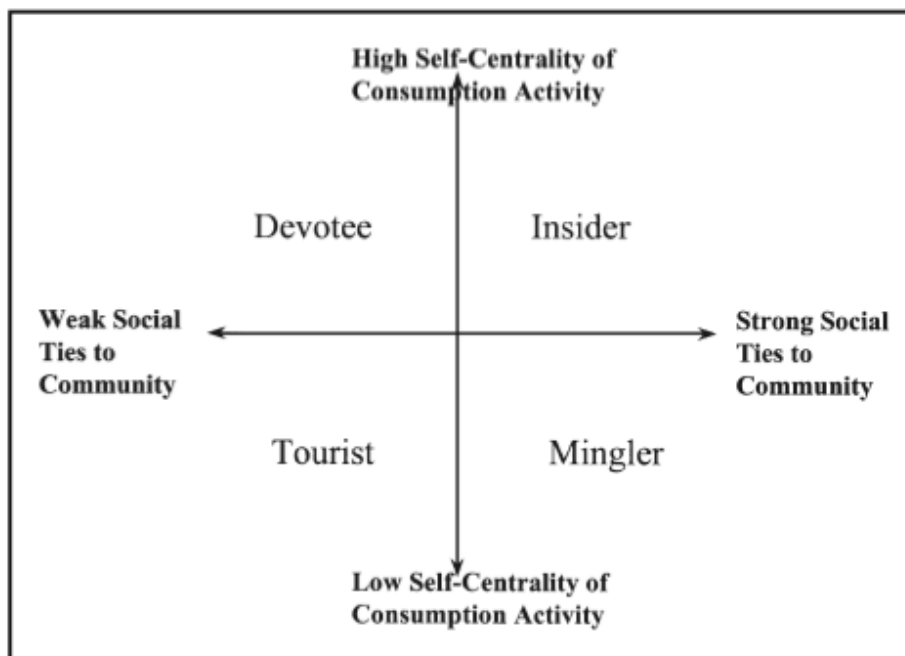
is occurring is also taken into consideration (ibid). The study found that it was the strength of tie with a particular site that would more like to govern behaviour and consumption decisions rather than the ties they had with other online users (2007: 11). Although Brown et al's study has its limitations, as they themselves identify, such as the fact that they only used seasoned Internet users in their study (and therefore less knowledgeable users may act differently) (2007: 16) and that the scope of the project was not very diverse (in as much as only one online consumption community was looked at over a short period of time), it is still useful in examining how word-of-mouth practices in an online environment differ from those in the offline world. An awareness of this subtle yet important difference is key to researching this area.

In an earlier essay, 'E-Tribalized Marketing' (1999), Robert V. Kozinet explored the importance of consumption-related online communities for marketers. Kozinet proposes that members of online communities can be broadly divided into four groups:

- Tourists – individuals who are not strongly socially tied to the group, more of a passerby than a member.
- Minglers – individuals who have strong social ties to the group but who are less committed to the specific consumption activity
- Devotees – individuals who have strong ties to the consumption activity, but less so to the social activities
- Insiders – individuals who are heavily into the consumption activity and the social element of the online community (1999: 254 – 255).

This approach allows for more “subtlety in targeting and approach” for marketers than what amalgamating all members of an online community into a single group would do (Kozinet, 1999: 254). Kozinet represents these groups on a horizontal and vertical spectrum of different values (see Diagram Three), which is particularly useful as it allows marketers to visualise how individuals can move between the different categories (and different areas of each category) fluidly, rather than being in a fixed state. This representation of online consumer behaviour is more insightful than other, more static assumptions.

### **Diagram Three: Robert V. Kozinet's (1999) Types of Virtual Community Members**



Kozinet also questions whether the economic value of consumers is what marketers should be focusing on. He suggests that “[l]oyalty [could] be assessed not merely in economic terms of retention or switching, but in cultural and experiential terms of depth of experience and emotional devotion” (1999: 257). What Kozinet is suggesting is that loyalty to a product, brand or consumption activity might not necessarily always be best measured by how much consumers spend, but rather in the influence that individuals – usually insiders – exert on other members of the community (ibid). As will be explored in Chapter Six in relation to discussions of “value”, “worth” and the “gift economy”, sometimes a consumer’s importance to a business may not be rooted in their financial expenditure but in the ways in which they support a product, brand or company. As Kozinet himself suggests, marketers should treat consumers as contributors to the promotion and distribution of their products and in doing so “loyal and mutually beneficial relationships can be built online with consumers” (1999: 264). The types of film marketing activities discussed in this chapter are examples of this action, and as will be explored in Chapter Six, engagement of consumers in the distribution and marketing of independent film can provide ways of sustaining a microcosm of grassroots independent filmmaking.

Social network analysis plays an important role in supporting researchers seeking to understand how consumers behave and can be engaged with in online environments. Derek L. Hansen, Ben Shneiderman, and Marc A. Smith suggest that this relatively new field, which applies “network science to the study of human relationships and



connections”, has flourished in the twenty-first century due to the “new global culture of commonplace network connectivity” (2011: 4). Although social networks themselves predate technological developments such as the social media platforms that Hansen et al refer to, it is the inception of such technologies that have made these networks more “visible and machine readable”, thus resulting in new opportunities to map them (Hansen et al, 2011: 3). Hansen et al perceive social media network analysis to be a key innovation in research methodologies for various industries and academic disciplines. Businesses can use such methods to highlight the participants within their network who “play critical and unique roles” (2011: 4), whereas digital humanities scholars can use social media network analysis to understand the connections between people and the media/cultural artefacts that they are examining (2011: 6).

Within film studies, such methodological approaches and studies which use digital tools to understand how consumers engage with films (particularly within an online environment) have begun to emerge. One such example is Sitaram Asur and Bernardo A. Huberman’s (2010) essay, which uses data mining methods informed by social network analysis to examine whether online word-of-mouth can be used to predict the box-office success of films. This study focused on the social media platform Twitter, and the authors used Twitter Search Api application to extract tweets from the platform at regular intervals (2010: 493). In total they gathered “2.89 million tweets referring to 24 different movies released over a period of three months” from November 2009 to February 2010 (ibid). The films that formed the corpus were those released on a Friday in a wide release; limited releases that later extended into a wide release were also collated and included within the corpus (ibid). Furthermore, the tweets gathered were only from the films’ “critical period”, which the authors defined as being from when the film’s marketing campaign was in full swing to two-weeks after a film’s release (ibid). The researchers also disregarded films such as *2012* (Emmerich, 2009) because of difficulties in distinguishing whether Twitter users were tweeting about the film or other topics (2010: 493 – 494). Of the 24 films examined in the study, 15 of them were major studio releases, 7 were released by mini-majors, 1 was released by a specialty division and 1 by a low-end independent.

The main conclusion of the study was that tweet generation prior to a film’s release can be used to predict box office revenue and that the sentiment of tweets post-release of the film can further predict the continued box office earnings of a film (Asur and Huberman, 2010: 492 – 493). For example, the film that had the lowest tweet-rates

from the corpus – *Transylmania* (Hillenbrand and Hillenbrand, 2009) – subsequently had the lowest opening box-office return, whereas the highest tweet-rates were for *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) and *Twilight: The New Moon* (Weitz, 2009) and these films achieved the highest opening weekend takings (2010: 496). When subjectively analysing post-release tweets, the authors found that the more positive sentiments contained in tweets, the more likely it was that a film’s box office takings would increase (2010: 8). For example, the positive sentiment in tweets about *The Blind Side* (Hancock, 2009), increased post-release and this directly correlated with its box office performance (ibid).

A key strength of this study is that it goes some way to proving that both high-quantities of online discussion about films and positive word-of-mouth (at least in an online environment) impacts on the economic success of a film, yet there are issues with its methodological approach and scope. For example, the types of films contained within the corpus of study are all wide releases. More so, the films are mainly major studio releases or from distributors with industrial links to major studios, or that adopt similar production, distribution and exhibition practices. This means that while the authors claim to have demonstrated that “social media feeds can be effective indicators of real-world performance” (2010: 492), this has only been proven for a certain section of the US film industry and within specific distribution and exhibition contexts. More research needs to be done within this field to ascertain whether the same patterns and findings are true for non-theatrical releases, other social media platforms and other areas of the US film industry.

In his examination of the online reception of *Inland Empire*, Buckland adopts Staiger’s (1992) conceptualisation of reception studies<sup>83</sup> in order to understand the “historical context” in which the film was received in today’s online environment (2013: 224). In order to undertake this research Buckland coupled Google’s Insights for Search tools with data mining strategies specific to the blogosphere. (2013: 227). Specifically, through using Google Insights for Search, entering the film’s title and its director into the search engine, Buckland was able to see the peak times where people were searching the Internet for information on the film over a five and a half year period (2013: 229). With this information Buckland correlated peaks in the searches to offline events. For example, a peak occurred in May 2006, which upon further investigation (e.g. looking at the websites the search queries linked to) and looking at the geographical location from

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<sup>83</sup> Staiger approaches reception studies as “the history of the interactions between real readers and texts, actual spectators and films” (1992: 8).

which the searches originated (in this instance France), Buckland was able to link this peak in online searches to the fact that *Inland Empire* did not play at Cannes Film Festival (2013: 230 - 231). When the film was subsequently premiered at Venice Film Festival similar correlations could be made (Buckland, 2013: 231). What this suggests is that certain events in a film's life-cycle – such as a specific distribution or a marketing activity – are key to increasing awareness about and interest in a film. Furthermore, acknowledging Asur and Huberman's (2010) findings that increased online word-of-mouth can lead to increased box-office revenue, Buckland's work demonstrates that offline activities can be instrumental in increasing online discussion. Therefore, offline marketing strategies should not be overlooked in a media landscape that is increasingly more online focused.

Continuing his work in this field, Buckland wrote a similar essay with Elsaesser (2013) on the online reception of *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle, 2008). Like Buckland's previous work, this essay again adopts Staiger's (1992) approach to reception studies and uses Google's Insight for Search as one of its tools of choice. However, the authors here aimed to bring together the "disciplines of film studies and computer science, combining statistical methods and semantic analysis" as a means of understanding how a geographically "dispersed audience for a new film release...can be connected via the web, blogs or social networking sites" (2013: 180). In doing so Buckland and Elsaesser were bridging a perceived scholarly divide within film studies between those who focus on the interpretation of film and those who examine its context – whether historical, social, industrial, cultural etc. (2013: 182). This approach was underpinned by a four-layered methodology:

- Layer 1 – Raw data and statistics (i.e. sourced from tools such as Google Insights for Search)
- Layer 2 – Data from online consumers' responses to films (i.e. sourced from user postings on platforms such as *IMDb.com*)
- Layer 3 – Critics' responses to films (i.e. professional/external reviews sourced from sites such as *Rotten Tomatoes*)
- Layer 4 – Relevant academic research, theoretical frameworks and conceptualisations (2013: 180).

This research strategy was then coupled with Buckland's approach in his earlier essay on *Inland Empire* in order to ascertain and deconstruct the online reception of *Slumdog Millionaire* (ibid).

This multi-layered approach provides a much more complex and intricate understanding of the reception of a specific film online than a purely statistical or surface level 'big data' reading would allow for. This polygonal method gave the authors the tools and scope to be able to locate a shift or perhaps, more aptly, a divide, in the online reception of *Slumdog Millionaire*. As Buckland and Elsaesser detail, between mid-January 2008 and the film's Oscar wins in February 2008 sixty-five online articles discussed the film in relation to "poverty porn" (2013: 188). Online data searching strategies allowed the authors to pin-point the moment and article that spawned this discussion. Despite Kim Voynar writing a blog review about the film glamorising poverty in August 2008, Buckland and Elsaesser ascertained that it was not until Alice Miles adopted a similar critical response in a *Times*' article in January 2009 that a proliferation in online newspaper articles discussing the same points occurred (2013: 187). Such articles polarised the reception of the film between "those who continued to perceive it as an upbeat comedy and those who argued that it was vile and exploitative" (Buckland and Elsaesser, 2013: 188). This specific finding exemplifies how bringing together statistics (e.g. level one data) with qualitative responses of critics (e.g. level three data) can help to provide a more rounded understanding of the reception of a film than either a purely interpretative or contextual based reading could do independently. Multifaceted research methods like this one provide meaningful and intricate ways of exploring word-of-mouth in an online environment. Such approaches are essential to understanding the complex ways in which film consumers engage with, consume and spread film content online.

### **Film distribution goes social?**

Media organisations – including film distributors – are increasingly making social media platforms part of their marketing operations and, in some cases, as part of their infrastructure. Writing about the latter occurrence, Dwyer suggests that "[t]hese online platforms are either being built from the ground up, or are being acquired or co-opted, and then adapted to suit the requirements of the particular media corporation" (2010: 47). For example, News Corp. acquired MySpace with the intention to transform "a free social network into a colossal marketing machine" (Reiss, 2006 cited in Dwyer, 2010: 57). The assumption was that it would provide the conglomerate with a direct communication channel to the lucrative 17 – 24 year old demographic, which populated social media platform at the time. These aims can clearly be seen in some of the way *The*

*Hills Have Eyes* franchise, examined in Chapter Four, was marketed. During the 2000s, Fox Searchlight – another subsidiary of News Corp. – also opened up communication channels with its consumers on social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In terms of its use of Facebook, Fox Searchlight has a main page as an organisation and individual pages for its films. These pages contain posts with links to interviews, trailers, festival screenings, reviews and so on. In the same way that DVD special features have targeted “film connoisseurs” (Klinger, 2006) and “contemporary cinephiles” (Hudson and Zimmerman, 2009), these online offerings of behind-the-scenes information or exclusive content also appear to be tapping into these types of film consumers. Rather than aiming to attract the 17 – 24 demographic courted by Fox Atomic through MySpace, Fox Searchlight’s strategy perhaps ties in more effectively with ‘indie’ or ‘specialty’ cinema’s perceived target audience of more discerning viewers; those who are perceived to engage with film as art and culture, rather than entertainment (not that the two are mutually exclusive). Furthermore, the specialty division also incorporates user-generated-content as part of its branding and marketing exercise. As Chapter Four detailed, this was particularly evident in the label’s 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, where consumer produced music videos and mash-ups were central.

These examples demonstrate how social media marketing strategies have become part of mainstream marketing practices over the last decade. As Jenkins et al observe, whereas social media audience behaviours were once considered to be niche they are now very much part of the mainstream, and as such a number of pioneering media producers and marketing agencies have begun to establish “new relationships with their audiences” using social media practices (2013: 148). By incorporating user-created products into its anniversary celebrations and marketing strategy, Fox Searchlight was striving to harness elements of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), which is underpinned by the new relationships that currently exist between producers and consumers (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2007). This evolving relationship is largely being forged on social media platforms through which a dialogue between the two camps is taking place. This should not suggest that this dialogue is one of equality in terms of power, but rather highlights changes in the relationships between producers and consumers, which Chapter Six will highlight further.

Looking specifically at distribution methods, the impact of social media is also evident. As Chapter Two discussed, the distribution landscape of American independent

cinema is now vastly different to what it was just two or three decades ago. The distribution strategy for environmental documentary *Earth Days* (Stone, 2009) is indicative of these changes, and of social media's role within them. After premiering at the Wisconsin Film Festival in 2009, mid-scale independent distributor Zeitgeist distributed the film theatrically in a limited release (playing in a maximum of 4 theatres at any given time) between August and December 2009 (Box Office Mojo – *Earth Days* (2009) Weekend Summary, 2014). Following this, the film was picked up by PBS for television release in the US, but rather than follow the traditional window releasing system (e.g. screening it on the network following its theatrical run), the network decided they would premiere it on Facebook first. The distributor pitched it as a “social screening” at which people would be “able to chat in real time with other participants, and with director Robert Stone and...executive producer Mark Samels” (Facebook – *Earth Days* Social Screening Event Page, 2014). The rationale behind this decision is two-fold. First, a Facebook premiere was likely to garner a degree of interest and discussion as this was then a novel approach, raising the profile of the film and subsequent broadcast. Secondly, this strategy could potentially connect the film with an alternative demographic to the one targeted via television.

This distribution decision also relates to Tryon's (2013) notion of “platform mobility”. Essentially platform mobility is characterised by a culture in which the consumer is in control of their viewing experiences and can switch consumption across different platforms at ease (2013: 3). Consumers' experiences are thus characterised by interactivity, mobility and immediacy (ibid). PBS's distribution of *Earth Days* embraces this consumption culture by firstly opening up new platforms (e.g. social media) through which consumers can engage with film content, and secondly, establishing a more interactive consumption experience through the incorporation of a ‘live chat’ into the screening. As Tryon suggests, within the cultural and technological context of platform mobility, consumers can “remain in contact with friends and family through cell phones, text messaging and even social media” (ibid). The distribution of *Earth Days* via a Facebook screening taps into these cultural sensibilities by actively promoting an online dialogue not just between consumers and their peers, friends and family but also with key members of the film's production team, again exemplifying the evolving relationship between producers and consumers.

The sociality of and communal practices associated with film consumption (which are intrinsically linked to a film's distribution) obviously have a longer history than online

distribution practices. Theatrical distribution and cinema-going have always been seen as social activities and communal experiences; after all, it is not often one watches a film in an empty theatre. Even with film consumption in the domestic sphere it was still considered to be both social and communal, with families gathering around the TV set to watch films. Yet digital distribution practices, specifically in terms of the online distribution of film, are sometimes discussed as being singular and isolating experiences in which an individual consumer will watch film on their own, on a media player. Jonathan Rosenbaum adopts this perspective and argues that “the technology that supposedly links us all together via phones and computer is actually keeping us all further apart, and not only from each other but also, in a sense, from ourselves” (2012: 39). For Rosenbaum, certain digital distribution methods whether it be DVD or online streaming, separate consumers from each other (2012: 38 – 39). Whilst certain technological developments may be fragmentary such as the regional encryptions of DVDs and geo-blocking on websites, what Rosenbaum overlooks is the ways in which the Internet has also provided opportunities for people to connect – albeit in an online sphere, rather than physical. In this sense Tryon’s concept of “platform mobility” is more useful in understanding the contemporary relationship between media distribution and consumption.

As the social screening of *Earth Days* and other online platforms such as Foursquare (a website via which consumers can ‘check-in’ when watching a film or television programme, and thus connect with others who are doing the same) demonstrate, within the online sphere, film consumption does retain many of social and communal viewing practices often associated with traditional forms of film distribution and exhibition. Such practices, according to Tryon, have resulted in the harnessing of “the communal and cosmopolitan aspects of social media to promote, market, and even distribute movies” (2013: 126). Writing specifically about services such as Foursquare, Tryon argues that they do the opposite of what Rosenbaum suggests, and instead allow “people to identify and meet others or to broadcast their activities to friends who might also be on the service” and in essence are a form of “self-expression” (2013: 127).

This connectivity in the online environment is related to ‘second-screening’ – a practice in which consumers maybe viewing content on one screen (e.g. a television set or cinema screen), whilst simultaneously using another screen (e.g. a tablet or smartphone) to do other activities such as online shopping or connecting their viewing experience via online tools with a global consumption community. It is this latter activity

that is particularly key to media producers and distributors. While consumers are engaging with practices such as ‘check-in’ services and tweeting about a film, they are providing marketers and distributors with rich data about contemporary consumption practices. Consumers are “voluntarily submitting to forms of surveillance that make them more visible as targets for advertising and other forms of promotion” (ibid). These online consumption practices create a digital trail of who is watching what, who is talking to whom about what, how content and word spreads, and other information about consumers. In addition to being of interest to marketing professionals who can use this information to improve their strategies, such practices have made it more achievable for researchers to understand how consumers use, spread, and engage with the media content they consume. With this in mind, the remainder of this chapter will move onto the main case study and examine the online reception of Lionsgate’s Chatroulette viral marketing campaign, used to promote *The Last Exorcism*.

### **Devilish Antics on Social Media: *The Last Exorcism*’s Chatroulette Viral Marketing Campaign**

In 2010, Lionsgate incorporated Chatroulette – a platform allowing Internet users around the world to chat via text, microphone and webcam to random people – into *The Last Exorcism*’s marketing campaign. This marketing campaign is a good exemplar of the innovations that have occurred in the marketing of independent film, and US (and global) film at large. As a case study it demonstrates how marketing practices have evolved during the last decade to incorporate more online activities, particularly those linked to social media and that involve consumers in spreading those marketing messages and components. Such practices potentially engage with more niche demographics than in previous times, given that consumers nowadays are fragmented across different platforms in a way not witnessed before when it was perhaps the one television (or even radio) set that families would hub around and through which marketing messages could be emitted. Furthermore, this case study demonstrates that whilst the films distributed by mini-majors such as Lionsgate might not necessarily engage with innovative distribution methods (such as the ones discussed in following chapter) or may not be aesthetically or politically challenging, this should not suggest that they do not innovate in any way. With one of the key elements of consumer discourse surrounding independent film (as highlight in Chapter One’s case study via the notion of originality) being that independent film should be “different”, this marketing campaign (at the time)



could be considered as being different and ‘pushing’ existing practice. Therefore, despite the film and its distribution strategy not necessarily fitting in within the wider dominant discourses of independence (despite the distributor being more industrially independent than the likes of the studio specialty film divisions), this element of the marketing campaign is more in-keeping with such discourses.

The basic premise for the Chatroulette campaign was that young male users of the platform were targeted by what initially appeared to be a young woman acting flirtatiously on webcam. Once the targets were hooked, the young woman would become demonically possessed and the reaction of the young men would be recorded. The best reactions were edited into a short video and posted on the film’s dedicated YouTube channel on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2010. From there, it spread online through a range of social media and websites such as Tom Chivers’ blog on *The Telegraph* and */Film*. While the initial part of this marketing strategy only connected with a relatively small number of users of the social media platform, the novelty of the approach combined with the highlights video provided ample opportunity for it to connect with a wider online audience. For example, the highlights video currently has over 8.5 million views on YouTube<sup>84</sup>. When compared to trailers released on YouTube from films of the same year, its achievement in terms of reaching potential consumers is clear to see. The highest box office grossing film of the same year, *Toy Story 3*’s (Unkrich, 2010) trailer on the Disney Movie Trailers official YouTube channel currently has just over 5.8 million views<sup>85</sup> (Box Office Mojo – 2010 Domestic Gross, 2011). Furthermore, the film was Lionsgate’s 6<sup>th</sup> most successful that year, out of their 16 releases, at the US box office (Box Office Mojo – Lionsgate, 2012), garnering over \$41 million on a budget of \$1.8million, thus making it, financially, a success (Box Office Mojo – *The Last Exorcism* (2010), 2014). It is plausible that the online buzz generated through the viral video could have translated into, at least some, of these box office takings.

In order to dissect the online reception of this marketing campaign, Buckland and Elsaesser’s (2013) four layers of analysis schema has been applied. The table below identifies its application.

### **Table Three: Application of Buckland and Elsaesser’s (2013) Four Layer**

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<sup>84</sup> The video on the official YouTube page of *The Last Exorcism* when accessed on the 7/7/2014 had 8,759, 347 views, see <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNSaurw6E\\_Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNSaurw6E_Q)>.

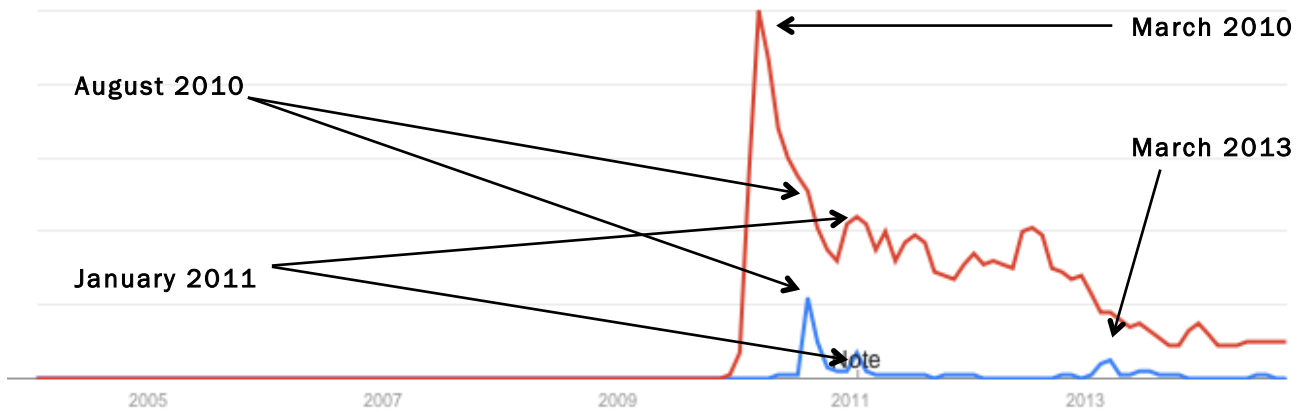
<sup>85</sup> When accessed on 7/7/2014 the trailer had 5,861, 898 views, see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcpWXaA2qeg>>.

## framework to *The Last Exorcism's* Chatroulette marketing campaign

Layer Level	Application
Raw data and statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Google Trends: Examination of online search interest</li> <li>• Issue Crawler: Network analysis</li> </ul>
Consumers' responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• YouTube: Analysis of comments</li> <li>• Twitter: Analysis of tweets</li> </ul>
Critics' responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs/Articles: Analysis of first page of Google results</li> </ul>
Theoretical frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of key conceptualisations on word-of-mouth/mouse and how media content spreads in an online environment to the results of the above layers.</li> </ul>

The starting point for Layer One was Google Trends, the contemporary counterpart of Google Insights for Search which Buckland and Elsaesser (2013) used. The first matter to note here is the limitations of this tool; mainly that it only includes online user searches made via Google and that it only analyses a percentage of such searches in order to ascertain an estimate of the number of searches conducted on the search term (Google Trends – Support, 2014). Despite this, it is still useful in giving a general overview of online interest in a topic. Upon entering the terms '*The Last Exorcism*' and 'Chatroulette' into Google Trends (with the search parameters set to the US and post-2004), it is unsurprising to see that the three largest peaks in online searches for '*The Last Exorcism*' correlate with key points in the film's life cycle. The largest peak was in August 2010 when the film was released theatrically in the US followed by a smaller peak in January 2011 when the film was released on DVD and Blu-Ray. In March 2013 when the film's sequel was released (by CBS films) into the US theatrical market another small peak in searches occurred. The first two of the peaks correlate to peaks in online users searching for 'Chatroulette'. The highest peak for online searches for 'Chatroulette' occurred in March 2010 a few months after its launch as momentum behind the new platform built. The two other highest peaks in online searches for the platform then occur in August 2010 and January 2011, and thus there is a strong case for arguing that the viral marketing campaign orchestrated by Lionsgate was a key element in motivating online searching for these two phrases. This correlation is indicated in the graph below, with the red line representing searches for 'Chatroulette' and the blue line being indicative of searches for '*The Last Exorcism*'.

**Graph One: Google searches for 'The Last Exorcism' and 'Chatroulette' (2004 - 2014)**



Issue Crawler<sup>86</sup> has also provided data indicating how the video spread online. Issue Crawler works by inputting web addresses into the software that then ‘crawls’ these sites and locates points on the web page that links users to external sites<sup>87</sup>. In essence, it shows the online ‘paths’ that users take from one site to another. In terms of this case study, the starting point was to input the first 10 web addresses identified by Google for the search term ‘The Last Exorcism Chatroulette’. The decision to use this search term was based on the likelihood that the results it gave would relate to the viral video examined in this case study, and Google was selected as it is the most used search engine (Purcell et al, 2012). More so, as very few Internet users look beyond page one of online search engine results (Chitika, 2013), only the first page’s web addresses were included. Inputting these web addresses<sup>88</sup> resulted in the network graph depicted in Appendix Item 16. The nodes (e.g. the circles) on the graph indicate a specific ‘outlink’ (e.g. an external site that the inputted web addresses linked to). The larger the node, the more it has been linked to, and the colour of the node determines the type of web address it is (e.g. .com, .co.uk, .net etc.). From this diagram we can see that the most common outlinks from the web addresses crawled are to social media platforms such as Twitter, and Facebook. There is also a number of blogs included within this network. This graph provides an understanding of how the video and campaign spread online; it demonstrates how consumers located the content via the inputted web addresses and

<sup>86</sup> Issue Crawler is a network mapping software that supports the data harvesting of online networks.

<sup>87</sup> See [http://www.govcom.org/Issuecrawler\\_instructions.htm](http://www.govcom.org/Issuecrawler_instructions.htm) for further details on how the software works.

<sup>88</sup> The 10 web addresses contained links to the viral video hosted on a number of sites and articles/blog posts on the campaign.

then helped the content spread to other platforms, most notably via social media. With many of the web addresses contained within this crawl encouraging content via links to social media platforms, it is unsurprising that the results of this crawl have created this network graph. For example, the official YouTube channel for *The Last Exorcism* was contained within the crawl and the channel allows consumers to share its video across a multitude of social media channels. More so, Chivers' blog post on the campaign was also included within the crawl and this too has social media links embedded that enable consumers to easily share the post.

While these results demonstrate how the video spread, they do not provide us with an understanding of the 'talk' that surrounded this spread. In order to ascertain an understanding of consumer responses, a qualitative assessment of consumer articulations of consumption on two key social media platforms – Twitter and YouTube – was conducted. Twitter was selected due to its integral position in terms of spreading the 'word' about the campaign as indicated by the Issue Crawler results and YouTube was used as this was the platform which Lionsgate chose to host the video. In order to ascertain Twitter's response to the campaign, a number of 'tweets' were harvested pre and post release of the video and the film's US theatrical premiere using Twitter Advanced Search. The search term 'The Last Exorcism' was inputted into the 'All of these words' bar and tweets from the dates between 10<sup>th</sup> August 2010 and 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010 were included in the collation<sup>89</sup>. The timeframe was picked to be largely in-line with Asur and Huberman's (2010) understanding of a film's "critical period". From the results only "top tweets" were used in this analysis. "Top tweets" are selected on the amount of interaction they receive from other Twitter users – the more replies, retweets and favourites that a tweet receives, the more likely it is to become a "top tweet" (Twitter Support – Top Tweets, 2014). This method of delimiting the number of tweets assessed was decided upon because it provided a manageable dataset and as the criteria for becoming a "top tweet" are based on its prominence on the platform (as judged by other users) it seemed apt to delineate in this way. This resulted in 364 tweets being harvested (Twitter *The Last Exorcism Search*, 2010), and of these 64 (18%) made reference to the Chatroulette video, ranging from commenting on it or passing on a link to the video. Taking into account just the tweets sent post-release of the video and until the theatrical release of the film on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 2010, then the percentage of tweets that make reference to the campaign increases to 35%. What this demonstrates is that a significant

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<sup>89</sup> This included retweets.

proportion on the online ‘talk’ on Twitter in reference to the film refers to the viral video.

In order to examine what this talk consisted of, a qualitative assessment of the ‘tweets’ collated within this corpus was assessed. Operating in-line with the ethical principles established in Chapter One in reference to the *IMDb* case study, the same “light disguise” approach is adopted here (Bruckman, 2002). The 64 tweets were collated into an Excel document and allocated a specific category based on the tweet’s content. In total four categories were identified: general comment, horror, funny and effective marketing. Some of the tweets fell into more than one category and 5 tweets were disregarded because they were not in English. Of the remaining tweets, 27 made reference to the effectiveness of the marketing strategy, 18 mentioned horror, 9 found the video to be humorous and 9 were simply tweets redirecting consumers to the video or a blog/article on the video and contained no subjective judgment. Following the same data collation principles as the Twitter search results, a qualitative analysis of the first 100 comments<sup>90</sup> left on the video posted on the film’s official YouTube channel resulted in a similar set of results. Again, the content of each comment was inputted into Excel and each comment was allocated one of the aforementioned categories. A new category of ‘YouTube Practice’ was also added to account for the comments that were typical of YouTube user practices such as identifying a specific time point in a video and making a comment or asking technical questions. This resulted in 45 comments in the funny category, 20 comments referencing horror, 18 comments being symptomatic of the YouTube practices, 8 comments on the effectiveness of the marketing campaign, 6 were general comments. 3 comments were removed from the analysis as they were in a foreign language; and no comment was allocated a hybridised category.

While the categories that emerged through the qualitative analysis of the tweets and comments between the two platforms were very similar, with the exception of the ‘YouTube Practice’ category that is intrinsic to that specific platform, the dominant responses or discourses evident differed slightly. Whereas the Twitter analysis is dominated by reflections on the marketing campaign itself, such as “Totally genius promotion for *The Last Exorcism* by using chatroulette” (Twitter – *The Last Exorcism* search, 2014) and “*The Last Exorcism* viral on Chatroulette is actually one of the most genius campaign executions I've seen in ages!” (ibid) this is less so on YouTube. The

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<sup>90</sup> The first 100 comments were selected as these were the video’s initial reception online and are most likely to refer to the actual viral video rather than the film that had not at this point been released. Therefore, the focus of the comments would be on the online reception of the video rather than the film. The 100 comments provided a manageable data set for a small case study such as this.

YouTube comments focus more on how funny the video was, ranging from comments that used text speak and emoticons to indicate an emotional response to the video such as “LOL” (*The Last Exorcism Chatroulette Viral Video – Comments*, 2014) and “This made my day xD” (ibid), to more complete sentences on these sentiments such as “Never laughed so much in my freakin' life” (ibid). From this brief comparison it can be deciphered that whereas the Twitter discourse is more associated with semi-critical commentary of the marketing campaign itself and is generally consultative in its register, the YouTube discourse is more about emotional response and is of a more casual and intimate register. The difference in both types of response that the consumers have posted on these platforms, and the dominant category on each, is indicative of the differences between the platforms and how they are used.

Twitter was established as an interest-based social media platform on which people could comment on subjects that they found interesting to others who also had similar interests (Barash and Golder, 2011: 143). While its usage has expanded since its inception, this sentiment is still alive on the platform; practices such as “live-tweeting” while watching a TV programme depict this. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the largest percentage of tweets comment upon the marketing campaign itself. More so, the tweets in this corpus were not just posted from individuals’ Twitter accounts, but also those belonging to organisations and so may explain why the posts adopt a more formal register than the YouTube comments. From its inception, YouTube has encouraged a social affinity between its users by allowing users to “friend” one another (Rotman and Golbeck, 2011: 227)<sup>91</sup>, which may explain the more emotional responses on the platform and the register adopted in the comments. Whilst not necessarily polar opposites, the relationships between the users of these two platforms do have their differences which are rooted in how the platforms were initially perceived – Twitter encouraging connections on an interest-based level and YouTube doing so via social affinity – and as such the types of user interactions elicited do appear to be distinctive. Writing about these distinctions in reference to political comment, Yelena Mejova and Padmini Srinivasan (2012) ascertained that Twitter comment is likely to be based on sharing of sources without much sentiment, whereas YouTube is dominated by opinionated speech. What this demonstrates in terms of analysing online discourses is that it is important not to merely understand the contributors to the discourse (as

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<sup>91</sup> The way in which users can ‘friend’ one another has changed over the years, but it is still an option on the site via adding contacts through an integrated Google account.

outlined in Chapter One) but to also comprehend the practices of the specific online platform, website or community from which the articulations of discourse are being extracted. Such an understanding allows for the researcher to explain why that type of discourse is prevalent within that specific context and how it may differ in other online environments.

The critics' responses to the campaign were ascertained by examining blog posts and articles identified on the first page of Google Results when the search term 'The Last Exorcism Chatroulette' was entered. Of the 10 results displayed, 3 links were to YouTube videos of the viral campaign, 3 to other sites hosting the video (but containing no further commentary) and 4 were to articles and blog posts. The decision to limit the analysis to the first page of Google results for this search term was based on the same factors which influenced the decision to use the same source material for the Issue Crawler analysis. The four items assessed were a short post on *Mashable* by Stan Schroeder (2010), a blog post by Tom Chivers (2010) on *The Telegraph*, an article by Dorothy Pomerantz (2010) on *Forbes* and an un-authored post on *Tomorrow Awards*. The discourse prevalent in these writings is largely reflective of the consumers' responses previously detailed in as much as the critics focused on the humour and horror values of the video, alongside discussing it as an exemplary piece of viral marketing. For example, Schroeder (2010) references how the video spooked Chatroulette users, whereas Chivers (2010) describes the video as a "hilarious piece of viral marketing" and the "[b]est piece of web-buzz creation for a film since *The Blair Witch Project*". Interestingly the interplay between horror and comedy value is something that the marketers behind the video were aiming for; "Part of our marketing message for this movie is that it's fun to be scared" (Tim Palen cited in Pomerantz, 2010). With both consumers and critics echoing this sentiment within the discourse they have created around the viral video, Lionsgate's communication of their key marketing message can be deemed a success. Furthermore, the number of times the video has been viewed on *The Last Exorcism's* YouTube channel alone and the number of times articles on it have been shared on social media platforms (Schroeder's brief post has been shared over 4900 times) are also indicative of the successfulness of this element of the film's overall marketing campaign.

Jenkins et al outline key principles for creating content that is likely to be shared; they suggest that content should be available when and where consumers want it, portable, easy to reuse in multiple ways, attract multiple audiences and be part of a constant stream of content (2013: 197 – 198). In looking at the online reception of

Lionsgate's Chatroulette viral marketing campaign, these key principles are clearly evident. First, the releasing of the video on YouTube made it available on an on-demand basis providing consumers had Internet access. Second, as the video was distributed online it meant that consumers could watch it on-the-go on a range of devices, from netbooks to smartphones. Third, the video could be reused and repurposed easily by consumers due to its digital nature and because Lionsgate did not restrict the video's downloading and sharing. Fourth, the easiness of sharing the video made it available to multiple audiences, from YouTube users to readers of Tom Chivers' blog and thus was seen by a number of online demographics. Fifth, and finally, the video was part of a stream of content that Lionsgate released in order to promote the film. In addition to the Chatroulette video, the marketers also uploaded a TV-spot length trailer on the same YouTube channel, and other paratextual entities on the Lionsgate and *The Last Exorcism's* Facebook pages. With marketing content, by its nature being designed to be shared between consumers, either by word-of-mouth, or more recently, word-of-mouse, it is not surprising that the Chatroulette campaign had the 'spreadability' factor.

With consumers playing a vital role in the spreading of the campaign's video, Kozinet's (1999) understanding of "worth" based on "loyalty" is quite significant. As the network visualisation produced using Issue Crawler identifies, the key sites that have enabled the spread of the video are social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. It is on these platforms that individuals have shared links to existing content related to the video, whether it is the video itself or links to online articles on it. Therefore, as Kozinet suggests, the value of these individual consumers is not necessarily located in the money they spend on the product (e.g. the cinema ticket) but in their ability to spread the 'word' about the product to others (1999: 257). As individuals, their economic spend on the film would generally be minimal, but as a collective their ability to motivate the consumption of the film by other consumers is quite substantial. It is this collective power of the consumer in an online environment that has contributed to many of the changes within film distribution and marketing that have occurred in recent times.

## **Conclusion**

There are a number of limitations in examining the online reception of films and their marketing campaigns. The case study analysis presented within this chapter is a case in point, as it is restricted in terms of the small nature of the data sets used to discuss the



consumers and critics' responses to the viral video, and also the limitations of the tools used to extract the data examined (e.g. the scope of Google Trends). Furthermore, as much of the data extraction and entry in this case study has been conducted manually (such as extracting the YouTube comments and tweets on *The Last Exorcism* Chatroulette video) it was extensively time-consuming and therefore makes it difficult for researchers to conduct similar studies on larger scales. Although tools such as NodeXL exist to extract data from social media networks and automatically put them into Excel spreadsheets and visualisations, these too have their restrictions. For example, NodeXL only has a certain capacity and downloads only from the latest tweets. Therefore, trying to use NodeXL to download historical tweets (e.g. as was required in this case study analysis) is impossible. Where it can be used is to download Twitter responses to a certain topic as it is happening, adopting a strategy more akin to Asur and Huberman's (2010) study which saw them download tweets, as they happened, at periodic intervals. More so, although NodeXL has the capacity to download YouTube networks, as *The Last Exorcism's* channel on YouTube does not allow other users to see its video statistics this function was blocked and therefore a manual extraction of comments on the video (via copying and pasting) was necessary for this case study.

With this in mind, it seems apt to suggest that more research and further experimentation is still required within the disciplines of film and media studies in order to ascertain how data-mining tools and strategies, and the data available on online platforms can inform academic practices and writings on media products, industries and audiences. This is particularly important for distribution studies as it can help track how content and marketing messages spread, which in turn (when coupled with more traditional approaches evident in film and media studies) will provide a multifaceted, and layered understanding of how digital delivery methods and online marketing practices work. As Buckland and Elsaesser state, work on the online reception of films should move "away from models based on the static, orderly accumulation of data, and towards models that are complex and emergent, if we are to understand the unpredictable, multiple and diverse lifecycles of contemporary cinema" (2013: 197). This chapter's case study has attempted to answer this call but in reference to a specific marketing component, as opposed to the film itself. The adoption of this approach to research is in its infancy and without doubt, in the coming years, the accessibility of the tools needed for this type of research will become more widespread and this in turn will lead to the emergence of more studies that combine raw data analysis with existing, and new

theories. Despite this, the case study analysis does provide an understanding of the intricate and multifaceted ways (albeit on a small-scale and with limited scope) of how elements of film marketing campaigns are received in an online environment.

What is interesting about this campaign is the way in which new technologies and social practices have been utilised in order to 'spread' a very traditional marketing message – that a new film is about to be released. This innovation is perhaps why the campaign has caught the attention of consumers and critics alike. It is also symptomatic of how consumers are now increasingly involved in the distributing and marketing of film content. In reference to such developments Tryon suggests that it is not just the media companies that are instrumental in initiating such changes but also the consumers themselves (2013: 180). It is therefore important to, as Tryon himself notes, not just examine the new technologies and platforms that are emerging, but the consumer-led practices that surround them (*ibid*). The multifaceted analysis of the Chatroulette marketing campaign is indicative of this duality of influence. Whereas this chapter has looked more at the ways in which film industry professionals and consumers have enabled the marketing messages of a specific film to spread in an online environment via new platforms and practices, the final chapter will examine how these practices can be utilised by filmmakers and independent companies operating on the fringes of American independent cinema when distributing (or perhaps more aptly, circulating) their films.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FROM DO-IT-YOURSELF (D.I.Y.) TO DO-IT-WITH OTHERS (D.I.W.O): AN EXAMINATION OF COLLABORATIVE DISTRIBUTION AND MARKETING PRACTICES

In 2006, Apple's iTunes store – considered by many as a revolutionary force in the arena of music distribution – began offering downloads of films and TV programmes (Cunningham and Silver, 2012: 191). In the same year similar services emerged in the US including Amazon's video-on-demand (VOD) service – Amazon Unbox - and Netflix's film streaming service – Watch Instantly (ibid). In Australia, BigPondMovies established an online distribution service, with FilmsNow being introduced in Italy (ibid). VOD service, Glowria, launched in France, with a similar service – Maxdome – opening in Germany (ibid). The Stockholm film festival went online, Indian film studio, Rajshri, began offering movies-on-demand and in China, Quacor, became the first legal film download site in the country (ibid). With an increasing array of digital distribution avenues emerging, filmmakers and distributors were inundated with new routes by which they could connect their films with consumers.

Online film distribution and the 'download-ability' of film exploits what Matt Hills has termed "a culture of on-demand access to content", through which people expect "to be able to access media content when they want to and where they want to" (2009: 113). These services have the potential to allow filmmakers and distributors to bypass traditional distribution avenues, such as the theatrical market, altogether. Following *Purple Violets'* (Burns, 2007) run on the festival circuit at Tribeca in 2007, the film's director, well-established indie filmmaker Edward Burns, signed a deal with Apple's iTunes that saw the film made available exclusively at the online store for \$14.99 for the first month of its release (Graser, 2007). As Marc Graser (2007) notes, *Purple Violets* was the first feature film to premiere exclusively on iTunes, building on their expanding film catalogue that started the previous year with Disney's *High School Musical* (Ortega, 2006). *Purple Violets'* producer, Aaron Lubin, acknowledged that the (legal) downloading of films was still in its infancy when they released the film, but because of the attention this distribution deal would receive, through the promotion of the film in Apple stores and on iTunes, he was confident that this would result in increasing the DVD sales of the film the following year (Lubin quoted in Weiler, 2008).

Despite concerns over the immaturity of the film download market, *Purple Violets* became the third most downloaded film in Autumn 2008 behind major studio releases, *Ratatouille* (Bird and Pinkava, 2007) and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (Verbinski, 2007) (ibid). This strategy demonstrates, to a certain degree, the potential that online distribution has, and how independent filmmakers can use similar methods to overcome barriers to distribution. Burns acknowledges that there would not have been enough money invested in the P&A of the film “to even make a dent in the moviegoing public’s consciousness” if the film were released theatrically (Burns quoted in Halbfinger, 2007). Yet the publicity garnered through releasing the film (initially) purely through iTunes and the novelty of this form of distribution at the time, enabled Burns to connect the film with a sizeable online audience. However, films released online in today’s climate will now no longer have this novelty factor and may not garner the marketing support that Apple gave *Purple Violets*.

While it may be perceived that filmmakers distributing their films through routes such as iTunes are accessing such services directly, the reality is quite different. As previously outlined, when distributing films through iTunes, services like TiVo or traditional VOD providers, filmmakers generally need to go through a third-party digital aggregator (Weiler, 2008). When releasing *Purple Violets* on iTunes, the filmmakers used New Video (ibid), which is one of the online store’s approved aggregators for North America territory (iTunes Movie Aggregators, 2013). These aggregators contribute to the new world of distribution (Broderick, 2008) that has been examined throughout this thesis and are one of a number of new entrants to film distribution, that alongside traditional distributors, are constructing today’s diverse distribution terrain.

Within this new, multifaceted landscape of distribution a number of filmmakers and organisations are involving consumers in the distribution of their work. In-line with Bruns’ (2007) conceptualisation of an evolving fluidity between the roles of producer and consumer, the arena of independent cinema distribution has seen significant innovations during the last decade on that front too. This final chapter will account for some of these changes and, as the title suggests, focus on the transition from do-it-yourself (D.I.Y) distribution and marketing methods to more collaborative do-it-with-others (D.I.W.O) models. Filmmakers operating in the various areas of American independent cinema are using these models to bypass the traditional gatekeepers of distribution and marketing realms. This chapter will analyse how both models are being adopted in order to connect films with core audiences, linking this discussion with contemporary scholarly debates

about the perceived movement from the distribution of media content to its circulation, the portability of media content and consumers, the thriving access-on-demand media consumption culture, the relationship between media producers and media consumers, and the alternative economies in which these activities are taking place. Following some brief contextualisation of these debates, this chapter will progress onto discussions of D.I.Y models and the movement to D.I.W.O strategies. It will conclude with some thoughts on the new industrial structure that is governing much of these activities that the Conclusion of this thesis will address more substantially.

### **Circulation and Alternative Economies**

Scholars across the fields of media, film and cultural studies are in the process of exploring what the evolving distribution environment means for industry, the aesthetics of films and consumers alike. Discussions around the complex area of contemporary distribution are still very much in development and, as discussed in-depth in Chapter Two, some scholars are still using the term 'distribution' to describe movement of content from production to exhibition, with others opting for the phrase 'circulation'. Whilst no concrete resolution to this discussion has emerged, the very fact that this discussion is occurring indicates that significant changes within the field must have taken, and are taking, place.

Returning to the distribution versus circulation debate in the context of this study, the term distribution has consciously been retained to describe the sector of the US film industry that sits between production and exhibition and to describe many of the methods and strategies being used to connect films with consumers. In this respect, the study aligns itself with Lobato's argument about the need to retain "agency" in discussions of distribution (2012: 2). Yet despite this, the adoption of the more specific term circulation (as used by Jenkins et al, 2013) is warranted in certain instances when the practices akin to Jenkins et al's understanding of term are evident. Therefore, the term circulation will, in specific instances, be used to describe a set of distribution methods and strategies that operate on a more collaborative basis between producer and consumer, mixing top-down and bottom-up forces.

With these practices a set of 'alternative economies' have emerged that are currently being tested, developed and modified largely by filmmakers and companies operating within the independent sectors. In order to allow their films to circulate freely some filmmakers, as will be discussed later in this chapter, have given their films away

for free. Such decisions are perhaps influenced by what has been referred to as the “gift economy”; an economy that has a strong presence online. This has come to the forefront of scholarly discussions by digital theorists, but as Jenkins et al. point out, its roots stem from Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* (1922) (2013: 65). Mauss’s original notion of a gift economy is helpful to digital theorists as it operates as “an analogy for informal and social based exchanges which characterise some aspects of the digital ethos” (ibid). This economy is based on the exchanging of items, services and time (e.g. the “gifts”) without the expectation of receiving a financial or other reward for them. As Gauntlett (2011) suggests, such gifts are “a way of sharing meaningful things, ideas, or wisdom, which form bridges between people and communities” (2011: 245). For Lewis Hyde, gift economy and its binary, commodity culture, are two different systems of gauging “the merits of transaction” (Hyde, 1983 paraphrased by Jenkins et al, 2013: 67). While the motivations behind the sharing of gifts are rooted in the social arena, the principle governing the distribution of commodities is more associated with economic returns (ibid). At its most basic, where a gift has “worth”, a commodity has “value” (ibid). In order to economically sustain any industry, film or otherwise, there must be a mechanism that allows for the exchange of worth into value, otherwise it can hardly be referred to as an industry. So how can this occur when films are being given away for free?

A possible benefit is that such gifts may drive or initiate future consumption and sales. Explaining this, Jenkins et al. cite how Nine Inch Nails released *The Slip* via a creative commons license (2013: 72); rather than giving the music away for free, the band’s front man, Trent Reznor, suggested that the act was instead “giving *back* to fans for what they had already given him” (Reznor paraphrased by Jenkins et al, 2013: 73). Underpinning this act, is what Jenkins et al term an “unspoken request” asking the fans to continue to support the band and consequently, while it may initially appear that the music was given away for free, perhaps this process is best interpreted as a “reciprocal exchange of social worth within an on-going relationship between producer and fans” (Jenkins et al, 2013: 83). SnagFilms – an online distributor independent film – originally offered their content for free to help them build up an audience (Tryon, 2013: 34 – 35). They targeted a “socially networked audience” that was “actively engaged with movies and the social and political cultures associated with them” and once a core audience base was established, they introduce a payment-based model (ibid).

As Chapter Two outlined, a similar logic underpinned the releasing of short film, *Hotel Chevalier* as a free download on iTunes, which went on to achieve an impressive

download rate that would dwarf many blockbuster trailer downloads on the same platform (Jess-Cooke, 2009: 107). With the film being a loose prequel to the then forthcoming *The Darjeeling Limited* (also directed by Anderson), the intention behind releasing *Hotel Chevalier* for free was to drive box office revenue for feature film. While giving away content for free online was quite common when *Hotel Chevalier* was released, what was innovative about this approach was that the content being given away for free was not produced by an unknown director or D.I.Y. team, but instead by the reputable indie filmmaker Wes Anderson. Furthermore, the distributor behind the release was Fox Searchlight, part of Fox Filmed Entertainment, which itself is part of media conglomerate, News Corp. – none of which usually give away filmed content for free.

Perhaps the key to online economies is found in not perceiving the categories of “gift” and “commodity” as being mutually exclusive, since products can move between the two camps. This movement is possible because social and cultural practices are intrinsically tied to the economic contexts in which they emerge, and vice versa (Jenkins et al, 2013: 71). As Jenkins et al. explain:

For media properties to move from the commodity culture in which they are produced to informal social contexts through which they circulate and are appraised, they must pass through a point where “value” gets transformed to “worth”, where what has a price becomes priceless, where economic investment gives way to sentimental investments. Similarly when a fan culture’s “gifts” are transformed into “user-generated content”, there are special sensitivities involved as the material gets absorbed back into commercial culture (2013: 72)

The transient nature of the “gift” and the “commodity” realms are displayed in some of the examples discussed in this chapter. Although certain filmmakers have chosen to give their films away for free, the fact that the consumers they connect with have attributed a “worth” to them has allowed these filmmakers to transform this into “value” through getting them to make donations or purchase ancillary products. This model fits with how Laurence Lessig views the Internet as being home to both “sharing” and “commercial” economies (2009: 121). For Lessig any economy is based on the “practice of exchange” (2009: 117). A commercial economy is based on the exchange of products, services and time for money whereas a sharing economy is the exchange of these for non-monetary gain (Lessig, 2009: 118). Lessig proposes that the future of online commerce will be dominated by a hybrid economy that has attributes of both sharing and commercial models (2009: 177).

The releasing of films as ‘gifts’ as part of the hybrid economy Lessig proposes is also underpinned in some ways by the concept of the “Long Tail” (Anderson, 2004, 2006). As explored in Chapter Two, the “Long Tail” concept suggests that the future of the entertainment industry is not in selling high volumes of a few mainstream products but is instead in niche markets (ibid). In order for this model to work, products must have enhanced availability, be sold at low-prices and be easily found through search mechanisms (ibid). Elements of this logic can be seen in the releasing of many of films discussed in this chapter. Yet as is evident with larger-scale films that try to adopt such approaches, such as the dual distribution of *The Princess of Nebraska* (2008, Wang) and *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2007, Wang) that will be discussed later, the key factor when operating according to the “Long Tail” principles and the aforementioned understandings of online economies, is to keep the costs low so that it may become possible to make a return on the investment. The two case studies that follow will chart how D.I.Y. practices have evolved into more collaborative ones, whilst simultaneously addressing how such methods relate to and embody the alternative economies discussed here.

### **D.I.Y distribution and marketing methods in the era of convergence**

Hunter Weeks’ *10mph* (2007, Weeks) – a documentary about two aspiring filmmakers who take a scooter across America at 10mph – makes an appropriate case study for examining D.I.Y distribution methods and strategies for a number of reasons. First, when releasing *10mph*, Weeks opted for a hybrid distribution strategy that saw the film released across various different markets including DVD, theatres and online. This approach to distribution is symptomatic of how many D.I.Y. filmmakers are choosing to release their films, and how they are using digital distribution methods to both connect their film with consumers and to create an economically sustainable practice to producing and distributing their films. Second, and linked to the first reason, as Broderick (2008) suggests, hybridised distribution is symptomatic of ‘The New World of Distribution’ in which new distribution possibilities have emerged for filmmakers seeking to avoid the traditional gatekeepers of distribution (ibid). The distribution of *10mph* therefore represents how (on a wider scale) independent filmmakers can utilise some of the ways that media convergence has impacted on distribution in order to overcome some of previously existing barriers to distribution that traditional gatekeepers of the realm had imposed and can lead, as Broderick suggests, to more control over the



distribution of their film (ibid). In essence, *10mph* is indicative in many ways of the contemporary distribution climate and of how hybridised distribution works<sup>92</sup> with certain strategies and methods adopted by Weeks being found in the distribution of others films from within this thesis's wider non-theatrical corpus (see Appendix Item 8) such as *Lumo*, *Bomb It* and *Bass Ackwards*. *10mph* is also emblematic of how online distribution practices can move fluidly between both sharing and commercial economies that Lessig (2009) identifies as existing on the Internet.

When releasing *10mph*, Weeks partnered with RepNet to distribute the film on DVD. RepNet was a sub-distributor who would sell the DVD through retailers such as Blockbuster and Amazon, whilst simultaneously allowing the filmmaker to retain the rights to other DVD distribution (Weeks, 2007). This meant that Weeks could still continue to sell the DVD wherever he chose to (ibid). RepNet provides this deal on the basis that the filmmaker is responsible for the authoring, purchasing and maintenance of the DVD stock for RepNet orders, which is considerable work but leaves the filmmaker free to sell the DVD in other places *and* direct to consumers (ibid)<sup>93</sup>. In order to capitalise on the combined direct sales and wider DVD distribution model adopted for *10mph*, Weeks and his team embarked on a marketing campaign that sought to exploit free publicity opportunities such as agreeing to interviews on local radio stations, making use of industry connections the team had developed on the festival circuit, asking industry contacts to review the DVD, and sending DVDs to magazines for them to review (ibid). Through these activities the filmmakers were able to raise the profile of their film across key geographical locations in a cost-effective way, the result of which was a significant drive in DVD sales on Netflix and Blockbuster's online stores (ibid).

With over \$20,000 made on the first weekend of DVD sales Weeks was keen to keep the momentum going (ibid). To do this he made a decision that defied the logic of the window releasing system that has dominated mainstream film distribution for decades, and toured the film theatrically following its DVD release (ibid). Yet rather than seek to profiteer out of this activity, the team saw the cross-country tour as a way of promoting the film further to drive more DVD-sales and its later release as a digital

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<sup>92</sup> It is worth noting that Bruce and Crumley previously set a precedent for this type of distribution within the low-end and D.I.Y. independent sectors with their mumblecore film *Four Eyed Monsters*. The filmmakers exploited opportunities provided by online distribution and consumption of film content alongside more traditional methods such as DVD release and theatrical tours to establish an audience for their film (see King, 2014: 81 – 85).

<sup>93</sup> The filmmakers behind *Lumo* and those behind *Bomb It*, also had direct DVD sales as part of their distribution strategy.

download (ibid). With the theatrical tour being a promotional venture for the ancillary markets, the team adopted strategies that would seek to enhance awareness of the film and capitalise on the types of word-of-mouth (and mouse) activities assessed in the previous chapter. To do this the team concentrated on smaller towns where the film market was not as crowded as in other areas such as New York or Los Angeles. As part of this strategy, the team gave away tickets to gain more press attention and larger audiences at screenings, incorporated 'meet-the-filmmaker' talks into screenings to give additional value to the events, and used targeted marketing strategies (e.g. mailouts) utilising a database of contacts they created whilst shooting the documentary (ibid).

This adoption of a targeted marketing strategy is linked to a general shift in marketing practices towards "customer selection" in which the goal is to selectively seek and keep profitable customers (Smith and Taylor, 2004: 4). With Weeks and his team maintaining a database of contacts met on their road trip, and industry contacts made during the project, they were able to target their marketing at these individuals rather than more generalised campaigns. For example, they used this database to make people aware of screenings in their area or encourage them to purchase the DVD (Weeks, 2007). Weeks discovered through surveying the theatrical tour's audiences that advertisements in newspapers were not as effective as practices such as radio interviews in terms of attracting audience members to the screenings (Weeks, 2007). Furthermore, these 'personal' or 'grassroots' contacts created an on-the-ground network of potential informal marketers who would spread positive word-of-mouth about the film. As was explored in the previous chapter, word-of-mouth (or mouse) marketing messages are generally considered to be more reliable than non-consumer driven forms of marketing (see Schiffman & Kanuk, 1995; Arndt, 1967). Drawing on work from Stacy Woods, Jenkins et al suggest that "word-of-mouth recommendations are an incredibly important source of credible information" for consumers in an environment where they are bombarded with industry-led marketing messages on a daily basis (Woods paraphrased in Jenkins et al, 2013: 76). Weeks and his team exploited this 'personal touch' strategy as part of *10mph*'s distribution, and demonstrates the importance of database-led intelligence in contemporary film marketing.

Weeks was also very aware of the growing digital download market for films, yet rather than try to get the film onto iTunes he decided to opt out of this system and distribute the film digitally by D.I.Y means (ibid). The filmmaker created a version of the film in the same file format adopted by iTunes (.m4v) and released it through the film's

website using E-Junkie<sup>94</sup>, originally pricing it at \$9.99 (ibid). Weeks then made a deal with Custom Flix (now Creative Space) and released a PC-compatible version of the film on Amazon Unboxed. Five months after the film's online release, the standard pricing of the download was removed and instead Weeks adopted a "pick-your-own-price" model (Weeks cited in Weiler, 2008). This allowed consumers to choose what to pay for the download and according to Weeks the average amount was around \$6.00 (ibid)<sup>95</sup>. The fluidity that exists on the Internet between a commercial model (represented by the set-price strategy) and the sharing model (evident in the set-your-own-price strategy – were essentially consumers could choose not to pay) is evident in the online distribution *10mph* that saw the film move between both economies.

Weeks' ability to produce a file in these formats and create the film's DVD was facilitated by "prosumer" technologies (Lister et al, 2009: 34). Such products have emerged because digitalisation has provided a more cost-effective means of producing, distributing and exhibiting media content, which meant that consumers now have more opportunities to engage with producing media content. They provide a merger (in terms of both cost and function) between high-end industry equipment and low-end home usage kit. In the case of *10mph*, Weeks used the various applications in Apple's prosumer software. For example Final Cut Pro Studio was used to produce both the DVD file and the .m4v download, DVD Studio Pro was used to author the DVD (Weeks, 2007) and Compressor was used to create the downloadable .m4v file (Weiler, 2007). These technologies, coupled with the Internet, not only provide opportunities for low-budget filmmakers such as Weeks to enter into film production but also are integral to enabling low-end or D.I.Y. independent filmmakers to overcome barriers to distribution. Through online film distribution, Weeks was able to tap into a key aspect of digital culture; that consumers "expect to be able to access media content when they want to and where they want to" (Hills: 2009: 133)<sup>96</sup>. This culture represents a significant development in consumption habits as consumers can choose where and when they watch, listen to, use or engage with content to a greater degree than in previous decades.

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<sup>94</sup> E-Junkie provided the "online storefront" which enabled the selling of the download from the film's website (Weeks, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> More high-profile films from both the independent and Hollywood sectors have also used free downloads as a way of driving sales of other products. For example, certain versions of Twentieth Century Fox's DVD release of *Love and Other Drugs* (2010, Zwick) came with a free digital download.

<sup>96</sup> The team behind *Bass Ackwards* (2010, Phillips) also exploited online distribution opportunities. While the film was still screening at Sundance, the distributor – New Video – made it available on iTunes, capitalising on the buzz around the film that festival was generating (Film Independent – *Bass Ackwards*, 2013).

In recent years online film distribution has entered the mobile arena. In 2009, Babelgum<sup>97</sup> released a mobile application for its services in the US (Andrews, 2009). In September that year, the UK-US co-production *Rage* (Potter, 2009) became the first feature film to be released on the mobile platform (Kay, 2009). The film was launched in an episodic format, with the platform showing one episode per day, over a week (ibid)<sup>98</sup>. Similarly, Reiss's *Bomb It 2* was released on Babelgum in 2010 as a series of webisodes that the director describes as a "transmedia extension of *Bomb It*" (Reiss, 2010). These platforms and services have created an environment in which industry determined schedules, such as broadcast or multiplex screening times, no longer govern consumption practices. Consumers can now time-shift their viewing of media content to times that suit them. With access to portable media devices increasing, the range of spaces in which consumers can now engage with this content has also proliferated; for example, consumers can watch films on their daily commute. The ability to consume film content across a number of devices and platforms provides consumers with more control over their viewing experiences, offering them the opportunity to consume the same content in different ways, at different times (Hills, 2009; Tryon, 2013).

Seeing the success of some of the aforementioned D.I.Y. strategies linked to online film consumption, independent film distributors outside of the low-end and D.I.Y. arenas have also sought to use similar techniques to distribute their films. In 2008 Magnolia Pictures experimented in this area of distribution by premiering (for free) Wayne Wang's *The Princess of Nebraska* (2008, Wang) in YouTube's Screening Room over a six week period (Thompson, 2008b). This was promoted both by YouTube and by a series of webisodes released on the same platform by the film's lead actress, Li Ling (ibid). The film was then released on DVD and as a purchasable download, demonstrating a disruption to the traditional hierarchical window releasing system that Jordanova discusses (2012: 1). The release of *The Princess of Nebraska* was part of a collaborative distribution strategy for the release of another Wang film – *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2007, Wang). *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* was released into the theatrical market at a similar time to *The Princess of Nebraska* being released online (Kay, 2008). The intention was that the hype surrounding the innovative release strategy of *The Princess of Nebraska* would generate more attention (and subsequently

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<sup>97</sup> Babelgum was originally an Internet television platform.

<sup>98</sup> In the same month as its premiere on the mobile platform, *Rage* was also given a US DVD release through Liberation Entertainment, a satellite premiere in the UK and release on Babelgum's online site (Kay, 2009).

ticket sales) for *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*. This aim does not seem to have been realised with the domestic gross of *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* being only \$78,806 (Box Office Mojo – *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* (2007), accessed 28/06/2013). What this demonstrates is that offering films for free does not guarantee consumption or further paid-for consumption, nor do novel, relatively ‘grassroots’ distribution practices automatically engage consumers. Therefore, although Lessig’s (2009) notion that the Internet is home to both sharing and commercial economic models, this does not mean that all products can move as easily between them as *10mph* did.

Although the models of D.I.Y. distribution discussed in relation to *10mph*, may not necessarily prove to be successful for all areas of the independent landscape, they can provide a way for certain types of independent filmmakers – namely those on the fringes of, or outside the industry – to bypass the traditional gatekeepers of distribution. As King suggests, “[i]f DV has created potential for a real democratisation of access to production...various online initiatives...promise to do something similar in the realms of distribution and sales” (2014: 117). Nowadays filmmakers do not need to secure a traditional distribution deal (e.g. selling all the rights for different markets to a single distributor) and can instead make use of different distribution avenues and strategies in order to connect their films with an audience. The aforementioned films are testament to this. Although these distribution methods may seem quite radical, such approaches still warrant the term distribution as opposed to circulation. With distribution retaining the notion of “agency” (Lobato, 2012: 2), the models discussed so far in this chapter are typical of a “top-down” process where “the movement of media content is largely – or totally – controlled by the commercial interests producing and selling it” (Jenkins et al, 2013: 1). In essence, the filmmakers and online distribution partners of these films were still largely in control of the ways in which consumers could encounter their films. This scenario is indicative of King’s notion of “indie 2.0” being an environment that has a push and pull occurring between freedom offered by online distribution opportunities and the control sought by the new gatekeepers of this realm (2014: 117). Furthermore, the aforementioned case studies do not really seek to overturn or transform the hierarchy between producer/distributor and consumer. What the following section will explore are more collaborative approaches to distribution, ones that are more fitting of the term circulation. Using Brave New Films and sister organisation – The Brave New Foundation – as its main case study, this chapter will now account for the evolution of D.I.W.O

practices and how it is these practices that can make more use of the alternative economies that are emerging in online environments that can support the connecting of films with consumers and sustain grassroots filmmakers and organisations.

### **Brave New Films, Brave New Ways: Do-it-with-others – a collaborative approach to film circulation**

Brave New Films is a US-based organisation that uses film to educate, influence and inform people about social and political issues (Brave New Films – About Us, 2012). It was founded by documentary filmmaker Robert Greenwald, who is also President of Brave New Films' sister organisation – The Brave New Foundation – which, through campaigning, champions “social justice by using a model of media, education, and grassroots volunteer involvement that inspires, empowers, motivates and teaches civic participation and makes a difference” (Brave New Foundation – About Us, 2012). The two organisations are intrinsically linked, as the films that Brave New Films produces are used in the Foundation's campaigns. These organisations have been at the forefront of using digital technologies to bypass traditional gatekeepers of film distribution by collaborating with consumers to release documentaries such as *Iraq for Sale* and *Rethink Afghanistan*, online for free, and as such these films make an appropriate choice for a case study analysis. As with *10mph*, both *Iraq for Sale* and *Rethink Afghanistan* are from the non-theatrical corpus compiled for this thesis and the collaborative distribution and marketing strategies they have used can also be found in other films within this corpus such as *Bass Ackwards* and *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008, Paley), and also other non-theatrically released independent films not contained within corpus identified. In essence these films are useful points at which a discussion about D.I.W.O distribution and marketing strategies can begin and can be understood to represent key trends emerging within the wider reaches of American independent cinema.

To raise the funds for *Iraq for Sale*, Greenwald adopted a “crowdfunding” strategy<sup>99</sup>, ultimately receiving over \$200,000 of donations through Brave New Films' website (Kirsner, 2007). This approach's success led Brave New Film and the Brave New Foundation to use their websites as ways of attracting further donations for their films and campaigns. Crowdfunding strategies are quite common and work well with these types of “campaigning and issue-led films” (Sørensen, 2012: 739). However, crowdfunding is not a recent development, nor have independent filmmakers only just

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<sup>99</sup> Crowdfunding is the process of asking people to donate money towards a cause, project or artefact.

adopted it. In the late 1950s, John Cassavetes' famously made a plea on radio show for funding to produce *Shadows* (Cassavetes, 1959). Cassavetes was on the show to promote *Edge of the City* (Ritt, 1957) that he was starring in, and shocked listeners by saying that it "was not a very good film and he could make a better film for a fraction of the cost" (Cassavetes paraphrased in Tzioumakis, 2006a: 174). According to Tzioumakis, this resulted in the filmmaker receiving letters containing donations and industry figures themselves heeding his call and donating sums to the project (2006a: 174). The difference nowadays is that people do not need to be an actor invited on to a radio show to start a crowdfunding campaign as the Internet is home to a number of websites that support this activity such as *Kickstarter*, *Indiegogo* and *Crowdfunder*.

Writing about these sites, Inge Ejbye Sørensen observes how they "enable projects to build communities and hone and gather funding pledges from individual sponsors" (2012: 736). Generally, crowdfunding donators receive some form of reward for their contribution; this could be updates on the film's progress, a DVD or an invite to a screening. The more an individual pledges, the more substantial their reward is (ibid). Although crowdfunding is not a new phenomenon, its movement to the online arena has made this funding method a more accessible (and viable<sup>100</sup>) option to filmmakers as it allows them to connect with a potentially global community of investors. These financing methods however, are not just restricted to raising investment to cover film production costs, but also help towards distribution expenditure. Nick Broomfield raised \$30,000 through crowdfunding which was used to support the distribution of his documentary *Sarah Palin: You Betcha!* (Broomfield, 2011) (Morfoot, 2011). Similarly, the team behind *Bass Ackwards* used Kickstarter to raise \$5000 towards taking the film to Sundance Film Festival (Film Independent – *Bass Ackwards*, accessed 28/06/2013), and filmmaker Zeke Zelker used test screenings to raise further funds for his film *In Search Of* (2009, Zelker) (Film London, Microwave – Collaborative Filmmaking, 2013). Zelker made an "event" of his test screenings and charged people \$25 each to attend (ibid). These strategies could go some way to transforming the relationship between producer and consumer. Through involving consumers in the financing of the films, old boundaries between the roles of the producer and consumer are blurred, largely in line with Jenkins' conceptualisation of "participatory culture" (2006: 331).

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<sup>100</sup> Fanny Armstrong crowdfunded £900,000 for *The Age of Stupid* (Armstrong, 2009) (Sørensen, 2012: 727) and in 2013, *Inocente* (Fine, 2012) became the first Kickstarter funded film to receive an academy award (Watercutter, 2013).

Yet such crowdfunding projects do not always ascribe more power, intelligence, creativity and democracy to their supporters (Jenkins et al, 2013: 248). In some instances, these activities could be a genuine attempt on behalf of the filmmaker to create a dialogue with, embrace and value the input of a group of supporters, while in others it may just be an effective way of garnering the financial backing required to produce the film (ibid). Brave New Films' collaborative approaches to film production, distribution and exhibition fall into the former category, not merely asking for financial contributions from consumers but also their 'crowd-sourced' help with other activities<sup>101</sup>. When distributing *Uncovered: The Whole Truth about the Iraq War* (Greenwald, 2004), Greenwald bypassed theatrical distribution and instead used social networking sites such as MoveOn.org and MeetUp.com to organise house parties to which a DVD copy of the film would be sent and then screened (Tryon, 2009: 98). In essence, Greenwald opted out of the traditional film distribution system and moved into the more informal networks that Lobato (2012) has termed "shadow economies". By doing this, Greenwald was able to cut down on P&A costs and, as Tryon accounts, used social media to facilitate simultaneous screenings of the documentary at "over 2,600 locations" (2009: 100). Despite the fact that the number of screens playing the film was not repeated to such a volume, at multiple times a day, over a number of weeks, this method of distribution can still be considered to be successful in terms of how it helped to promote the film and subsequent DVD sales<sup>102</sup>. Seeing the viability of this model, Greenwald adopted the similar strategies when releasing both *Iraq for Sale* and *Rethink Afghanistan*. In essence, Brave New Films successfully conflates the boundaries of 'gifts' and 'commodities'. Through engaging consumers in a cause – something they sentimentally invest in – and raising funds to produce their documentaries upfront, they are then able to give away their films for free as 'gifts'. A network of consumers' supports this 'giving away' process, via the allocation of their time and resources (e.g. setting-up and hosting screenings) rather than just financial investment. Therefore Brave New Films' documentaries moves from commodity culture to the culture of circulation via, as Jenkins et al. explain, a transition from "value" to "worth", in which "economic investment gives way to sentimental investments" (2013: 72).

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<sup>101</sup> Crowdsourcing is "outsourcing to the public, jobs typically performed by employees" (Dell, 2008: 39 – 40).

<sup>102</sup> As Mark Pesce argued, the DVD sold over 100,000 copies in its first month of release, garnering over \$1.5 million, which, on a budget of \$300,000 is a healthy return (Pesce cited in Tryon, 2009: 300).



Brave New Films' approach is also symptomatic of what Tryon has termed a "pedagogy of self-distribution" in which filmmakers "teach others how to use social media tools to promote and distribute their films" adopting tactics such as crowdfunding and crowdsourcing (2013: 140)<sup>103</sup>. On Brave New Films' website, consumers can sign up to become 'Distribution Advocates', whose role involves using social media to promote the organisation's work and hosting screenings (Brave New Films – Activist, 2011). Furthermore, the campaign site for *Rethink Afghanistan* has a facility allowing consumers to search for "grassroots screenings" in their area (Rethink Afghanistan, 2011). Filmmakers Buice and Crumley refer to this process as "collective curation" (Buice and Crumley paraphrased in Jenkins et al, 2013: 247). Exploring this concept further, Jenkins et al account for how it involves independent producers using the Internet to measure consumer interest in their films (based on the releasing of free content, teasers, etc.) and from this information they can decide which locations it would be economically viable to book a theatre to do a theatrical screening (ibid). While Brave New Films are not adopting "collective curation" to plan a DIY theatrical tour, they are using this method to assess where there are groups or audiences interested in screening their films in community centres, their own homes, churches and other similar venues, and then, based on response, are shipping DVDs to the relevant people and groups. Kerrigan perceives such practices as being a more "democratic notion of filmmaking and consumption" as the filmmakers adopting these practices are changing existing structures within the film industry and using online tools to build communities of supporters (2010: 209). Thus whilst, authors such as Iordanova are correct in asserting that "[p]eople see new films in new ways" during this era of convergence, the assumption that this radical change is "technologically-driven" is somewhat misguided (2012: 3). Although technological developments have provided certain tools for the new forms of film delivery, the role of people – or consumers – in implementing such changes must not be under-estimated; collective curation strategies or the use of "Distribution Advocates" by Brave New Films are testament to this. As Michael Gubbins argues, "[t]he means by which content is accessed is more than a technical issue; it plays a key role in shaping attitudes to and expectations of the content it delivers" (2012: 81). In essence, sociocultural strands of convergence such as the hybridisation of the roles of the producer and consumer, and people's own motivation to use technologies in certain

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<sup>103</sup> Also falling within this pedagogy, Weeks (2007) released a manual on how he self-distributed *10mph*.

ways have also been key impetuses behind the change and disruption that Iordanova (2012), amongst others, discusses.

As an extension of the “host a screening” model, Brave New Theatres has emerged from the ‘Brave New’ consortium. This venture has three functions: first, it provides a facility for independent filmmakers to link their films to the Brave New Theatres website that acts as a directory of films; second, it allows consumers to request to arrange a screening of any film on the website; and third, it allows consumers to search for “grassroots” screening of films in their area (Brave New Theatres, 2013). When using the site, filmmakers keep the rights to their films and set the conditions for the screenings, such as whether there will be a charge, whether the host venue will need to purchase a version of the film, or whether the content is entirely free (ibid). Writing about these strategies in specific reference to Brave New Films, John Haynes compares them to the alternative methods of distribution and exhibition which evolved in the 1960s and 1970s that were spearheaded by movements such as the Newsreel collective in the US and the Latin American Third Cinema movement (2007: 7). Referring to Erik Barnouw’s (1993) use of the “guerrilla” classification in non-fiction film, Haynes suggests that Brave New Films (and others adopting similar strategies) are emblematic of this term due to their focus on community screenings and adoption of viral marketing and guerrilla/stealth promotional strategies (ibid). While Haynes’ adoption of the phrase “viral” to describe the marketing strategies of Brave New Films is debatable given the term’s connotations of lack of agency on the ‘infected’ consumer’s behalf (Jenkins et al, 2013:17), his alignment of such strategies with “guerrilla” documentary filmmaking is apt. Yet these strategies are not just found within the independent sector. As Haynes outlines, these techniques are “beloved of both corporations and the movements that seek to resist them” (ibid). Paramount Pictures, for example, co-opted elements of the “collective curation” approach with their “demand it” campaign for *Paranormal Activity* (2007, Peli). What is distinctive about such techniques now compared to the 1960s and 1970s is the Internet, as it is this that provides the tools for independent filmmakers to connect with individual consumers on a potentially global basis without incurring large expenditure. Essentially, the arrangement of grassroots film screenings can now be done on a larger geographical scale with a wider audience reach than in previous decades.

Brave New Films made use of the Internet’s ability to connect with consumers in a diverse range of locations by releasing the feature-length *Rethink Afghanistan* online in small segments via video hosting site YouTube. The videos were also embedded into the

campaign’s website and promoted on the organisation’s other social media outlets such as their Facebook page. As outlined in the previous chapter, Jenkins et al suggest that there are five key principles in creating content that is likely to spread (2013: 197 – 198). These guiding principles are in some ways akin to Hills’ (2009) writings on on-demand access to content and the increased mobility of computer-mediated-communications in contemporary digital culture, and Tryon’s notion (2013) of “platform mobility”. As the table beneath depicts, Jenkins et al’s ‘spreadability’ principles are evident in how *Rethink Afghanistan* was released.

**Table Three: Brave New Films’ Sharing of Content**

<b>Jenkins et al (2013) Sharing Framework</b>	<b>Sharing of <i>Rethink Afghanistan</i></b>
Available when and where people want it	The film was available 24 hours a day, every day, online <i>and</i> consumers could set-up their own screenings.
Portable	Online distribution via YouTube and download-ability of the film meant it could be watched anywhere on a range of media devices.
Easy to reuse in multiple ways	Its digital nature means it can be remixed and reused in different contexts, and by releasing the film in small sections, consumers can choose to watch them individually or together.
Attract multiple audiences	The film is aimed at documentary consumers, political activists, people who have directly or indirectly been affected by the Afghanistan conflict.
Be part of a stream of content	It is part of a regular flow of media content produced by Brave New Films.

The marketing of Brave New Films’ films and campaigns also call on the active contributions of their supporters. As part of the *Rethink Afghanistan* campaign, they asked their supporters to push for the campaign’s Facebook page to have “more “fans”

than the Department of Defence's own community site" (Jenkins et al, 2013: 169). According to Jenkins et al, this type of activity encourages the supporters "to think of themselves as part of a network public that could spread the word to its dispersed members" (ibid). Drawing on Jessica Clark's (2009) work on "public media 2.0", the authors suggest that "public media" counteracts the paternalistic tendencies of public service media and instead creates an environment in which mobilised publics have "greater control over the circulation of media", which in turn could enhance the investment they give content (Jenkins et al, 2013: 170).

Epitomising this mobilisation of "publics", in 2007 high-profile documentary filmmaker Michael Moore participated in a joint venture with Brave New Films when releasing *Slacker Uprising* (2007, Moore) into the US and Canadian markets. The film was released for free online prior to the 2008 presidential election and "received more than 3 million hits in one month" placing it at number one on both the Amazon On Demand and iTunes charts (Anon, 2008). Moore has stated that this release strategy was firstly a thank you to his supporters to mark 20 years since his first film *Roger and Me* (1989, Moore) and secondly to encourage more young people to vote in the forthcoming presidential election (*Slacker Uprising* – About, 2013). Moore encouraged people to "share the movie", "set up screenings" and "show it on [their] campuses", for free (ibid). In a similar fashion to how Brave New Films involves consumers in acts of "curation, conversation and circulation" in order to spread "progressive messages" as part of a political process (Jenkins et al, 2013: 171), the strategy and discourse surrounding the release of *Slacker Uprising* too adopts the "public media" concept to attract greater investment from consumers in a particular cause. Furthermore, the films produced by Brave New Films and *Slacker Uprising* are examples of "civic media", which as Jenkins et al describe, are "content intended to increase civic engagement or to motivate participation in the political process" (2013: 219). Generally, the producers of civic media do not have the means to reach wide audiences from traditional channels and thus tend to use online platforms to "spread the word" (ibid). This statement is perhaps more relevant to Brave New Films than it is to Moore due to the documentary filmmaker's general ability to secure wide theatrical releases for his films. It is perhaps Brave New Films' significant roots in civic media production, distribution and exhibition that motivated Moore to partner with them when releasing *Slacker Uprising*.

Offering a different semantic phrasing of Brave New Films' work, Tryon (2011) suggests that they are "transmedia documentaries", which he defines as being "a set of

nonfiction films that use the participatory culture of the web to enhance the possibilities for both a vibrant public sphere cultivated around important political issues and an activist culture invested in social and political change”. These films are also linked together by their use of alternative releasing methods such as “streaming video, digital downloads, or social media tools that facilitate public or semi-public screenings” (ibid). The rise of “transmedia documentary” is symptomatic of the impact that media convergence has had on the film (and media) industries. The releasing methods and strategies of such films are undoubtedly facilitated by manifestations of technological convergence (e.g. the digitalisation of media content). Furthermore, the new industrial climate that has emerged within this contemporary era of media convergence has also facilitated their development with new companies and platforms such as YouTube and Facebook making it possible for filmmakers to adopt such releasing methods and strategies. At a sociocultural level, the “participatory culture of the web” is indicative of people’s desire to share, connect and discuss with other people and can also be seen as a driving force behind such films (ibid).

The groups and individuals engaged in the production, circulation and exhibition of such “transmedia” documentaries and other non-fiction films, have traits akin to fan communities (Jenkins et al, 2013: 171). It is the involvement and engagement of these communities that are key to sustaining filmmakers such as Greenwald, who give their films away for free, or as “gifts”. Another, often cited example of a filmmaker giving away their film as a “gift”, is Nina Paley who originally released *Sita Sings the Blues* under the Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike license, before changing this to a Creative Commons Public Domain license in 2011 (*Sita Sings the Blue*, 2013). This gave permission for people to “copy, share, publish, archive, show, sell, broadcast, or remix” the film in any way they wished (ibid). Whilst filmmakers such as Greenwald, and Paley seem to have given away their films as “gifts”, they have been successful in translating their “worth” into value. For example, Greenwald uses his films to raise donations for current and future campaigns, whereas Paley’s film has since had theatrical and DVD distribution in various territories and she sells merchandise related to the film on an online shop (Nina Paley Blog – Middlemen search, 2013). More so, *Sita Sings the Blues*’ website also asks for donations – a variation on the pick-your-own-price model adopted by Weeks when releasing *10mph* as a digital download. Both Paley and Greenwald are representative of what Jenkins et al refer to as “a new generation of independent filmmakers experimenting with new media technologies and practice to reach desired

and desiring audience that might otherwise have little or no exposure to their films” (2013: 247). Comparing the activities of these filmmakers to Hollywood, the authors suggest that the difference between them is that whilst Hollywood takes its fans for granted, these filmmakers recognise the value of aligning themselves with fans, groups and communities either on political or aesthetic grounds (ibid). More so, the way these filmmakers involve consumers in the process of producing, releasing and exhibiting media content blurs the once quite distinct line between producer and consumer. The current fluidity of the producer-consumer dichotomy has resulted in the hybridisation of the roles of the producer and user, and thus creates a media environment that is distinctly different to previous decades’ incarnations (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

These types of do-it-with-others strategies adopted by organisations such as Brave New Films are more akin to the notion of circulation, than the do-it-yourself approaches undertaken by filmmakers like Weeks, discussed earlier in the chapter. Referring back to Jenkins et al’s conceptualisation of circulation as being a mixture of top-down and bottom up approaches (2013: 1), we can see how the releasing strategies behind films like *Iraq for Sale* and *Rethink Afghanistan* are exemplars of this approach in action. Whilst there is an element of top-down activity (e.g. control over who they sent DVD copies of films to for grassroots screenings), there is also a significant degree of bottom-up activity from consumers who choose to run screenings or who participate in the online consumption and/or circulation of the films. Mark Pesce has termed this “networked digital distribution”, a process where content travels through digital networks and platforms, and bypasses some traditional gatekeepers of distribution (Pesce cited in Tryon, 2009: 94). Through the use of digital tools such as social media, there seems to be new (and potentially sustainable) models of low-end and D.I.Y. independent film practice emerging. These models seem to be operating within an alternative economic structure where films move fluidly between having value and worth, akin perhaps to Lessig’s notion of a hybrid economy (2009: 177).

While such filmmakers and organisations seem to be resisting and perhaps disrupting the oligopolistic structure that has long since governed the US film industry, by subverting the windowing releasing system, bypassing theatrical distribution and (most importantly) being less reliant on more commercial distributors to connect their films with consumers, it is also important to question how ‘independent’ this new and emerging

industrial environment is and will become. As the conclusion of this thesis will now address, a new industrial structure has emerged, where the powerful stakeholders are still, to a certain degree, the major studios and their respective parent conglomerates, but also a rapidly growing new breed of conglomerates, the roots of which are in the online world. A large number of the D.I.Y. and D.I.W.O strategies outlined within this chapter are reliant on platforms and services provided by these new conglomerates, and as such the 'independence' of the independent films being released through these channels is questionable.

## CONCLUSION THE CHANGING FACE OF FILM DISTRIBUTION

The starting point for this thesis was the topological query, “where is cinema?”, and it seems both poetic and useful to conclude this thesis by returning to this question. As this thesis has demonstrated, cinema is not locatable to one specific place, site of exhibition or indeed, ‘reality’. As Chapter Two details, the array of distribution practices evident in US film has resulted in an environment where film is accessible in theatres, in the domestic sphere and out on the street, and there are no signs that any of these sites of consumption will diminish in the coming years. More so, as Chapter Three detailed, the current marketing strategies being adopted to promote films are utilising digital tools to merge the films’ story worlds with our own reality. These are just two of the ways in which developments within the distribution sector have facilitated the enhanced nomadic nature of contemporary cinema.

Throughout its chapters, this thesis has reconceptualised the distribution landscape of US film, with a specific focus on the terrain that can be collectively referred to as American independent cinema. As the Introduction and Chapter One explored, it is impossible to discuss American independent cinema as a definitive entity or its components – whether that be companies, filmmakers, or the films themselves – as existing in a state of homogeneity. Rather, it is more appropriate to perceive American independent cinema as having many incarnations. The various ways in which American independent cinema presents itself have varying degrees of independence in terms of their industrial position, aesthetics and form, and ideological stance (King, 2005: 2). Therefore, as Kleinhans suggests, independence is a relative concept that is usually determined by its position in relationship to the “dominant Hollywood system” (1998: 308). As this thesis has reiterated, certain parts of American independent cinema are closer to Hollywood than others, and it is this breadth of scope and overall diversity that make American independent cinema a useful case study for investigating changes in film distribution and marketing.

A major change which has occurred within film distribution is the emergence of new organisations, and, as such, a new industrial structure has formed. Writing about this, Tryon asserts that conglomerates such as “Google, Amazon, and Walmart joined a number of new media companies, including Apple, Facebook, and Netflix, in reshaping the networks through which media content is delivered” (Tryon, 2013: 31). As Chapter Two explored, Amazon has a number of different interests in the film industry with most



of them linked to the distribution sector. For example, its acquisition of LOVEFiLM, subsequently absorbed into the Amazon Instant Video service, has provided the online retailer with a large interest in the DVD, digital download and streaming services markets. Furthermore, Amazon's ownership of Custom Flix and Withoutabox extends the conglomerate's investment in non-theatrical distribution in terms of the video-on-demand and festival distribution arenas. This brief outline of Amazon's subsidiaries is indicative of a wider pattern in the media and entertainment industries that has seen new conglomerates emerge from the online arena to become substantial players in film distribution, and the wider media terrain.

The new media landscape which has emerged is characterised by contradictions and complexities. On the one hand, as Tryon notes, the opportunities offered by digital delivery systems and social media platforms for D.I.Y. filmmakers have been celebrated because they have enabled these filmmakers to overcome the distribution barrier that has invariably been a problem (2013: 139). Yet, on the other hand, in order to overcome such barriers, these D.I.Y. filmmakers are using and depending "upon resources owned by major media conglomerates" (ibid). Chapter Six's case study aptly represents this situation. While Brave New Films are using new delivery methods and tools to bypass both theatrical distribution and the traditional gatekeepers of this realm, they are also largely using the platforms and assets of the types of organisations they are seeking to circumvent. For example, they use YouTube as a way of hosting and circulating video content. Yet whilst it may appear to be a democratising platform, both its industrial position as a subsidiary of Google (a conglomerate that exerts both power and influence within the new industrial landscape outlined here) and its privileging activities undermine this.

There is a tension, according to Wasko and Mary Erikson between the platform's "democratising goals and economic potential" (2009: 372). While YouTube brands itself on the notion of "Broadcast Yourself™" that appears to offer democratisation of media distribution and exhibition, it also uses "various techniques adopted...to enhance advertising and privilege some videos over others" (Wasko and Erikson, 2009: 383). Therefore, assumptions that the platform is democratising are ill-judged given that a two-tiered system is in operation in which those with finances available to pay for promotion and position can and those without it have to rely on the quality of their content and its ability to connect with consumers in order to increase its visibility. Furthermore, with content being put on the site for free and YouTube using this to sell advertising, there are

also issues pertaining to the “commodification of [free] labour” (ibid). This commodification and co-option of independent film (or to be more technically accurate, video) by YouTube and Google bears distinct resemblance to how – as Chapter One detailed – in the 1980s and subsequent decades, the major studios and their parent conglomerates encroached upon parts of American independent cinema after seeing its revenue potential. What this thesis is proposing is that a type of re-conglomeration of independent film has occurred (to a certain degree) that is akin in some ways to the co-option that occurred during the 1980s and onwards. From the 1980s, the major studios and their conglomerate owners realised that money could be made from within the independent sector and they began to acquire independent production companies or create companies within their own structures that mimicked the practices of such companies. Nowadays, a new group of conglomerates have begun to realise how certain components of American independent cinema can be monetised in a slightly different way. Rather than acquiring or creating independent film companies (as occurred in the 1980s), this new group of conglomerates (to which Google and Amazon belong to) are instead acquiring or creating the platforms, services and online tools that certain independent filmmakers and companies use to overcome the barriers to film distribution. In essence, rather than procuring the production of independent film, they are instead acquiring and creating the distribution tools needed to connect independent film with consumers. In this model, the new conglomerates are using their control and ownership of the distribution tools to monetise independent film content not only from taking their percentage from the sales of the films (e.g. downloads etc.) but also through online advertising revenue.

This should not suggest that the traditional gatekeepers of distribution or the more established ‘powers’ in the US film industry – namely the major studios and their parent conglomerates – are becoming extinct, but rather indicate that a new industrial structure has emerged which they are a part of, alongside the aforementioned new conglomerates. The traditional ‘powers’ increasingly work with these new conglomerates in order to retain their control on the film and entertainment industries, and will probably continue to do so successfully. Furthermore, by investing in such partnerships and collaborations, these media conglomerates, as Tryon acknowledges, are able to use digital delivery platforms to exert “greater control over the distribution, circulation and exhibition of their movies” (2013: 50). Therefore, the innovations that have occurred within the distribution sectors that this thesis has explored should not just be seen as

being symptomatic of American independent cinema, which itself, in certain parts, operates extremely closely to (if not within) the reach of these major studios and conglomerates. Rather, what this thesis has demonstrated is that the parts of American independent cinema furthest away from these conglomerates, such as mid-scale independents, low-end independents and D.I.Y. filmmakers, are more likely to engage in innovative practices in these fields first. When such practices are proven to be effective or have potential to be monetised, they generally become adopted or co-opted by the parts of American independent cinema that are closest to Hollywood, the major studios and their parent conglomerates themselves, and the new conglomerates such as Google and Amazon.

### **Key findings of the thesis**

This remapping of the distribution landscape of American independent cinema goes some way to answering the central question underpinning this thesis; how has media convergence impacted on the distribution and marketing of American independent cinema, and how can this impact be understood in terms of wider technological, industrial and sociocultural contexts relevant to the current media landscape? Yet this key finding – the identification of new industrial structures – is just one face of a multifaceted picture of the relationship between media convergence and the distribution sector of American independent cinema. As this thesis has demonstrated, the impact of media convergence on the distribution and marketing of American independent cinema goes beyond changes to industrial structures, despite such changes being of fundamental significance and being interconnected with developments in terms of the technology used to distribute films and the sociocultural consumption practices which have emerged from new forms of digital delivery.

At a technological level, media convergence has facilitated the emergence of a number of new methods and strategies in terms of the digital distribution of films. For example, within the timeframe examined, the online distribution of feature films became more realisable and prevalent. As the Introduction outlined, a number of key platforms emerged or expanded their services in 2006 to facilitate the distribution of film content online, such as Apple's iTunes beginning to offer films and TV shows to rent or buy, and Amazon launching a video-on-demand service (Cunningham and Silver, 2012: 191). While these developments have changed the industrial arrangement of the distribution sector of American independent cinema to a certain degree, the fact that there was

substantial investment in online distribution also indicates that technological developments were in place to support it; most notably the capacity of Internet connections to offer film streaming and downloading on a widespread basis.

The purely digital delivery of film which online distribution offers – either by streaming or downloading – has not yet resulted in the disappearance of semi-digital distribution forms. Although as Chapter Two suggested, the DVD market in the US was in decline during the years examined in this thesis, and despite this decline continuing, DVD is still “the most valuable window after theatrical” (Ault, 2013). This indicates that the distribution environment discussed in this thesis and what has continued post-2010, is characterised by the adoption of both digital and semi-digital delivery systems. A ‘digital-by-default’ mode of delivery has not occurred yet – although in time it may. As Tryon identifies, the range of digital and semi-digital methods of film distribution has led to a situation where it is likely “that no single delivery will dominate the home and mobile markets, leading to complications in how movies are distributed and exhibited (2013: 31). In the future, purely digital forms of film distribution could come to dominate the home and mobile markets. Where in the 1970s there were two rival forms of home video players released – Betamax and VHS – which both used different technologies, and, after a battle between the two, the JVC format (VHS) became the “de facto world standard for video” (JVC History, 2010), a similar confrontation between the different forms of purely digital delivery forms is unlikely to occur. This is because the hardware (e.g. laptops, smartphones, tablets, etc.) used by consumers to consume digital films supports all forms of digital distribution. In essence, what is important in today’s scenario is the Internet, which is not beholden to a specific device.

The online distribution and digital delivery of films are key underpinnings of what Hills (2009) has referred to as an “on-demand” culture of “on-the-go” access to media content and what Tryon describes as the increasing control that consumers have over their viewing experience in this period of enhanced “platform mobility” (2013: 4). To summarise, both of these studies suggest that consumers are expectant of having access to media content when and where they want it. In recent years, consumers have become more expectant of being able to control and individualise their consumption experience. These sociocultural consumption trends and expectations have also impacted on the distribution methods of American independent cinema, and US film at large. As Chapter Two examined, this has manifested itself in the reduction of the distribution windows between the different markets. For example, the time between a

film playing in cinemas to when it is released into the home entertainment market is continually being reduced. Day-and-date releasing strategies collapsed these 'windows' altogether. As exemplified by 2929 Entertainment's releasing of *Bubble*, the film was simultaneously distributed in cinemas, on DVD and online. The institutional structure of 2929 Entertainment with its subsidiaries in all of these film markets, coupled with the digitalisation of film and the Internet as a distribution system, enabled the smooth, synchronised releasing of the film across different markets at the same time.

The Internet has also supported many of the changes evident in the marketing arena. In a similar manner to the way in which current film distribution methods include traditional, relatively recent and then emergent forms of film delivery, the marketing arena uses a similar array of approaches to build awareness about a film. As Chapter Three discussed, a range of offline and online strategies are being adopted. In terms of those influenced by media convergence, the current scenario is that it is commonplace for films to have an online presence such as a website and/or being prevalent on social media platforms. Furthermore, specific marketing strategies are aimed directly at linking consumers' real worlds to the online world and do so by working across offline forms of marketing alongside newer online techniques. An exemplar of this is the QR code, as discussed in Chapter Three in reference to *For Colored Girls*. A QR code can be placed on printed promotional materials and when scanned by a smartphone with Internet connection, transports the consumer to online content.

Marketers' adoption of social media platforms as a means of promoting their films has become increasingly complex and in some ways, sophisticated. They have pursued social media as a way of connecting to specific groups of consumers, such as Fox Atomic's usage of MySpace in the marketing of their films to attract the lucrative 17 – 24 year old demographic. Furthermore, it has been fundamental in taking a "customer selection" (Smith and Taylor, 2004: 4) approach to film marketing. This is because social media depends on people liking, following, friending etc. (depending on the platform in question) a film's or distributor's Facebook page, Twitter account, YouTube Channel and so on. In doing this, consumers have already declared an interest in the product and so are likely to be more profitable contacts. In essence, the marketing materials delivered via social media are more targeted than the general distribution of a film poster.

Film marketers have also begun to utilise specific consumer-led practices evident on different social media platforms to market their films. The *Hot Tub Time Machine*'s campaign's use of the hashtag and social media trend #ThrowbackThursday – which

sees social media users display online photographs from their past – exemplifies this. As the premise of the film is about a hot tub that facilitates time travel to the past, the film’s marketers utilised this social media practice extensively in campaign activities across the film’s Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. Furthermore, as Chapter Five examined, Lionsgate utilised social media platform, Chatroulette, and its users’ practices as a means of marketing *The Last Exorcism*. The distributor recorded the reactions of Chatroulette users in a conversation they were having with a female who then became ‘demonically possessed’. A video of their reactions was posted on YouTube and from there it spread extensively online. As the results of this case study demonstrated, this spread was largely due to consumers sharing the video and blogs/articles written about it, across different social media platforms.

Such communication and consumption practices are indicative of the concept of Web 2.0, which is simultaneously a consequence of the technological and sociocultural strands of convergence. As Chaffey argues, it is important that people do not discuss Web 2.0 as “a new web standard” but rather as “an evolution of technologies and communications approaches which have grown in importance since 2004 – 2005” (Chaffey, 2008: 504). Building on this in his discussion on the phrase “indie 2.0”, King suggests that Web 2.0 “signifies a shift of orientation that enables and encourages collective participation and collaboration in the production of online materials” (2014: 4). As Chapter Four detailed, this has impacted on the marketing of independent film as consumer creations have been used by distributors such as Fox Atomic and Fox Searchlight as a means of promoting both themselves and their films online. This relates to Bruns’ notion of “produsage” as a term that accounts for the “new hybrid form of simultaneous production and usage” (2007: 117). In essence, those creating content are also those consuming it. Thus, as Jenkins and Green state, media convergence has brought about a “reconceptualisation of the audience – how it is comprised, how it is courted, what it wants, and how to generate value from it” (2009: 215).

However, as this thesis has demonstrated, this collaboration is not just restricted to the production of content, but also includes the ways in which film content is distributed – or perhaps, more aptly, circulated. As Chapter Six explored in reference to filmmakers such as Greenwald and Paley, consumers are currently contributing to the multitude of ways in which film flows through different mediums and platforms, and connects with consumers. Greenwald used a social media platform to orchestrate simultaneous offline screening events when releasing *Uncovered: The Whole Truth about*

*the Iraq War* (Greenwald, 2004) and has since utilised, to varying degrees, opportunities offered by both social media and the Internet in general to release other, more recent films, such as *Iraq For Sale* (Greenwald, 2006) and *Rethink Afghanistan* (Greenwald, 2009). In all of these strategies, consumers have collaborated with the releasing of the films, from hosting screenings through to becoming 'Distribution Advocates'. Such strategies are indicative of the new sociocultural-driven consumption trends, where consumers are more actively engaged in the act of consumption than perhaps they were previously. Yet such practices are also underpinned by technological convergence in terms of digitalisation and the Internet, as without these many of these consumer practices would be hindered or impossible.

What this demonstrates is the interconnectedness of the three key expressions – technological, industrial and sociocultural – of media convergence. From this, it can be stated that media convergence at industrial, technological and sociocultural levels has diversified the ways in which films are connected with consumers, and as such has brought about changes in both consumption practices and the articulations of this consumption. Furthermore, innovations within film distribution and marketing have resulted in changes to film form itself, which traditional approaches to understanding film struggle to account for. Fundamentally, this thesis has used the distribution sector as an entry point to understanding the ways in which media convergence has impacted on American independent cinema at technological, industrial and sociocultural levels. With distribution as the connecting industry sector between the realms of production and exhibition, changes within it intrinsically have an impact on these two adjoining arenas. This ripple effect means that by analysing changes within distribution, developments in production and exhibition can also be both discussed and understood. For example, as Chapter Two suggested, digital distribution impacts on the exhibition sites where films are consumed and, as Chapter Four discussed, online tools used to market films are changing the ways in which film stories are presented – *The Outbreak* (Lund, 2008) and *Bank Run* (Lund, 2010) are exemplars of this. Therefore, while this thesis is essentially a distribution study, its findings and discussions are relevant to wider conversations about American independent cinema, contemporary film form and aesthetics, and emergent consumption environments and practices within this contemporary era of convergence.

The underpinning methodological architecture of this thesis has been fundamental to the discovery of these findings. Firstly, by approaching media convergence as a tripartite concept, it has enabled this thesis to perceive changes within

American independent cinema - from the novel methods of distribution identified in Chapter Two, to the new story telling practices discussed in Chapter Four - not as unconnected practices but rather interconnected innovations. Essentially, by understanding that media convergence does not have one singular form evident in just technological developments, industrial structures or sociocultural practices, but instead has a number of incarnations that span all three of these arenas, this thesis has been able to intricately assess the scope that it has had not only on distribution methods and companies, but also in terms of how such changes have manifested themselves in film form itself *and* its consumption.

Secondly, the adoption and situation of this thesis within the wider media industry studies agenda further supports this multifaceted approach to assessing the area. As McDonald has argued, a media industry studies approach is not a clear-cut or definitive research methodology, but rather a hybridised way of examining media industries that uses “ideas, concepts, perspectives and arguments from many...directions” (2013: 146). Whilst this ‘cherry-picking’ of methodological approaches is one of the reasons why the media industry studies agenda has attracted a degree of criticism, it is precisely this perceived weakness which has made it useful for this thesis. The fluidity and scope of the media industry studies agenda to draw upon a range of approaches to provide, as Holt and Perren state, an “integrated analysis of media texts, audiences, histories, and culture” (2009: 2), has given this thesis the tools and frameworks needed to fully understand media convergence’s impact on the distribution sector of American independent cinema from a number of angles, and to construct an argument based on how they interconnect.

The macro and micro level analysis framework adopted by this thesis, broadly aligned to Schatz’s (2009) assessment of the US film industry, has provided a structure for the findings, and also a way in which specific nuances within the distribution of American independent cinema can be related to wider contexts and trends. For example, this overarching framework allowed the collaborative circulation techniques adopted by Brave New Films, to be, on one level, discussed as individualised practices orchestrated by that specific organisation and, on another level, provided scope for them to be related to wider concepts such as the new industrial formation outlined in the introduction to this conclusion, Tryon’s (2013) notion of “platform mobility” and Jenkins, Ford and Green’s (2013) conceptualisation of spreadable media.



The adoption of this framework has worked hand-in-hand with how the film corpus for this thesis was constructed in a largely systematic way. The film corpus has been used to support the assertion of general trends that this thesis has identified and has also allowed for the methodical handpicking of key films to use as case studies. The proposed framework of the Venn of Independence provided a schema through which the full array of distributors operating in American independent cinema can be positioned primarily in accordance with their industrial position, but also with consideration of other more subjective and nuanced elements, such as the types of films they release. This framework was initially inspired by Taves' (1995) B film taxonomy that he used to categorise different types of B films. However, rather than proposing a rigid structure for segmenting American independent cinema in terms of its distributors, The Venn of Independence is more fluid in its approach and more industrially-minded than Taves' earlier work. The boundaries between the four main categories are malleable, allowing for companies to belong to more than one category and also change their position within the Venn at any given time in light of new contextual considerations. Given that the current media landscape in this contemporary era of media convergence is one that is characterised by mergers, acquisitions, fluidity, movement and on-going change, this approach to loosely structuring the distribution sector of American independent cinema seems apt. The Venn of Independence provides a way by which this impact of media convergence, primarily at an industrial level, can be (albeit loosely) structured. This has resulted in a comprehensive assessment of the terrain, rather than an examination of the distribution of a specific incarnation of American independent cinema. Furthermore, while this thesis has used this framework primarily as a way to position individual distributors operating in the theatrical market, its use could easily be extended as a tool to help categorise production companies too.

### **The limitations of the thesis and future directions for research**

With these methodological frameworks and research agendas in mind, this thesis situates itself both within the recent trend in film studies scholarship for distribution studies, and within the ever-growing canon of literature on American independent cinema. In terms of its position within the distribution studies landscape, it aligns itself with the work of Tryon (2013), Lobato (2009, 2012), Jenkins et al (2013) and to a lesser degree, Iordanova and Cunningham (2012), and within the realms of American independent cinema supports and builds on work by Tzioumakis (2006, 2012a, 2012b

and 2013) and Perren (2004, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). In this light, this study has achieved a broad re-mapping of the distribution sector of American independent cinema, in terms of the distributors involved in the sector, the methods and strategies that they are adopting, and the types of films they released within the contemporary era of media convergence. This is coupled with nuanced readings and analyses of key trends in operation in reference to specific case studies, and also how the innovations witnessed within distribution impact and relate to changes evident in production and exhibition. In essence, this thesis has (to a certain degree) picked up the baton from more-or-less where Tzioumakis's (2006) monograph finished, and through the lens of distribution has explored what American independent cinema is in a new set of industrial frameworks<sup>104</sup>. In adopting a distribution studies rationale it has enabled the thesis to touch upon key issues within both production and exhibition. Whilst this wide-ranging scope and assessment of the terrain is one of the thesis's main strengths and asserts its original contribution to knowledge in the field, it also (in certain instances) highlights its limitations.

Amongst these limitations is the fact that the thesis has only really addressed the distribution of American independent cinema within its domestic context. Principally, this thesis has focused on the distribution of films in the US and although some of the distribution strategies examined opened the films up to global audiences – such as Weeks' self-distribution of *10mph* (2007) via a digital download – other strategies, such as the free online release of *Slacker Uprising* (Moore, 2007), were only applicable to its US distribution strategy. Furthermore, while focusing on the distribution sector has provided this thesis with the scope to examine how changes from within this field have impacted on the production and exhibition of American independent cinema due to its interconnecting position between the two, some of these findings are unfortunately not fully explored. For example, while this thesis, as a distribution study, has identified the impact that innovations within the sector have had on the types and forms of stories being told in American independent cinema, it has not had the opportunity to articulate or investigate in much depth how existing frameworks within narratology studies can be adapted or remixed across different media in order to textually analyse these new story forms in line with industrial considerations. The broadness of this thesis in terms of how much of the American independent cinema landscape it encapsulates within its

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<sup>104</sup> The film corpus tables contained within the Appendices of this thesis, particularly in terms of the theatrical market, are a key contribution to research in American independent cinema as it provides an overview of the types of films being released and the distributors who release them.

discussion, while being necessary as no other study has done this for the terrain in its current form, has meant that areas such as the aforementioned ones have not been able to be examined within the thesis's timeframe and word count. Therefore, future research directions within this field could examine how the global distribution of American independent cinema functions, and could take some of the findings from this thesis and dissect them further in accordance with new frameworks or theoretical concepts.

Finally, this thesis's remit ends in 2010, when essentially mobile or fully portable distribution of films was in its infancy; for example, the first iPad was only launched early in 2010. While the post-2010 distribution landscape has not yet fundamentally departed from the one examined within this thesis, since 2010 technology has developed, new services have emerged, institutional mergers have taken place, and consumption practices that were once relatively niche have become more widely adopted. In light of this, this thesis's findings are rapidly becoming historical in their nature and, as such, research on how film content moves between production and consumption needs to be continually conducted in order to keep up with the rate of progress. This thesis's original contributions to knowledge in the fields of both American independent cinema and distribution studies have gone some way to providing a blueprint for how future research into the aforementioned areas could be conducted. Specifically, this thesis has: reconceptualised what independent film has become within this contemporary period of media convergence; reframed discussions on film distribution to be more inclusive and less elitist in their scope; provided new methodological approaches to understanding the wider workings of film distribution and marketing; and explored how changes in the distribution sector have impacted on the fields of film production and exhibition. With these key features, *From the Cinema Screen to the Smartphone* has provided part of the schema needed to continue the pursuit of locating American independent cinema.

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*Be Kind Rewind*. 2008. Dir. Michel Gondry. New Line Cinema. US. 102 minutes.

*Beware the Gonzo*. 2010. Dir. Bryan Goluboff. Tribeca Film. 94 minutes.

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*Juno*. 2007. Jason Reitman. Fox Searchlight. US. 96 minutes.

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*Mega Shark Versus Mecha Shark*. 2010. Dir. Emile Edwin Smith. The Asylum. US. 85 minutes.

*Memento*. 2001. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Newmarket. US. 113 minutes.

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*Mulholland Drive*. 2001. Dir. David Lynch. Universal Pictures. France/US. 147 minutes.

*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. 2002. Dir. Joel Zwick. IFC Films. US. 95 minutes.

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*Psycho*. 1960. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures. US. 109 minutes.

*Pulp Fiction*. 1994. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Miramax Films. US. 154 minutes.

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## APPENDIX



## Appendix Item 1: Full Theatrical Corpus

Film Title	Distributor	Year of Release
9	Focus Features	2009
1408	MGM	2007
45365	7th Art Releasing	2010
(500) Days of Summer	Fox Searchlight	2009
\$5 a day	Image Entertainment	2008
10 Questions for the Dalai Lama	Monterey Media	2007
10th & Wolf	ThinkFilm	2006
11th Hour	Warner Independent	2007
127 Hours	Fox Searchlight	2010
13 Months of Sunshine	Abeselom Productions Distribution	2008
16 to Life	Waterdog Films	2010
2012: Time for Change	Mangusta Productions	2010
28 Weeks Later	Fox Atomic	2007
3:10 to Yuma	Lionsgate	2007
51 Birch Street	Truly Indie	2006
95 Miles to Go	ThinkFilm	2006
A Dog Lover's Symphony	A Dog Lover's Symphony	2006
A Four Letter Word	Embrem Entertainment	2008
A Good Day to be Black and Sexy	Magnolia Pictures	2008
A Good Woman	Lionsgate	2006
A Guide to Recognising Your Saints	First Look	2006
A Jihad for Love	First Run Features	2008
A Lawyer Walks into a Bar	Indican Pictures	2008
A Man Named Pearl	Shadow/Railroad Square	2007
A Mighty Heart	Paramount Vantage	2007
A Mother's Courage: Talking Back to Autism	First Run Features	2010
A Plumm Summer	Freestyle Releasing	2008

A Prairie Home Companion	Picturehouse	2006
A Scanner Darkly	Warner Independent	2006
A Serious Man	Focus Features	2009
A Thousand Years of Good Prayers	Magnolia Pictures	2008
A Wink and a Smile	First Run Features	2009
Abduction: The Megumi Yokota Story	Safari Media, LCC/Sagewood Cinema Ventures	2006
Abominable	Freestyle Releasing	2006
Absolute Wilson	New Yorker	2006
Adam	Fox Searchlight	2009
Adam & Steve	TLA Releasing	2006
Adventureland	Miramax	2009
Adventures of Power	Variance Films	2009
After the Cup: Sons of Sakhnin United	Variance Films	2010
After.Life	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
Afterschool	IFC Films	2009
Ahead of Time	Vitagraph Films	2010
Akeelah and the Bee	Lionsgate	2006
Al Franken: God Spoke	Balcony Releasing	2006
Alex Rider: Operation Stormbreaker	Weinstein Co.	2006
Alice Neel	SeeThink Films	2007
Alien Trespass	Roadside Attractions	2009
All Good Things	Magnolia Pictures	2010
All Roads Lead Home	Waldo West Productions	2008
Allah Made Me Funny	Truly Indie	2008
Alone with Her	IFC Films	2007
Alpha and Omega	Lionsgate	2010
Amazing Grace	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Ambrose Bierce: Civil War Stories	Hannover House Films	2006
Amelia	Fox Searchlight	2009
America Betrayed	First Run Features	2009

America the Beautiful	First Independent Pictures	2008
America: Freedom to Fascism	Cinema Libre	2006
American Cannibal	Lifesize Entertainment	2007
American Casino	Argot Pictures	2009
American Fusion	Wildcat Releasing	2007
American Grindhouse	Lorber Films	2010
American Gun	IFC Films	2006
American Hardcore	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
American Radical: The Trials of Norman Finkelstein	Typecast Releasing	2010
American Swing	Magnolia Pictures	2009
American Teen	Paramount Vantage	2008
American Violet	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2009
American Zombie	Cinema Libre	2008
Americanising Shelley	Rocky Mountain Pictures	2007
Amexicano	Maya Releasing	2008
Amreeka	National Geographic Entertainment	2009
Amu	Emerging Pictures	2007
An American Affair	Screen Media Films	2009
An American Carol	Vivendi Entertainment	2008
An American Haunting	Freestyle Releasing	2006
An Education	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
An Inconvenient Truth	Paramount Vantage	2006
An Unreasonable Man	IFC Films	2007
Anamorph	IFC Films	2008
And Then Came Love	Fox Meadow	2007
Another Gay Movie	TLA Releasing	2006
Another Gay Sequel	TLA Releasing	2008
April's Shower	Regent Releasing	2006
Aqua Teen Hunger Force: The Movie	First Look	2007
Arctic Tale	Paramount Vantage	2007

Arnolds Park	Lantern Lane Entertainment	2007
Arranged	Film Movement	2007
Art & Copy	7th Art Releasing	2009
Art School Confidential	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
Arthur and the Invisibles	Weinstein Co.	2006
As Good as Dead	Millenium Films/First Look International	2010
Astro Boy	Summit Entertainment	2009
August	First Look	2008
August Evening	Maya Releasing	2008
Aurora Borealis	Regent Releasing	2006
Autumn	Truly Indie	2006
Awake	Weinstein Co.	2007
Away From Her	Lionsgate	2007
Away We Go	Focus Features	2009
Babel	Paramount Vantage	2006
Backseat	Truly Indie	2008
Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans	First Look	2009
Baghead	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Ballast	Alluvial Film Company	2008
Balls of Fury	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2007
Bamako	New Yorker	2007
Bandslam	Summit Entertainment	2009
Bangkok Dangerous	Lionsgate	2008
Bart Got a Room	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
Battle for Terra	Roadside Attractions	2009
Battle in Seattle	ThinkFilm/Redwood Palms Pictures	2008
Be Kind Rewind	New Line	2008
BearCity	TLA Releasing	2010
Beautiful Losers	Sidetrack Films/Arthouse Films	2008
Been Rich All My Life	First Run Features	2006

Beer for My Horses	Roadside Attractions	2008
Beer League	Freestyle Releasing	2006
Beeswax	Cinema Guild	2009
Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo	Argot Pictures	2010
Before the Devil Knows You're Dead	ThinkFilm	2007
Before the Rains	Roadside Attractions	2008
Behind the Burly Q	First Run Features	2010
Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2007
Believe	Kaleidescope Films	2007
Believe in Me	IFC Films	2007
Bella	Roadside Attractions	2007
Beowulf & Grendel	Truly Indie	2006
Best Worst Movie	Area23a	2010
Between Love & Goodbye	Embrem Entertainment	2009
Beyond a Reasonable Doubt	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
Beyond Belief	Film Sales Company	2008
Beyond Honor	International Film Circuit	2006
Bhutto	First Run Features	2010
Big Fan	First Independent Pictures	2009
Big Gay Musical	Unknown/Self Distributed	2009
Bigger, Stronger, Faster*	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Billy the Kid	Elephant Eye Films	2007
Billy: The Early Years of Billy Graham	Rocky Mountain Pictures	2008
Bitch Slap	Freestyle Releasing	2010
Black Christmas	MGM	2006
Black Dynamite	Apparition	2009
Black Gold	California Newsreel	2006
Black Irish	Anywhere Road Entertainment	2007
Black Snake Moan	Paramount Vantage	2007
Black Swan	Fox Searchlight	2010
Black White + GrayÉ	Arthouse Films	2007

Blackballed: The Bobby Dukes Story	The 7th Floor	2006
Blessed is the Match: The Life and Death and Hannah Senesh	Balcony Releasing	2009
Blind Date	Variance Films	2009
Blind Dating	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Blonde Ambition	First Look	2007
Blonde and Blonder	Empire Pictures	2008
Blood and Chocolate	MGM	2007
Blood and Tears	ThinkFilm	2007
Blood Done Sign My Name	Paladin	2010
Bloodline	Cinema Libre	2008
BloodRayne	Romar Entertainment	2006
Blossoms of Fire	New Yorker	2006
Blue Gap Boy'z	Better World Distribution	2008
Blue Valentine	Weinstein Co.	2010
Bob Funk	Cinema Epoch	2009
Bobby	MGM	2006
Body of War	Film Sales Company	2008
Bonneville	SenArt/Scranton-Lacy	2008
Boogie Man: The Lee Atwater Story	InterPositive Media	2008
Bottle Shock	Freestyle Releasing	2008
Boxing Gym	Zipporah	2010
Boy Culture	TLA Releasing	2007
BoyBand	Artigo Ajemian Films	2010
Boynton Beach Club	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside/Wingate	2006
Brand Upon the Brain!	Vitagraph Films	2007
Bratz	Lionsgate	2007
Breaking and Entering	Weinstein Co.	2006
Breaking Upwards	IFC Films	2010
Breath Made Visible	Argot Pictures	2010
Brick	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2006
Brief Interviews with Hideous Men	IFC Films	2009

Broken Bridges	Paramount Vantage	2006
Broken English	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Broken Hill	Audience Alliance	2009
Brooklyn Rules	City Lights Pictures	2007
Brooklyn's Finest	Overture Films	2010
Brothers	Lionsgate	2009
Brutal Beauty: Tales of the Rose City Roller	Cinema Purgatorio	2010
Bubble	Magnolia Pictures	2006
Budrus	Balcony Releasing	2010
Bug	Lionsgate	2007
Bullrider	Emerging Pictures	2006
Buried	Lionsgate	2010
Burma VJ	Oscilloscope Pictures	2009
Burn After Reading	Focus Features	2008
Bustin' Down the Door	Screen Media Films	2008
Ca\$h	Roadside Attractions	2010
Call of the Wild 3D	Vivendi Entertainment	2009
Call+Response	Fair Trade Pictures	2008
Canvas	Screen Media Films	2007
Capitalism: A Love Story	Overture Films	2009
Captivity	After Dark Films	2007
Carbon Nation	Clay Way Media	2010
Carmen and Geoffrey	First Run Features	2009
Carriers	Paramount Vantage	2009
Case 39	Paramount Vantage	2010
Casino Jack and the United States of Money	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Cassandra's Dream	Weinstein Co.	2008
Casting About	Kino International	2007
Catch a Fire	Focus Features	2006
Cavite	Truly Indie	2006
Chain Letter	New Films Cinema	2010

Chalk	Arts Alliance America	2007
Chapter 27	Vitagraph Films	2008
Charlie Bartlett	MGM	2008
Che, Part 1: The Argentine	IFC Films	2008
Che, Part 2	IFC Films	2008
Chelsea on the Rocks	Aliquot Films	2009
Cherry	Abramorama Films	2010
Chicago 10	Roadside Attractions	2008
Children of Invention	The Kids are Alright Productions/Variance Films	2010
China Blue	Argot Pictures	2007
Chloe	Sony Pictures Classics	2010
Choke	Fox Searchlight	2008
Choking Man	International Film Circuit	2007
Choose Connor	Strand Releasing	2008
Chop Shop	Koch Lorber Films	2008
Chris and Don: A Love Story	Zeitgeist	2008
Christmas at Maxwell's	Laufer Films	2006
Christmas in Wonderland	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
Ciao	Regent Releasing	2008
Circle	Indican Pictures	2010
City Island	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
Civic Duty	Freestyle Releasing	2007
Clear Blue Tuesday	CAVU Releasing	2010
Clerks 2	MGM	2006
Client 9: The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Climates	Zeitgeist	2006
Closing Escrow	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Coastlines	IFC Films	2006
Cocaine Cowboys	Magnolia Pictures	2006
Code Name: The Cleaner	New Line	2007



Coffee Date	Slowhand Cinema	2006
Cold Souls	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2009
Collapse	Vitagraph Films	2009
College	MGM	2008
Colma: The Musical	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2007
Color of the Cross	Rocky Mountain Pictures	2006
Come Early Morning	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Commune	First Run Features	2006
Confessions of a Ex-Doofux-Itchy Footed Mutha	Innocent Bystander	2009
Constantine's Sword	First Run Features	2008
Control	Weinstein Co.	2007
Convention	IFC Films	2010
Conversations with God	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Conversations with Other Women	Fabrication Films	2006
Conviction	Fox Searchlight	2010
Cool It	Roadside Attractions	2010
Copying Beethoven	MGM	2006
Coraline	Focus Features	2009
Countdown to Zero	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Cover	Reel Diva Consultants/American Cinema International	2008
Cowboy and Lucky	Unknown/Self Distributed	2009
Cowboy Del Amor	Emerging Pictures	2006
Crank	Lionsgate	2006
Crank 2: High Voltage	Lionsgate	2009
Crazy Heart	Fox Searchlight	2009
Crazy Like a Fox	Sky Island	2006
Crazy Love	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Crazy on the Outside	Freestyle Releasing	2010
Crisps and Bloods: Made in America	Argot Pictures	2009
Cropsey	Cinema Purgatorio	2010

Crossing Over	Weinstein Co.	2009
Crude	First Run Features	2009
Cruel World	Indican Pictures	2006
CSA: The Confederate Stats of America	IFC Films	2006
CSNY: DŽj^ Vu	Roadside Attractions	2008
Cthulhu	Regent Releasing	2008
Cyrus	Fox Searchlight	2010
Daddy Longlegs	IFC Films	2010
Daddy's Home/Father of Invention	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
Daddy's Little Girl	Lionsgate	2007
Dalai Lama Renaissance	Wakan Films	2008
Dancing Across Borders	First Run Features	2010
Dare	Image Entertainment	2009
Dare Not Walk Alone	Indican Pictures	2008
Darfur Now	Warner Independent	2007
Dark Matter	First Independent Pictures	2008
Dark Streets	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2008
Dave Chappelle's Block Party	Focus Features	2006
David & Layla	Newroz Films	2007
Day Night Day Night	IFC Films	2007
Day Zero	First Look	2008
Daybreakers	Lionsgate	2010
Dead Awake	New Films Cinema	2010
Deadfall Trail	Nocturnal Features	2010
Deal	MGM	2008
Dear Zachary: a letter to a son about his father	Oscilloscope Pictures	2008
Death at a Funeral	MGM	2007
Death in Love	Screen Media Films	2009
Death of a Ghost Hunter	Nocturnal Features	2009
Dedication	Weinstein Co.	2007
Defamation	First Run Features	2009

Defendor	Darius Films	2010
Defiance	Paramount Vantage	2008
Delgo	Freestyle Releasing	2008
Delirious	Peace Arch Releasing	2007
Deliver Us From Evil	Lionsgate	2006
Delta Farce	Lionsgate	2007
Descent	City Lights Pictures	2007
Desert Bayou	Cinema Libre	2007
Devil Girl	Nocturnal Features	2009
Devil's Miner	First Run Features	2006
Dhamma Brothers, The	Balcony Releasing	2008
Diary of the Dead	Weinstein Co.	2008
Diggers	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Diminished Capacity	IFC Films	2008
Dirty	Silver Nitrate Releasing	2006
Dirty Laundry	Codeblack Entertainment	2007
Disappearances	Truly Indie	2007
Disaster Movie	Lionsgate	2008
Disfigured	Cinema Libre	2008
Divine Intervention	Bullz Eye	2007
DOA: Dead or Alive	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2007
Dog Problem, The	ThinkFilm	2007
Don't Come Knocking	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
Doogal	Weinstein Co.	2006
Dostana	Yash Raj Films	2008
Doubt	Miramax	2008
Douchebag	Paladin	2010
Down in the Valley	ThinkFilm	2006
Downloading Nancy	Strand Releasing	2009
Dr. Bronner's Magic Soapbox	Balcony Releasing	2007
Drawing Restraint 9	IFC Films	2006

Dream Boy	Regent Releasing	2010
Dreamland	Truly Indie	2006
Drool	Strand Releasing	2010
Earth Days	Zeitgeist	2009
Eastern Promises	Focus Features	2007
Eating Out 2: Sloppy Seconds	Ariztical Entertainment	2006
Echelon Conspiracy	After Dark Films	2009
Edgar Allan Poe's House of Usher	Regent Releasing	2008
Edmond	First Independent Pictures	2006
El Cantante	Picturehouse	2007
El Inmigrante	Indican Pictures	2007
Elegy	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2008
Eleven Minutes	Regent Releasing	2009
Elite Squad	IFC Films	2008
Emma Smith: My Story	Candlelight Media	2008
Employee of the Month	Lionsgate	2006
Encounters at the End of the World	ThinkFilm	2008
End of the Spear	M Power Releasing/Rocky Mountain Pictures	2006
Enlighten Up!	Balcony Releasing	2008
Even Money	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
Evening	Focus Features	2007
Ever Again	Rocky Mountain Pictures/Moriah Films	2006
Every Little Step	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
Everybody Wants To Be Italian	Roadside Attractions	2008
Everybody's Fine	Miramax	2009
Everything's Cool: A Toxic Comedy About Global Warming	City Lights Pictures	2007
Exit Through the Gift Shop	Producer's Distribution Agency	2010
Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed	Rocky Mountain Pictures	2008
Expired	MCR Releasing	2008
Explicit Ills	Peace Arch Releasing	2009

Extract	Miramax	2009
Extraordinary Measures	CBS Films	2010
Eye of the Dolphin	Monterey Media	2007
F*ck	ThinkFilm	2006
Facing the Giants	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Factory Girl	MGM	2006
Factotum	IFC Films	2006
Fair Game	Summit Entertainment	2010
Fall of Hyperion	Regent Releasing	2008
Fall to Grace	Truly Indie	2006
Fallen Idol: The Yuri Gagarin Conspiracy	Indican Pictures	2009
Falling Awake	IFC Films	2010
Falling for Grace	Slowhand Cinema	2007
Fame	MGM	2009
Familiar Strangers	Cavalier Films	2008
Fanboys	Weinstein Co.	2009
FAQs	TLA Releasing	2006
Fast Food Nation	Fox Searchlight	2006
Faster	CBS Films	2010
Fat Girls	Regent Releasing	2007
Favela Rising	Mochary Films/ThinkFilm	2006
Fay Grim	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Feast	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2006
Feast of Love	MGM	2007
Feed the Fish	Strand Releasing	2010
Fierce People	After Dark Films	2007
Fighting for Life	Truly Indie	2008
Fighting Words	Indican Pictures	2007
Film Geek	First Run Features	2006
Final Destination 3	New Line	2006
Find Me Guilty	Freestyle Releasing	2006

Finding Amanda	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Finishing the Game	IFC Films	2007
Fired!	International Film Circuit	2007
Fireproof	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2008
First Snow	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
Fix	Mangusta Productions	2009
Flakes	IFC Films	2007
Flannel Pajamas	Gigantic Pictures	2006
FLOW: For Love of Water	Oscilloscope Pictures	2008
Fly Me To the Moon	Summit Entertainment	2008
Flyboys	MGM	2006
Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman	Artistic License	2007
Food, Inc.	Magnolia Pictures	2009
For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf	Lionsgate	2010
For the Bible Tells Me So	First Run Features	2007
For Your Consideration	Warner Independent	2006
Forever Strong	Crane Movie Company	2008
Forgiving Dr. Mengele	First Run Features	2006
Formosa Betrayed	Screen Media Films	2010
Four Lane Highway	Sky Island	2007
Four Seasons Lodge	First Run Features	2009
Fracture	New Line	2007
Freakonomics	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Free Style	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2009
Friends with Money	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
From Mexico with Love	Roadside Attractions	2009
Frontrunners	Oscilloscope Pictures	2008
Frozen	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
Frozen River	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Fuel	Blue Water Entertainment	2008
Full Battle Rattle	Mile End Films/The Film Sales	2008

	Company	
Full Grown Men	Emerging Pictures	2008
Full of It	New Line	2007
Funny Games	Warner Independent	2008
Funny Money	ThinkFilm	2007
Fur	Picturehouse	2006
Furry Vengeance	Summit Entertainment	2010
G.I. Jesus	Wildcat Releasing	2007
Game 6	Kindred Media Group	2006
Gamer	Lionsgate	2009
Garden Party	Roadside Attractions	2008
Gardens of the Night	City Lights Pictures	2008
GasLand	GasLand Productions	2010
Gentlemen Broncos	Fox Searchlight	2009
George A. Romero's Survival of the Dead	Magnolia Pictures	2010
George Bush Goes to Heaven	HB Filmworks	2006
Get Low	Sony Pictures Classics	2010
GhettoPhysics	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
Ghosts of CitŽ Soleil	ThinkFilm	2007
Gigantic	First Independent Pictures	2009
Girls Rock!	Shadow	2008
Glass: A Portrait of Philip in Twelve Parts	Koch Lorber Films	2008
Glastonbury	ThinkFilm	2007
God and Gays: Bridging the Gap	Indican Pictures	2008
God Grew Tired of Us: The Story of Lost Boys of Sudan	Newmarket Films	2007
God of Vampires	Nocturnal Features	2010
Gogol Bordello Non-Stop	Lorber Films	2009
Going Under	Argot Pictures	2006
Gone, Baby, Gone	Miramax	2007
Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Good Dick	Abramorama Films	2008

Good Hair	Roadside Attractions	2009
Good Luck Chuck	Lionsgate	2007
Goodbye Solo	Roadside Attractions	2009
Gotta Dance	Mitropoulos Films	2009
Goya's Ghosts	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Grace	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
Grace Is Gone	Weinstein Co.	2007
Gracie	Picturehouse	2007
Gray Matters	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
Great Directors	Paladin	2010
Great World of Sound	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Greenberg	Focus Features	2010
Greetings from the Shore	Freestyle Releasing	2008
Grindhouse	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2007
Gringo Wedding	Gringo Wedding LLC	2007
Grip: A Criminal's Story	JeTi Films	2006
Guest of Cindy Sherman	Trela	2009
Guiliani Time	Cinema Libre	2006
Gunnin' for that #1 Spot	Oscilloscope Pictures	2008
Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench	Variance Films	2010
Hair High	Bill Plympton	2006
Hairspray	New Line	2007
Half Nelson	ThinkFilm	2006
Halloween	MGM/Dimension Films	2007
Halloween 2	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2009
Hamlet 2	Focus Features	2008
Handsome Harry	Paladin	2010
Hannah Takes the Stairs	IFC Films	2007
Happily N'Ever After	Lionsgate	2007
Happiness Runs	Strand Releasing	2010
Happy Tears	Roadside Attractions	2010



Happy Valley	Stone Five Studios/Halestone Distribution	2008
Hard Candy	Lionsgate	2006
Harimaya Bridge, The	Eleven Arts	2010
Harold	City Lights Pictures	2008
Harsh Times	MGM	2006
Harvard Beats Yale 29 - 29	Kino International	2008
Hatchet	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2007
Hatchet II	Vitagraph Films	2010
Hats Off	Abramorama Films	2008
Haven	Yari Film Group Releasing	2006
He Was a Quiet Man	Mitropoulos Films	2007
Heavy Metal in Baghdad	Arts Alliance America	2008
Helena From the Wedding	Film Movement	2010
Hell Ride	Weinstein Co.	2008
Henry Poole Is Here	Overture Films	2008
Herb & Dorothy	Arthouse Films	2009
Herbie Hancock: Possibilities	Magnolia Pictures	2006
Here and There	Cinema Purgatorio	2010
His Dark Materials: The Golden Compass	New Line	2007
Holding Trevor	Regent Releasing	2008
Holly	Priority Films	2007
Hollywood Dreams	Rainbow Releasing	2007
Hollywoodland	Focus Features	2006
Holy Rollers	First Independent Pictures	2010
Home	Monterey Media	2009
Home of the Brave	MGM	2007
Honeydripper	Emerging Pictures	2007
Hoot	New Line	2006
Hostel	Lionsgate	2006
Hostel: Part Two	Lionsgate	2007

Hot Fuzz	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2007
Hot Tub Time Machine	MGM	2010
Hounddog	Empire Pictures	2008
House	Roadside Attractions	2008
House of the Devil, The	Magnolia Pictures/Magnet Releasing	2009
How She Move	Paramount Vantage	2008
How to be a Serial Killer	Monterey Media	2009
How to Eat Fried Worms	New Line	2006
How to Rob a Bank	IFC Films	2008
Howl	Oscilloscope Pictures	2010
Humble Pie	Monterey Media	2009
Humboldt Country	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Humpday	Magnolia Pictures	2009
I Am a Sex Addict	IFC Films	2006
I Can Do Bad All By Myself	Lionsgate	2009
I Hate Valentine's Day	IFC Films	2009
I Have Never Forgotten You: The Life & Legacy of Simon Wiesenthal	Moriah Films	2007
I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell	Freestyle Releasing	2009
I Like Killing Flies	ThinkFilm	2006
I Love You, Phillip Morris	Roadside Attractions	2010
I Sell the Dead	IFC Films	2009
I Spit on Your Grave	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
I Think I Love My Wife	Fox Searchlight	2007
I Trust You To Kill Me	First Independent Pictures	2006
I Want Someone To Eat Cheese With	IFC Films	2007
I Want Your Money	Freestyle Releasing	2010
I.O.U.S.A	Roadside Attractions	2008
I'll Believe You	Stand Up Films	2007
I'm Not There	Weinstein Co.	2007
I'm Reed Fish	Screen Media Films	2007

I'm Still Here	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Ice Blues: A Donald Strachey Mystery	Regent Releasing	2008
If I Didn't Care	Artistic License	2007
If I Die Tonight	Indican Pictures	2009
Igor	MGM	2008
Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust	Shadow	2007
Imagine Me & You	Fox Searchlight	2006
Imprint	Linn Productions	2007
In a Dream	International Film Circuit	2009
In Between Days	Kino International	2007
In Bruges	Focus Features	2008
In Her Line of Fire	Regent Releasing	2006
In My Sleep	Morning Star Pictures	2010
In Search of a Midnight Kiss	IFC Films	2008
In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale	Freestyle Releasing	2008
In the Shadow of the Moon	ThinkFilm	2007
Infamous	Warner Independent	2006
Inglourious Basterds	Weinstein Co.	2009
Inhale	IFC Films	2010
Inland Empire	518 Media	2006
Inside Job	Sony Pictures Classics	2010
Insidious	Romantic Troubadour Entertainment	2008
Interview	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
Into Temptation	First Look	2009
Into the Wild	Paramount Vantage	2007
Ira and Abby	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Iraq in Fragments	Typecast Releasing	2006
Irene in Time	Rainbow Releasing	2009
Islam: What the West Needs to Know	Quixotic Media	2006
Islander	Slowhand Cinema	2007

Issues	Bullz Eye	2006
It Might Get Loud	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
It's a bash!	Midway Pictures	2010
It's Kind of a Funny Story	Focus Features	2010
Itty Bitty Titty Committee	Pocket Releasing	2007
Jack and Jill vs. the World	Lantern Lane Entertainment	2008
Jack Goes Boating	Overture Films	2010
Jack Smith and the Destruction of Atlantis	Film Forum	2007
Jailbait	Kindred Media Group	2006
Jake's Corner	Emerging Pictures	2008
Janky Promoters	Third Rail	2009
Jazz in the Diamond District	Truly Indie	2009
Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child	Arthouse Films	2010
Jesus Camp	Magnolia Pictures	2006
Jet Li's Fearless	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2006
Jim	Area23a	2010
Jimmy Carter: Man From Plains	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work	IFC Films	2010
Jonestown: The Life and Death of People's Temple	7th Art Releasing	2006
Joshua	Fox Searchlight	2007
Journey from the Fall	ImaginAsian	2007
Julia	Magnolia Pictures	2009
Juno	Fox Searchlight	2007
Just Say Love	Regent Releasing	2010
Just Wright	Fox Searchlight	2010
Kabluey	Regent Releasing	2008
Kalamazoo?	Reel Source	2006
Keeping Up with the Steins	Miramax	2006
Kick-Ass	Lionsgate	2010
Kickin It Old Skool	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
Kill Your Idols	Palm Pictures	2006

Killer Diller	Freestyle Releasing	2006
Killers	Lionsgate	2010
Killing Kasztner	GR Films	2009
Killshot	Weinstein Co.	2009
Kimjongilia	Lorber Films	2010
King Corn	Balcony Releasing	2007
King Leopold's Ghost	Aloha Releasing	2006
Kings of Pastry	First Run Features	2010
Kings of the Evening	Indican Pictures	2010
Kinky Boots	Miramax	2006
Kiss Me Deadly	Regent Releasing	2008
Kiss the Bride	Regent Releasing	2008
Kit Kittredge: An American Girl	Picturehouse	2008
Knowing	Summit Entertainment	2009
Kurt Cobain: About a Son	Balcony Releasing	2007
La Danse	Zipporah	2009
La Mission	Screen Media Films	2010
La mujer de mi hermano	Lionsgate	2006
Ladron que roba a ladron	Lionsgate	2007
Lake City	Screen Media Films	2008
Lake of Fire	ThinkFilm	2007
Lake Tahoe	Film Movement	2009
Land of the Blind	Bauer Martinez	2006
Larger than Life 3D: The Dave Matthews Band	MGM/UA Distribution	2009
Larry the Cable Guy: Health Inspector	Lionsgate	2006
Lars and the Real Girl	MGM	2007
Lassie	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Last Chance Harvey	Overture Films	2008
Last Stop for Paul	Mandt Brothers	2008
Laura Smiles	Emerging Pictures	2007
Law Abiding Citizen	Overture Films	2009

Lbs.	Truly Indie	2010
Leaves of Grass	Telepathic Studios	2010
Legendary	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
Leonard Cohen: I'm Your Man	Lionsgate	2006
Let Me In	Overture Films	2010
Letters to God	Vivendi Entertainment	2010
Letters to Juliet	Summit Entertainment	2010
Life Before Her Eyes	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Life During Wartime	IFC Films	2010
Lifelines	Kanbar Entertainment	2009
Like Dandelion Dust	Blue Collar Releasing	2010
Lions for Lambs	United Artists/MGM	2007
Little Big Top	Moving Pictures Films and Television	2008
Little Chenier	Slowhand Cinema	2008
Little Children	New Line	2006
Little Miss Sunshine	Fox Searchlight	2006
Live Fast, Die Young	Riverrain	2008
Live Freaky! Die Freaky!	Wellspring	2006
Live Free or Die	ThinkFilm	2007
Living in Emergency	Truly Indie	2010
Local Color	Monterey Media	2007
Logan	Real Bean Entertainment	2010
London	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Lonely Hearts	Millenium Films/Roadside Attractions/Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Lonesome Jim	IFC Films	2006
Look	Vitagraph Films	2007
Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World	Warner Independent	2006
Looking for Kitty	ThinkFilm	2006
Looking for Palladin	Monterey Media	2009

Lord, Save Us From Your Followers	Thunderstruck Films	2008
LoudQuietLoud: A Film About The Pixies	Roxie Releasing	2006
Louise Bourgeois	Zeitgeist	2008
Love Comes Lately	Kino International	2008
Love in the Time of Cholera	New Line	2007
Love N' Dancing	Screen Media Films	2009
Love Ranch	E1 Entertainment	2010
Love's Abiding Joy	Fox Faith	2006
Lovely, Still	Monterey Media	2010
Loverboy	ThinkFilm	2006
Lower Learning	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2008
Lucky Number Slevin	MGM	2006
Lust, Caution	Focus Features	2007
Lymelife	Screen Media Films	2009
Mad Money	Overture Films	2008
Made in Jamaica	ArtMattan Productions	2009
Madea Goes To Jail	Lionsgate	2009
Madea's Family Reunion	Lionsgate	2006
Maldeamores	Maya Releasing	2008
Man on Wire	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Man Push Cart	Film Philos	2006
Management	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2009
Mardi Gras: Made in China	Carnavalesque Films	2006
Margot at the Wedding	Paramount Vantage	2007
Marilyn Hotchkiss' Ballroom Dancing and Charm School	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Married Life	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Marwencol	The Cinema Guild	2010
Material Girls	MGM	2006
Matthew Barney: No Restraint	IFC Films	2006
Maxed Out	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Me & You, Us, Forever	Five & Two Pictures	2008

Medicine for Melancholy	IFC Films	2009
Meet Bill	First Look	2008
Meet the Browns	Lionsgate	2008
Meeting Resistance	International Film Circuit	2007
Memory	Aloha Releasing	2007
Mendy - A Question of Faith	Andes Film Company	2006
Mercy	IFC Films	2010
Middle Men	Paramount Vantage	2010
Midnight Meat Train	Lionsgate	2008
Midnight Reckoning/The Fall of Night	Winter Star Productions	2010
Military Intelligence and You!	Anywhere Road Entertainment	2008
Milk	Focus Features	2008
Mine	Film Movement	2009
Mini's First Time	First Independent Pictures	2006
Misconceptions	Regent Releasing	2010
Miss Conception	First Look	2008
Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day	Focus Features	2008
Miss Potter	MGM	2006
Momma's Man	ThinkFilm	2008
Monster Beach Party	Indican Pictures	2009
Moondance Alexander	Fox Faith	2007
More Than a Game	Lionsgate	2009
Mother of Tears	Mitropoulos Films/Myriad Pictures	2008
Motherhood	Freestyle Releasing	2009
Moving McAllister	First Independent Pictures	2007
Moving Midway	First Run Features	2008
Mozart and the Whale	Millenium Films	2006
Mr. Blue Sky	Rocky Mountain Pictures	2007
Mr. Brooks	MGM	2007
Mr. Untouchable	Magnolia Pictures	2007



Mr. Woodcock	New Line	2007
Munyurangabo	Film Movement	2009
Murder in Fashion	Regent Releasing	2010
Music Within	MGM	2007
Mutual Appreciation	Goodbye Cruel Releasing	2006
My Best Friend's Girl	Lionsgate	2008
My Bloody Valentine	Lionsgate	2009
My Brother	Codeblack Entertainment	2007
My Country My Country	Zeitgeist	2006
My Dog Tulip	New Yorker	2010
My Kid Could Paint That	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
My Life in Ruins	Fox Searchlight	2009
My Mexican Shivan	Emerging Pictures	2008
My Name is Bruce	Image Entertainment	2008
My One and Only	Freestyle Releasing	2009
Mystery Team	Roadside Attractions	2009
N-Secure	Freestyle Releasing	2010
Naked Boys Singing	TLA Releasing	2007
Nanking	ThinkFilm	2007
Neshoba: The Price of Freedom	First Run Features	2010
Never Back Down	Summit Entertainment	2008
Never Forever	Arts Alliance America	2008
Never Let Me Go	Fox Searchlight	2010
New In Town	Lionsgate	2009
New Year Parade	Two Street Productions	2009
New York, I Love You	Vivendi Entertainment	2009
Next Day Air	Summit Entertainment	2009
Night Catches Us	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Nights and Weekends	IFC Films	2008
Nine	Weinstein Co.	2009
No Country for Old Men	Miramax	2007

No End In Sight	Magnolia Pictures	2007
No Impact Man	Oscilloscope Pictures	2009
Nobel Son	Freestyle Releasing	2008
No'Ille	Gener8xion Entertainment	2007
Noise	ThinkFilm	2008
Not Forgotten	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
Not Quite Hollywood	Magnolia Pictures/Magnet Releasing	2009
Notes on Marie Menken	Icarus Films	2007
Nothing But the Truth	Yari Film Group Releasing	2008
Nothing Like the Holidays	Overture Films	2008
Notorious	Fox Searchlight	2009
Nursery University	Variance Films	2009
O Jerusalem	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Objectified	Plexifilm	2009
October Country	International Film Circuit	2010
Off and Running	First Run Features	2010
Off the Black	ThinkFilm	2006
Oh My God	Mitropoulos Films	2009
Old Joy	Kino International	2006
On Broadway	Picture Park	2008
On the Other Hand: A Donald Strachey Mystery	Regent Releasing	2008
Once in a Lifetime	Miramax	2006
Ondine	Magnolia Pictures	2010
One Last ThingÉ	Magnolia Pictures	2006
One Night with the King	Rocky Mountain Pictures/8x Entertainment	2006
One Peace at a Time	Monterey Media	2009
Only the Brave	Indican Pictures	2009
Operation Filmmaker	Icarus Films	2008
Operation Homecoming	The Documentary Group	2007
Oswald's Ghost	7th Art Releasing	2007

Our Brand is Crisis	Koch Lorber Films	2006
Our City Dreams	First Run Features	2009
Our Family Wedding	Fox Searchlight	2010
Outlander	Third Rail	2009
Outrage	Magnolia Pictures	2009
Outsourced	Lantern Lane Entertainment	2007
Over Her Dead Body	New Line	2008
Owl and the Sparrow	Wave Releasing	2009
Oy Vey! My Son is Gay!	New Generation Films	2010
P2	Summit Entertainment	2007
Pan's Labyrinth	Picturehouse	2006
Paper Dolls	Strand Releasing	2006
Paper Heart	Overture Films	2009
Paper Man	MPI Media Group	2010
Paradise Lost	Fox Atomic	2006
Passage to Zarahemla	Somerset Films	2007
Passport to Love	Variance Films	2009
Pathology	MGM	2008
Patti Smith: Dream of Life	Palm Pictures	2008
Penelope	Summit Entertainment	2008
Perestroika	Strand Releasing	2009
Persepolis	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
Pete Seeger: The Power of Song	Weinstein Co.	2007
Peter and Vandy	Strand Releasing	2009
Phat Girlz	Fox Searchlight	2006
Phoebe in Wonderland	ThinkFilm	2009
Photographer, His Wife, Her Lover	Icarus Films	2006
Phyllis and Harold	Rainbow Releasing	2010
Picture Me: A Model's Diary	Strand Releasing	2010
Ping Pong Playa	IFC Films	2008
Piranha 3D	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2010

Pirate Radio	Focus Features	2009
Pizza	IFC Films	2006
Plagues and Pleasures on the Salton Sea	Tilapia Film	2006
Planet B-Boy	Elephant Eye Films	2008
Play the Game	Slowhand Cinema	2009
Please Give	Sony Pictures Classics	2010
Polar Opposites	Regent Releasing	2008
Poster Boy	Regent Releasing	2006
Poultrygeist: Night of the Chicken Dead	Troma Entertainment	2008
Pray the Devil Back to Hell	Balcony Releasing	2008
Preacher's Kid	Gener8xion Entertainment	2010
Preaching to the Choir	Freestyle Releasing	2006
Precious (Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire)	Lionsgate	2009
Pressure Cooker	BEV Pictures	2009
Pride	Lionsgate	2007
Prince of Broadway	Elephant Eye Films	2010
Princess Kaiulani	Roadside Attractions	2010
Prodigal Sons	First Run Features	2010
Protagonist	IFC Films	2007
Proud American	Slowhand Cinema	2008
Psychopathia Sexualis	Kino International	2006
Puccini for Beginners	Strand Releasing	2007
Pulse	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2006
Punisher: War Zone	Lionsgate	2008
Push	Summit Entertainment	2009
Quantum Hoops	Green Forest Films	2007
Queen of the Lot	Rainbow Releasing	2010
Queen of the Sun	Collective Eye	2010
Quid Pro Quo	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Quiet City	600 West	2007
Quinceanera	Sony Pictures Classics	2006

Rabbit Hole	Lionsgate	2010
Race You to the Bottom	Regent Releasing	2007
Rachel Getting Married	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Racing Dreams	Hannover House Films	2010
Raising Flagg	Cinema Libre	2007
Rambo	Lionsgate	2008
Randy and the Mob	IFC Films/Lightyear Entertainment/Capricorn Distribution	2007
Rank	IFC Films	2006
Rape of the Soul	Slowhand Cinema	2006
Red	Summit Entertainment	2010
Red	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Red Doors	Emerging Pictures	2006
Red Roses and Petrol	World Wide Motion Pictures	2008
Redacted	Magnolia Pictures	2007
Redbelt	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Redline	Chicago Releasing	2007
Refusenik	Abramorama Films	2008
Religulous	Lionsgate	2008
Remember Me	Summit Entertainment	2010
Rendition	New Line	2007
Repo! The Genetic Opera	Lionsgate	2008
Rescue Dawn	MGM	2007
Reservation Road	Focus Features	2007
Restrepo	National Geographic Entertainment	2010
Resurrecting the Champ	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
Return with Honor - Missionary	Excel Entertainment	2007
Reunion	Abramorama Films	2009
Revolutionary Road	Paramount Vantage	2008
Right at Your Door	Lionsgate	2007

Righteous Kill	Overture Films	2008
Ripple Effect	Monterey Media	2008
Rise: Blood Hunter	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Roadside Romeo	Yash Raj Films	2008
Robert Blecker Wants Me Dead	Atlas Media Corp	2009
Rock Bottom	ThinkFilm	2007
Rock the Bells	7th Art Releasing	2007
Rocket Science	Picturehouse	2007
Rocky Balboa	MGM	2006
Rogue	Weinstein Co./Third Rail Releasing	2008
Rolling	Indican Pictures	2009
Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired	ThinkFilm	2008
Romance and Cigarettes	Borotoro	2007
Rom�ntico	Kino International	2006
Rome & Jewel	Emerging Pictures	2008
Romeo & Juliet: Sealed with a Kiss	Indican Pictures	2006
Room	The 7th Floor	2006
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Undead	Indican Pictures	2010
Rudo y Cursi	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
Run For Your Life	Screen Media Films	2008
Running Scared	New Line	2006
Running with Arnold	Lantern Lane Entertainment	2008
Rush Hour 3	New Line	2007
Sacco and Vanzetti	First Run Features	2007
Saint John of Las Vegas	IndieVest Pictures	2010
Saint Misbehavin': The Wavy Gracy Movie	Argot Pictures	2010
Saint of 9/11	IFC Films	2006
Sangre de mi sangre	IFC Films	2008
Sarah Landon and the Paranormal Hour	Freestyle Releasing	2007
Savage Grace	IFC Films	2008

Save Me	First Run Features	2008
Saving Marriage	Regent Releasing	2008
Saw 3	Lionsgate	2006
Saw IV	Lionsgate	2007
Saw V	Lionsgate	2008
Saw VI	Lionsgate	2009
Saw VII 3D	Lionsgate	2010
Say Uncle	TLA Releasing	2006
Scary Movie 4	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2006
School For Scoundrels	MGM	2006
Scoop	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2006
Scott Walker: 30 Century Man	Oscilloscope Pictures	2009
Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure	National Geographic Entertainment	2007
See No Evil	Lionsgate	2006
Self Medicated	ThinkFilm	2007
Semi-Pro	New Line	2008
Send a Bullet	City Lights Pictures	2007
Seraphim Falls	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Serious Moonlight	Magnolia Pictures	2009
Severed Ways: The Norse Discovery of America	Magnolia Pictures/Magnet Releasing	2009
Sex and Death 101	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2008
Sex Drive	Summit Entertainment	2008
Sex Positive	Regent Releasing	2009
Shadowboxer	Freestyle Releasing	2006
Shadowland	Pirate Media Group	2010
Shakespeare Behind Bars	International Film Circuit	2006
Shanghai Red	Indican Pictures	2010
Shelter	Regent Releasing	2008
Sherman's Way	International Film Circuit	2009
Sherrybaby	IFC Films	2006

Shine a Light	Paramount Vantage	2008
Shoot 'Em Up	New Line	2007
Shoot Down	Magic Lamp	2008
Shoot on Sight	Aron Govil Productions	2008
Shortbus	ThinkFilm	2006
Shotgun Stories	International Film Circuit	2007
Shrink	Roadside Attractions	2009
Shut Up and Sing	Weinstein Co.	2006
Shuttle	Truly Indie	2009
Sicko	Lionsgate	2007
Sin Nombre	Focus Features	2009
Sing Now or Forever Hold Your Peace	Strand Releasing	2007
Sir! No Sir!	Balcony Releasing	2006
Sita Sings the Blues	Creative Commons/Shadow Distribution	2008
Sketches of Frank Gehry	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
Skid Marks	Diversa Films	2008
Skid Row	Screen Media Films	2007
Skills Like This	Shadow	2009
Skinwalkers	After Dark Films	2007
Sleep Dealer	Maya Releasing	2009
Sleepwalking	Overture Films	2008
Sleuth	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
Slipstream	Strand Releasing	2007
Slow Burn	Lionsgate	2007
Slow Jam King	Unico Entertainment	2006
Smart People	Miramax	2008
Smash His Camera	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Smiley Face	First Look	2007
Snakes on a Plane	New Line	2006
Snow Angels	Warner Independent	2008



So Goes the Nation	IFC Films	2006
So Much So Fast	Balcony Releasing	2006
Solar Flare	Regent Releasing	2008
Solitary Man	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
Something New	Focus Features	2006
Something to Cheer About	Truly Indie	2007
Somewhere	Focus Features	2010
Sorority Row	Summit Entertainment	2009
Sorry, Haters	IFC Films	2006
Soul men	MGM	2008
Soul Power	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
South of the Border	Cinema Libre	2010
Southland Tales	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2007
Special	Magnolia Releasing/Revolver Entertainment	2008
Speed-Dating	Rockstone Releasing	2010
Splinter	Magic Lamp	2007
Splinter	Magnolia Pictures/Magnet Releasing	2008
Splinterheads	Paladin	2009
Spoken Word	Variance Films	2010
Spread	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
Sputnik Mania	Balcony Releasing	2008
Standard Operating Procedure	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Standing Ovation	Rocky Mountain Pictures	2010
Standing Still	Freestyle Releasing	2006
Starter for Ten	Picturehouse	2007
Starting Out in the Evening	Roadside Attractions	2007
Stay	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Steal a Pencil for Me	7th Art Releasing	2007
Stealing America: Vote by Vote	Direct Cinema Ltd	2008
Steel City	Truly Indie	2007

Steep	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
Stephanie Daley	Regent Releasing	2007
Stolen	IFC Films	2010
Stone	Overture Films	2010
Stonewall Uprising	First Run Features	2010
Strange Powers: Stephin Merritt and the Magnetic Fields	Variance Films	2010
Strange Wilderness	Paramount Vantage	2008
Strangers with Candy	ThinkFilm	2006
Street Dreams	Slowhand Cinema	2009
Street Fight	Argot Pictures	2006
Street Kings	Fox Searchlight	2008
Streetballers	MSK Productions	2009
Stuck	ThinkFilm	2008
Sugar	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
Suicide Killers	City Lights Pictures	2006
Summertime!	Argot Pictures	2007
Sunshine	Fox Searchlight	2007
Sunshine Cleaning	Overture Films	2009
Super Capers	Roadside Attractions	2009
Superhero Movie	MGM/Dimension Films	2008
Surfer, Dude	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2008
Surfwise	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Surveillance	Magnolia Pictures/Magnet Releasing	2009
Sweet Land	Libero, LLC	2006
Sweetgrass	Cinema Guild	2010
Sweethearts of the Prison Rodeo	Cinema Purgatorio	2010
Swimmers	Skouras Pictures	2006
Synecdoche, New York	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Ta Ra Rum Pum	Yash Raj Films	2007
Take	Liberation Entertainment	2008

Take Out	CAVU Releasing	2008
Take the Lead	New Line	2006
Taking Woodstock	Focus Features	2009
Tales From the Script	First Run Features	2010
Talk to Me	Focus Features	2007
Tamara	City Lights Pictures	2006
Taxi to the Dark Side	ThinkFilm	2008
Teeth	Roadside Attractions	2008
Ten 'Til Noon	Radio London Films	2007
Ten Items or Less	ThinkFilm	2006
Tenacious D in: The Pick of Destiny	New Line	2006
Tennessee	Vivendi Entertainment	2009
Tetro	American Zoetrope	2009
Thank You For Smoking	Fox Searchlight	2006
That Evening Sun	Freestyle Releasing	2009
That Man: Peter Berlin	Gorilla Factory	2006
The Air I Breathe	ThinkFilm	2008
The Alphabet Killer	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2008
The Amateurs	Bauer Martinez	2007
The American	Focus Features	2010
The Answer Man	Magnolia Pictures	2009
The Architect	Magnolia Pictures	2006
The Art of Being Straight	Regent Releasing	2009
The Art of the Steal	IFC Films	2010
The Babysitters	Peace Arch Releasing	2008
The Back-up Plan	CBS Films	2010
The Band's Visit	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
The Bank Job	Lionsgate	2008
The Beautiful Truth	Cinema Libre	2008
The Beauty Academy of Kabul	Shadow	2006
The Big Uneasy	The Noise Dept.	2010

The Blue Tooth Virgin	Regent Releasing	2009
The Boondock Saints 2: All Saints day	Apparition	2009
The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas	Miramax	2008
The Bride & The Grooms	Sumbadhat Productions	2009
The Brothers Bloom	Summit Entertainment	2009
The Burning Plain	Magnolia Pictures	2009
The Business of Being Born	International Film Circuit	2008
The Cake Eaters	7-57 Releasing	2009
The Camden 28	First Run Features	2007
The Canyon	Truly Indie	2009
The Celestine Prophecy	Ram Entertainment	2006
The Children of Huang Shi	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
The City of Your Final Destination	Screen Media Films	2010
The Class	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
The Collector	Freestyle Releasing	2009
The Comebacks	Fox Atomic	2007
The Condemned	Lionsgate	2007
The Conrad Boys	Newport Films	2006
The Cove	Roadside Attractions	2009
The Craziest	Overture Films	2010
The Cross: The Arthur Blessitt Story	Gener8xion Entertainment	2009
The Cry	Monterey Media	2008
The Darjeeling Limited	Fox Searchlight	2007
The Dead Girl	First Look	2006
The Death Factory Bloodletting	Nocturnal Features	2009
The Devil and Daniel Johnson	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
The Devil Came on Horseback	IFC Films	2007
The Diving Bell and the Butterfly	Miramax	2007
The Dry Land	Freestyle Releasing	2010
The Duchess	Paramount Vantage	2008
The Dukes	CAVU Releasing	2008

The Education of Charlie Banks	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
The Elephant King	Unison Films/Strand Releasing	2008
The Empire in Africa	Cinema Libre	2006
The End of Poverty?	Cinema Libre	2009
The Errand of Angels	Excel Entertainment	2008
The Ex	MGM	2007
The Expendables	Lionsgate	2010
The Exploding Girl	Oscilloscope Pictures	2010
The Extra Man	Magnolia Pictures	2010
The Fall	Roadside Attractions	2008
The Fall of Fujimori	Cinema Libre	2006
The Family That Preys	Lionsgate	2008
The Final Season	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
The First Basket	Laemmle/Zeller Film	2008
The First Saturday in May	Truly Indie	2008
The Flyboys/Spy Kids	Dark Coast Pictures	2008
The Foot Fist Way	Paramount Vantage	2008
The Forbidden Kingdom	Lionsgate	2008
The Freebie	Phase 4 Films	2010
The Garden	Oscilloscope Pictures	2009
The Girlfriend Experience	Magnolia Pictures	2009
The Go-Getter	Peace Arch Releasing	2008
The Golden Boys	Roadside Attractions	2009
The Good Guy	Roadside Attractions	2010
The Good Heart	Magnolia Pictures	2010
The Good Soldier	Artistic License	2009
The Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard	Paramount Vantage	2009
The Grand	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2008
The Great Buck Howard	Magnolia Pictures	2009
The Great Debaters	Weinstein Co.	2007
The Great New Wonderful	First Independent Pictures	2006

The Greatest	Paladin	2010
The Groomsmen	Bauer Martinez	2006
The Ground Truth: After the Killing Ends	Focus Features	2006
The Hammer	Hammer the Movie	2008
The Haunting in Connecticut	Lionsgate	2009
The Haunting of Molly Hartley	Freestyle Releasing	2008
The Hawk is Dying	Strand Releasing	2007
The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things	Palm Pictures	2006
The Heart of the Game	Miramax	2006
The Hills Have Eyes	Fox Searchlight	2006
The Hills Have Eyes 2	Fox Atomic	2007
The Hip Hop Project	ThinkFilm	2007
The Hitcher	Focus Features	2007
The Horse Boy	Zeitgeist	2009
The Hottest State	IFC Films/THINKfilm	2007
The Hottie and the Nottie	Regent Releasing	2008
The Hunting Party	Weinstein Co.	2007
The Hurt Locker	Summit Entertainment	2009
The Illusionist	Yari Film Group Releasing	2006
The Informers	Senator Entertainment	2009
The Inner Life of Martin Frost	New Yorker	2007
The Iron Man	Iron Man Distribution	2007
The Jane Austen Book Club	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
The Joneses	Roadside Attractions	2010
The Kids Are All Right	Focus Features	2010
The Kids Grow Up	Shadow	2010
The Killer Inside Me	IFC Films	2010
The King	ThinkFilm	2006
The King of California	First Look	2007
The King of Kong	Picturehouse	2007
The Kite Runner	Paramount Vantage	2007

The Korean	Indican Pictures	2010
The Last Exorcism	Lionsgate	2010
The Last International Playboy	Cplus	2009
The Last Mimzy	New Line	2007
The Last New Yorker	Brink Film	2010
The Last Winter	IFC Films	2007
The Legend of God's Gun	Indican Pictures	2008
The Legend of Pale Male	Balcony Releasing	2010
The Limits of Control	Focus Features	2009
The Little Traitor	Westchester Films	2009
The Living Wake	Mangusta Productions	2010
The Long Weekend	Gold Circle Films	2006
The Longshots	MGM	2008
The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond	Paladin	2009
The Lost City	Magnolia Pictures	2006
The Lottery	Variance Films	2010
The Lucky Ones	Lionsgate	2008
The Marc Pease Experience	Paramount Vantage	2009
The Martian Child	New Line	2007
The Matador	City Lights Pictures	2008
The Men Who Stare at Goats	Overture Films	2009
The Merry Gentleman	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2009
The Messenger	Oscilloscope Pictures	2009
The Missing Person	Strand Releasing	2009
The Mist	MGM	2007
The Most Dangerous Man in America	First Run Features	2010
The Mostly Unfabulous Social Life of Ethan Green	Regent Releasing	2006
The Motel	Palm Pictures	2006
The Mutant Chronicles	Magnolia Pictures	2009
The Mysteries of Pittsburgh	Peace Arch Releasing	2009
The Namesake	Fox Searchlight	2007

The Nanny Diaries	MGM	2007
The Nativity Story	New Line	2006
The Nature of Existence	Walking Shadows	2010
The New Twenty	Argot Pictures/Wolfe Twenty	2009
The Next Three Days	Lionsgate	2010
The Night Listener	Miramax	2006
The Nines	Newmarket Films	2007
The Notorious Bettie Page	Picturehouse	2006
The Number 23	New Line	2007
The Oath	Zeitgeist	2010
The Objective	IFC Films	2009
The Oh in Ohio	Cyan	2006
The Open Road	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
The Order of Myths	Cinema Guild	2008
The Other City	Cabin Films	2010
The Other End of the Line	MGM	2008
The Other Man	Image Entertainment	2009
The Painted Veil	Warner Independent	2006
The Paranoid Park	IFC Films	2007
The People I've Slept With	People Pictures/Maya Entertainment	2010
The Perfect Game	Image Entertainment	2010
The Perfect Holiday	Yari Film Group Releasing	2007
The Perfect Sleep	Cinema Epoch	2009
The Pleasure of being Robbed	IFC Films	2008
The Pool	Vitagraph Films	2007
The Price of Sugar	Mitropoulos Films	2007
The Private Lives of Pippa Lee	Screen Media Films	2009
The Promise	Warner Independent	2006
The Promotion	Weinstein Co./Third Rail Releasing	2008
The Providence Effect	Slowhand Cinema	2009



The Puffy Chair	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
The Quiet	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
The Reader	Weinstein Co.	2008
The Real Dirt on Farmer John	Slowhand Cinema	2006
The Return	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2006
The Rise and Fall of Miss Thang	Lavender House Films	2008
The Road	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2009
The Runaways	Apparition	2010
The Salon	Freestyle Releasing	2007
The Sasquatch Gang	Screen Media Films	2007
The Savages	Fox Searchlight	2007
The Secret Life of Bees	Fox Searchlight	2008
The Secrets of Jonathan Sperry	Five & Two Pictures	2009
The Sensation of Sight	Monterey Media	2007
The September Issue	Roadside Attractions	2009
The Signal	Magnolia Pictures	2008
The Singing Revolution	Abramorama Films	2007
The Situation	Shadow	2007
The Skeptic	IFC Films	2009
The Slammin' Salmon	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2009
The Spirit	Lionsgate	2008
The Spy Next Door	Lionsgate	2010
The Stoning of Sorava M.	Roadside Attractions	2009
The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	Rocky Mountain Pictures	2006
The Strangers	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2008
The Surfer King	Movin' Picture Studio	2006
The Switch	Miramax	2010
The Tagwacores	Strand Releasing	2010
The Tempest	Miramax	2010
The Ten	ThinkFilm	2007
The Ten Commandments	Rocky Mountain	2007

	Pictures/Promenade Pictures	
The Tenants	Millenium Films/Rocky Mountain Pictures	2006
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning	New Line	2006
The Tillman Story	Weinstein Co.	2010
The Tollbooth	Castle Hill Productions	2006
The Treatment	New Yorker	2007
The Trials of Darryl Hunt	ThinkFilm	2007
The Tripper	Freestyle Releasing	2007
The Trouble with Terkel	Indican Pictures	2010
The TV Set	ThinkFilm	2007
The Twilight Saga: Eclipse	Summit Entertainment	2010
The Twilight Saga: New Moon	Summit Entertainment	2009
The Two Escobars	All Rise Films	2010
The U.S. vs John Lennon	Lionsgate	2006
The Ultimate Gift	The Bigger Picture	2007
The Unforeseen	Cinema Guild	2008
The Village Barbershop	Monterey Media	2009
The Visitor	Overture Films	2008
The Wackness	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
The Walker	ThinkFilm	2007
The War Tapes	SenArt/Scranton-Lacy	2006
The Way We Get By	International Film Circuit	2009
The Weathered Underground	Indican Pictures	2010
The Wendell Baker Story	ThinkFilm	2007
The Wildest Dream	National Geographic Entertainment	2010
The Windmill Movie	The Film Desk	2009
The Winning Season	Roadside Attractions	2010
The Women	Picturehouse	2008
The Wonder of it All	Indican Pictures	2009
The Work and the Glory 3: A House Divided	Excel Entertainment	2006

The Wrestler	Fox Searchlight	2008
The Yes Men Fix the World	Shadow	2009
The Young Victoria	Apparition	2009
The Zodiac	ThinkFilm	2006
Then She Found Me	ThinkFilm	2008
There Will Be Blood	Paramount Vantage	2007
This Film is Not Yet Rated	IFC Films	2006
Through the Fire	Cinema Libre	2006
Throw Down Your Heart	Argot Pictures	2009
Tiny Furniture	IFC Films	2010
Tis Autumn: The Search for Jackie Paris	Outsider Films	2007
To Save a Life	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
Today's Special	Reliance MediaWorks/Vitagraph films	2010
Toe to Toe	Strand Releasing	2010
Tortilla Heaven	Wildcat Releasing	2007
Touching Home	CFI	2010
Trade	Roadside Attractions	2007
Traitor	Overture Films	2008
Transformation: The Life and Legacy of Werner Erhard	Reel Diva Consultants	2007
Transylmania	Full Circle Releasing	2009
Tre	Cinema Libre	2008
Treeless Mountain	Oscilloscope Pictures	2009
Trouble the Water	Zeitgeist	2008
Tru Loved	Regent Releasing	2008
Trucker	Monterey Media	2009
Trudell	Balcony Releasing	2006
Trumbo	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2008
Trust the Man	Fox Searchlight	2006
Trying to Get Good: The Jazz Odyssey of Jack Sheldon	Reel Source	2008
Turn the River	Screen Media Films	2008

Twelve	Hannover House Films	2010
Twelve and Holding	IFC Films	2006
Twilight	Summit Entertainment	2008
Twisted: A Ballonamentary	Elliot Lives Productions, LLC	2008
Two Lovers	Magnolia Pictures	2009
Two Weeks	MGM	2007
Tyson	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
Unborn in the USA: Inside the War on Abortion	First Run Features	2007
Uncertainty	IFC Films	2009
Under Our Skin	Shadow	2009
Under the Same Moon	Fox Searchlight	2008
Undoing	Indican Pictures	2008
Unidentified	Five & Two Pictures	2006
Unknown	IFC Films	2006
Unknown White Male	Wellspring	2006
Until the Light Takes Us	Variance Films	2009
Vajra Sky Over Tibet	Truly Indie	2006
Valentino: The Last Emperor	Truly Indie	2009
Valkyrie	United Artists/MGM	2008
Valley of the Hearts Delight	Indican Pictures	2010
Van Wilder Deux: The Rise of Taj	MGM	2006
Vanaja	Emerging Pictures	2007
Vice	41 Inc.	2008
Vicky Cristina Barcelona	MGM/The Weinstein Company	2008
Vince Vaughn's Wild West Comedy Show: 30 Days & 30 Nights - Hollywood to the Heartland	Picturehouse	2008
Violet Tendencies	Embrem Entertainment	2010
Visual Acoustics	Arthouse Films	2009
Viva	Vagrant Films	2008
W.	Lionsgate	2008
Waist Deep	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2006

Waiting for Armageddon	First Run Features	2010
Waiting for Superman	Paramount Vantage	2010
Waitress	Fox Searchlight	2007
Walking on Dead Fish	Variance Films	2008
Waltz with Bashir	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Waltzing Anna	Kindred Media Group	2006
War	Lionsgate	2007
War Dance	ThinkFilm	2007
War Eagle, Arkansas	Empire Pictures	2009
War, Inc.	First Look	2008
Wassup Rockers	First Look	2006
Watercolors	Regent Releasing	2010
We Go Way Back	Cyan	2006
We Live in Public	Abramorama Films	2009
Weather Girl	Secret Identity Productions	2009
Welcome to the Rileys	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
Wendy and Lucy	Oscilloscope Pictures	2008
Were the World Mine	SPEAKproductions	2008
Wetlands Preserved: The Story of a Activist Rock Club	First Run Features	2008
What If	Five & Two Pictures/Pure Flix/Jenkins Entertainment	2010
What Just Happened	Magnolia Pictures	2008
What the Bleep?: Down the Rabbit Hole	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
What Would Jesus Buy?	Warrior Poets	2007
Whatever Works	Sony Pictures Classics	2009
When Do We Eat?	ThinkFilm	2006
When the Road Bends: Tales of a Gypsy Caravan	Shadow	2007
When You're Strange: A Film About The Doors	Abramorama Films	2010
Where God Left His Shoes	IFC Films	2008
Where in the World is Osama Bin Laden?	Weinstein Co.	2008
While She Was Out	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2008

Whip It	Fox Searchlight	2009
White on Rice	Variance Films	2009
Whiz Kids	Shadow	2010
Who Does She Think She Is?	Artistic License	2008
Who Gets to Call It Art?	Palm Pictures	2006
Who is Harry Nilsson (and Why is Everybody Talkin' About Him)?	Lorber Films	2010
Who Killed the Electric Car?	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
Who the #\$^% is Jackson Pollock?	Picturehouse	2006
Who's Your Caddy?	MGM	2007
Why Did I Get Married?	Lionsgate	2007
Why We Fight	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
Wild Tigers I Have Known	IFC Films	2007
William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe	Arthouse Films	2009
William S. Burroughs: A Man Within	Oscilloscope Pictures	2010
Winnebago Man	Kino International	2010
Winston Churchill: Walking with Destiny	Moriah Films	2010
Winter of Frozen Dreams	Monterey Media	2009
Winter Passing	Focus Features	2006
Winter's Bone	Roadside Attractions	2010
Without the King	First Run Features	2008
Witless Protection	Lionsgate	2008
Women in Trouble	Screen Media Films	2009
Wonderful World	Magnolia Pictures	2010
Wordplay	IFC Films	2006
World's Greatest Dad	Magnolia Pictures	2009
Wrestling with Angels	Balcony Releasing	2006
Wristcutters: A Love Story	Autonomous Film	2007
Year of the Dog	Paramount Vantage	2007
Yellow Handkerchief, The	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
Yiddish Theater: A Love Story	New Love Films	2007
Yonkers Jow	Magnolia Pictures	2009

Yoo-Hoo, Mrs. Goldberg	International Film Circuit	2009
You Kill Me	IFC Films	2007
You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger	Sony Pictures Classics	2010
You Won't Miss Me	Reel Diva Consultants	2010
You're Gonna Miss Me	Palm Pictures	2007
Youssou N'Dour: I Bring What I Love	Shadow	2009
Youth in Revolt	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2010
Youth Without Youth	Sony Pictures Classics	2007
Zack and Miri Makes a Porno	Weinstein Co.	2008
Zenith	Cinema Purgatorio	2010
Zerophilia	Microangelo Entertainment	2006
Zoo	ThinkFilm	2007
Zyzyx Rd.	Regent Releasing	2006

**Appendix Item 2: Corpus Sample of Category 1 (Major Studio Specialty Film divisions) Theatrical Releases**

<b>Film Title</b>	<b>Distributor</b>	<b>Year of Release</b>
127 Hours	Fox Searchlight	2010
28 Weeks Later	Fox Atomic	2007
An Inconvenient Truth	Paramount Vantage	2006
Babel	Paramount Vantage	2006
Be Kind Rewind	New Line	2008
Black Swan	Fox Searchlight	2010
Defiance	Paramount Vantage	2008
Final Destination 3	New Line	2006
Friends with Money	Sony Pictures Classics	2006
Gone, Baby, Gone	Miramax	2007
No Country for Old Men	Miramax	2007
Paradise Lost	Fox Atomic	2006
Snakes on a Plane	New Line	2006
Synecdoche, New York	Sony Pictures Classics	2008
Tenacious D in: The Pick of Destiny	New Line	2006
The Darjeeling Limited	Fox Searchlight	2007
The Hills Have Eyes	Fox Searchlight	2006
The Hills Have Eyes 2	Fox Atomic	2007
The Kids Are All Right	Focus Features	2010
The Return	Focus Features/Rogue Pictures	2006
Under the Same Moon	Fox Searchlight	2008



### Appendix Item 3: Corpus Sample of Category 2 (Mini-Majors) Theatrical Releases

Film Title	Distributor	Year of Release
Capitalism: A Love Story	Overture Films	2009
Clerks 2	MGM	2006
For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf	Lionsgate	2010
Grindhouse	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2007
Hot Tub Time Machine	MGM	2010
I'm Not There	Weinstein Co.	2007
Piranha 3D	Weinstein Co./Dimension	2010
Precious (Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire)	Lionsgate	2009
Punisher: War Zone	Lionsgate	2008
Repo! The Genetic Opera	Lionsgate	2008
Saw 3	Lionsgate	2006
Saw IV	Lionsgate	2007
Sicko	Lionsgate	2007
Sorority Row	Summit Entertainment	2009
The Expendables	Lionsgate	2010
The Hurt Locker	Summit Entertainment	2009
The Last Exorcism	Lionsgate	2010
The Mist	MGM/Dimension	2007
The Twilight Saga: Eclipse	Summit Entertainment	2010

#### Appendix Item 4: Corpus Sample of Category 3 (Mid-Scale Independents) Theatrical Releases

Film Title	Distributor	Year of Release
45365	7th Art Releasing	2010
A Four Letter Word	Embrem Entertainment	2008
A Guide to Recognising Your Saints	First Look	2006
A Thousand Years of Good Prayers	Magnolia Pictures	2008
American Zombie	Cinema Libre	2008
Amexicano	Maya Releasing	2008
Another Gay Movie	TLA Releasing	2006
Another Gay Sequel	TLA Releasing	2008
Bigger, Stronger, Faster*	Magnolia Pictures	2008
Black Dynamite	Apparition	2009
Blonde Ambition	First Look	2007
Bottle Shock	Freestyle Releasing	2008
Boy Culture	TLA Releasing	2007
Bubble	Magnolia Pictures	2006
Chris and Don: A Love Story	Zeitgeist	2008
Coffee Date	Slowhand Cinema	2006
Cruel World	Indican Pictures	2006
Deadfall Trail	Nocturnal Features	2010
Death of a Ghost Hunter	Nocturnal Features	2009
Douchebag	Paladin	2010
Dream Boy	Regent Releasing	2010
Earth Days	Zeitgeist	2009
F*ck	ThinkFilm	2006
Fireproof	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2008
Food, Inc.	Magnolia Pictures	2009
GhettoPhysics: Will the Real Pimps and Ho's Please Stand Up?	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
God and Gays: Bridging the Gap	Indican Pictures	2008
Good Dick	Abramorama Films	2008
How to be a Serial Killer	Monterey Media	2009

I'm Still Here	Magnolia Pictures	2010
In a Dream	International Film Circuit	2009
Iraq in Fragments	Typecast Releasing	2006
Jesus Camp	Magnolia Pictures	2006
Just Say Love	Regent Releasing	2010
Kiss the Bride	Regent Releasing	2008
Kurt Cobain: About a Son	Balcony Releasing	2007
Letters to God	Vivendi Entertainment	2010
Look	Vitagraph Films	2007
Mini's First Time	First Independent Pictures	2006
Motherhood	Freestyle Releasing	2009
My Dog Tulip	New Yorker	2010
My Name is Bruce	Image Entertainment	2008
Night Catches Us	Magnolia Pictures	2010
No Impact Man	Oscilloscope Pictures	2009
Nursery University	Variance Films	2009
Paper Dolls	Strand Releasing	2006
Patti Smith: Dream of Life	Palm Pictures	2008
Phoebe in Wonderland	ThinkFilm	2009
Planet B-Boy	Elephant Eye Films	2008
Rome & Jewel	Emerging Pictures	2008
Sarah Landon and the Paranormal Hour	Freestyle Releasing	2007
Save Me	First Run Features	2008
Self Medicated	ThinkFilm	2007
Sex Positive	Regent Releasing	2009
Sita Sings the Blues	Shadow	2008
Skid Row	Screen Media Films	2007
Smiley Face	First Look	2007
Splinter	Magnolia Pictures/Magnet Releasing	2008
Ten Items or Less	ThinkFilm	2006

The Beautiful Truth	Cinema Libre	2008
The Girlfriend Experience	Magnolia Pictures	2009
The Mostly Unfabulous Social Life of Ethan Green	Regent Releasing	2006
The Motel	Palm Pictures	2006
The Real Dirt on Farmer John	Slowhand Cinema	2006
To Save a Life	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
Two Lovers	Magnolia Pictures	2009
Unborn in the USA: Inside the War on Abortion	First Run Features	2007
We Live in Public	Abramorama Films	2009
Welcome to the Rileys	Samuel Goldwyn Films	2010
Wendy and Lucy	Oscilloscope Pictures	2008
White on Rice	Variance Films	2009
Who Does She Think She Is?	Artistic License	2008
Zoo	ThinkFilm	2007

#### Appendix Item 5: Corpus Sample of Category 4 (Low-End Independents) Theatrical Releases

Film Title	Distributor	Year of Release
13 Months of Sunshine	Abeselom Productions Distribution	2008
16 to Life	Waterdog Films	2010
A Dog Lover's Symphony	A Dog Lover's Symphony	2006
Abduction: The Megumi Yokota Story	Safari Media, LCC/Sagewood Cinema Ventures	2006
Alice Neel	SeeThink Films	2007
All Roads Lead Home	Waldo West Productions	2008
American Fusion	Wildcat Releasing	2007
And Then Came Love	Fox Meadow	2007
Ballast	Alluvial Film Company	2008
Believe	Kaleidescope Films	2007
Big Gay Musical	Unknown/Self Distributed	2009
Black Irish	Anywhere Road Entertainment	2007
Blackballed: The Bobby Dukes Story	The 7th Floor	2006
Blue Gap Boy'z	Better World Distribution	2008
Boogie Man: The Lee Atwater Story	InterPositive Media	2008
BoyBand	Artigo Ajemian Films	2010
Broken Hill	Audience Alliance	2009
Call+Response	Fair Trade Pictures	2008
Carbon Nation	Clay Way Media	2010
Chelsea on the Rocks	Aliquot Films	2009
Christmas at Maxwell's	Laufer Films	2006
Confessions of a Ex-Doofux-Itchy Footed Mutha	Innocent Bystander	2009
Cowboy and Lucky	Unknown/Self Distributed	2009
Crazy Like a Fox	Sky Island	2006
Dalai Lama Renaissance	Wakan Films	2008
David & Layla	Newroz Films	2007
Defendor	Darius Films	2010
Dirty	Silver Nitrate Releasing	2006
Divine Intervention	Bullz Eye	2007

Expired	MCR Releasing	2008
Familiar Strangers	Cavalier Films	2008
Flannel Pajamas	Gigantic Pictures	2006
Forever Strong	Crane Movie Company	2008
Four Lane Highway	Sky Island	2007
Fuel	Blue Water Entertainment	2008
G.I. Jesus	Wildcat Releasing	2007
GasLand	GasLand Productions	2010
George Bush Goes to Heaven	HB Filmworks	2006
Gringo Wedding	Gringo Wedding LLC	2007
Guest of Cindy Sherman	Trela	2009
Hair High	Bill Plympton	2006
Happy Valley	Stone Five Studios/Halestone Distribution	2008
I'll Believe You	Stand Up Films	2007
In My Sleep	Morning Star Pictures	2010
Inland Empire	518 Media	2006
Insidious	Romantic Troubadour Entertainment	2008
Islam: What the West Needs to Know	Quixotic Media	2006
Issues	Bullz Eye	2006
It's a bash!	Midway Pictures	2010
Itty Bitty Titty Committee	Pocket Releasing	2007
Jack Smith and the Destruction of Atlantis	Film Forum	2007
Journey from the Fall	ImaginAsian	2007
Killing Kasztner	GR Films	2009
King Leopold's Ghost	Aloha Releasing	2006
Last Stop for Paul	Mandt Brothers	2008
Leaves of Grass	Telepathic Studios	2010
Like Dandelion Dust	Blue Collar Releasing	2010
Live Fast, Die Young	Riverrain	2008
Logan	Real Bean Entertainment	2010
Lord, Save Us From Your Followers	Thunderstruck Films	2008

Man Push Cart	Film Philos	2006
Mardi Gras: Made in China	Carnavalesque Films	2006
Memory	Aloha Releasing	2007
Mendy - A Question of Faith	Andes Film Company	2006
Midnight Reckoning/The Fall of Night	Winter Star Productions	2010
Military Intelligence and You!	Anywhere Road Entertainment	2008
Mutual Appreciation	Goodbye Cruel Releasing	2006
New Year Parade	Two Street Productions	2009
On Broadway	Picture Park	2008
Owl and the Sparrow	Wave Releasing	2009
Oy Vey! My Son is Gay!	New Generation Films	2010
Passage to Zarahemla	Somerset Films	2007
Plagues and Pleasures on the Salton Sea	Tilapia Film	2006
Pressure Cooker	BEV Pictures	2009
Quantum Hoops	Green Forest Films	2007
Quiet City	600 West	2007
Redline	Chicago Releasing	2007
Romance and Cigarettes	Borotoro	2007
Room	The 7th Floor	2006
Saint John of Las Vegas	IndieVest Pictures	2010
Shadowland	Pirate Media Group	2010
Skid Marks	Diversa Films	2008
Slow Jam King	Unico Entertainment	2006
Streetballers	MSK Productions	2009
Sweet Land	Libero, LLC	2006
Swimmers	Skouras Pictures	2006
Tetro	American Zoetrope	2009
That Man: Peter Berlin	Gorilla Factory	2006
The Big Uneasy	The Noise Dept.	2010
The Bride & The Grooms	Sumbadhat Productions	2009
The Cake Eaters	7-57 Releasing	2009

The Celestine Prophecy	Ram Entertainment	2006
The Conrad Boys	Newport Films	2006
The Flyboys/Spy Kids	Dark Coast Pictures	2008
The Hammer	Hammer the Movie	2008
The Iron Man	Iron Man Distribution	2007
The Last International Playboy	Cplus	2009
The Little Traitor	Westchester Films	2009
The Nature of Existence	Walking Shadows	2010
The Oh in Ohio	Cyan	2006
The Other City	Cabin Films	2010
The Rise and Fall of Miss Thang	Lavender House Films	2008
The Surfer King	Movin' Picture Studio	2006
The Two Escobars	All Rise Films	2010
Tortilla Heaven	Wildcat Releasing	2007
Transylmania	Full Circle Releasing	2009
Twisted: A Ballonamentary	Elliot Lives Productions, LLC	2008
Vice	41 Inc.	2008
We Go Way Back	Cyan	2006
Weather Girl	Secret Identity Productions	2009
Were the World Mine	SPEAKproductions	2008
What Would Jesus Buy?	Warrior Poets	2007
Zerophilia	Microangelo Entertainment	2006



### Appendix Item 6: Corpus Sample of Specialty Divisions/Mid-scale Independent Crossover Theatrical Releases

<b>Film Title</b>	<b>Distributor</b>	<b>Year of Release</b>
Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2007
City Island	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
Descent	City Lights Pictures	2007
Hannah Takes the Stairs	IFC Films	2007
I Hate Valentine's Day	IFC Films	2009
I Spit On Your Grave	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2010
Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work	IFC Films	2010
Life During Wartime	IFC Films	2010
The Alphabet Killer	Anchor Bay Entertainment	2008
The Objective	IFC Films	2009

**Appendix Item 7: Corpus Sample of Mini-Major/Mid-scale Independent Crossover Theatrical Releases**

<b>Film Title</b>	<b>Distributor</b>	<b>Year of Release</b>
Lassie	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Facing the Giants	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006
Good Hair	Roadside Attractions	2009
Shrink	Roadside Attractions	2009
Teeth	Roadside Attractions	2008
The Puffy Chair	IDP/Goldwyn/Roadside	2006

### Appendix Item 8: Corpus Sample of Non-Theatrical Releases

Title	Distributor/Production Company	Year of Release
10mph	Spinning Blu (P), Wonderphil Productions (D)	2007
2012 Doomsday	The Asylum (P/D)	2008
Army of the Dead	Maverick Entertainment (P/D)	2008
Bank Run	SilkTricky (P/D)	2010
Bass Ackwards	Furness Films (P), The Group Entertainment (P), Lunacy Unlimited (P) and New Video Group (D)	2010
Beware the Gonzo	Tribeca Film (D)	2010
Bomb It	Antidote Films (P), Flying Cow Productions (P) Gravitas Ventures (D)	2007
Bomb It 2	Jon Reiss (P), Babelgum (D)	2010
Hotel Chevalier	Fox Searchlight (D)	2007
Iraq for Sale	Brave New Films (P/D)	2006
Level 26: Dark Prophecy	Dare to Pass (P/D), Penguin Group (P/D)	2010
Level 26: The Dark Origins	Dare to Pass (P/D), Penguin Group (P/D)	2009
Lumo	The Goma Project (P/D)	2007
Mega Shark Versus Crocosaurus	The Asylum (P/D)	2010
Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus	The Asylum (P/D)	2009
Purple Violets	iTunes (D)	2007
Rage	Adventure Pictures (P), Vox3 Films (P), Liberation Entertainment (D)	2009
Rethink Afghanistan	Brave New Films (P/D)	2009
Robbin' in Da Hood	Maverick Entertainment (P/D)	2009
Slacker Uprising	Dog Eat Dog Films, (P) Brave New Films (D), The Weinstein Company (D)	2007
The Least of These	SnagFilms (D)	2009
The Outbreak	SilkTricky (P/D)	2008
The Princess of Nebraska	Magnolia Pictures (D)	2007
Transmorphers	The Asylum (P/D)	2007

## Appendix Item 9: IMDb Case Study Films

List of films that contributed to the dataset (alphabetical order)		
<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> (1968, Stanley Kubrick)	<i>Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb</i> (1964, Stanley Kubrick)	<i>Psycho</i> (1960, Alfred Hitchcock)
<i>A Women Under the Influence</i> (1974, John Cassavetes)	<i>Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind</i> (2004, Michel Gondry)	<i>Pulp Fiction</i> (1994, Quentin Tarantino)
<i>Amadeus</i> (1984, Milos Forman)	<i>Fargo</i> (1996, Joel and Ethan Coen)	<i>Requiem for a Dream</i> (2000, Darren Aronofsky)
<i>American Beauty</i> (1999, Sam Mendes)	<i>Hotel Rwanda</i> (2004, Terry George)	<i>Reservoir Dogs</i> (1992, Quentin Tarantino)
<i>American History X</i> (1998, Tony Kaye)	<i>Kill Bill: Vol 1</i> (2003, Quentin Tarantino)	<i>Se7en</i> (1995, David Fincher)
<i>Apocalypse Now</i> (1979, Francis Ford Coppola)	<i>Magnolia</i> (1999, Paul Thomas Anderson)	<i>Sling Blade</i> (1996, Billy Bob Thornton)
<i>Before Sunset</i> (2004, Richard Linklater)	<i>Memento</i> (2000, Christopher Nolan)	<i>The Big Lebowski</i> (1998, Joel and Ethan Coen)
<i>Crash</i> (2004, Paul Haggis)	<i>Mulholland Drive</i> (2001, David Lynch)	<i>The Graduate</i> (1967, Mike Nichols)
<i>Crimes and Misdemeanours</i> (1989, Woody Allen)	<i>One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest</i> (1975, Milos Forman)	<i>The Killing</i> (1956, Stanley Kubrick)
<i>Dances with Wolves</i> (1994, Kevin Costner)	<i>Papillion</i> (1973, Franklin J. Shaffner)	<i>The Straight Story</i> (1999, David Lynch)
<i>Dawn of the Dead</i> (1978, George A. Romero)	<i>Paths of Glory</i> (1957, Stanley Kubrick)	<i>The Usual Suspects</i> (1995, Bryan Singer)
<i>Donnie Darko</i> (2001, Richard Kelly)	<i>Platoon</i> (1986, Oliver Stone)	

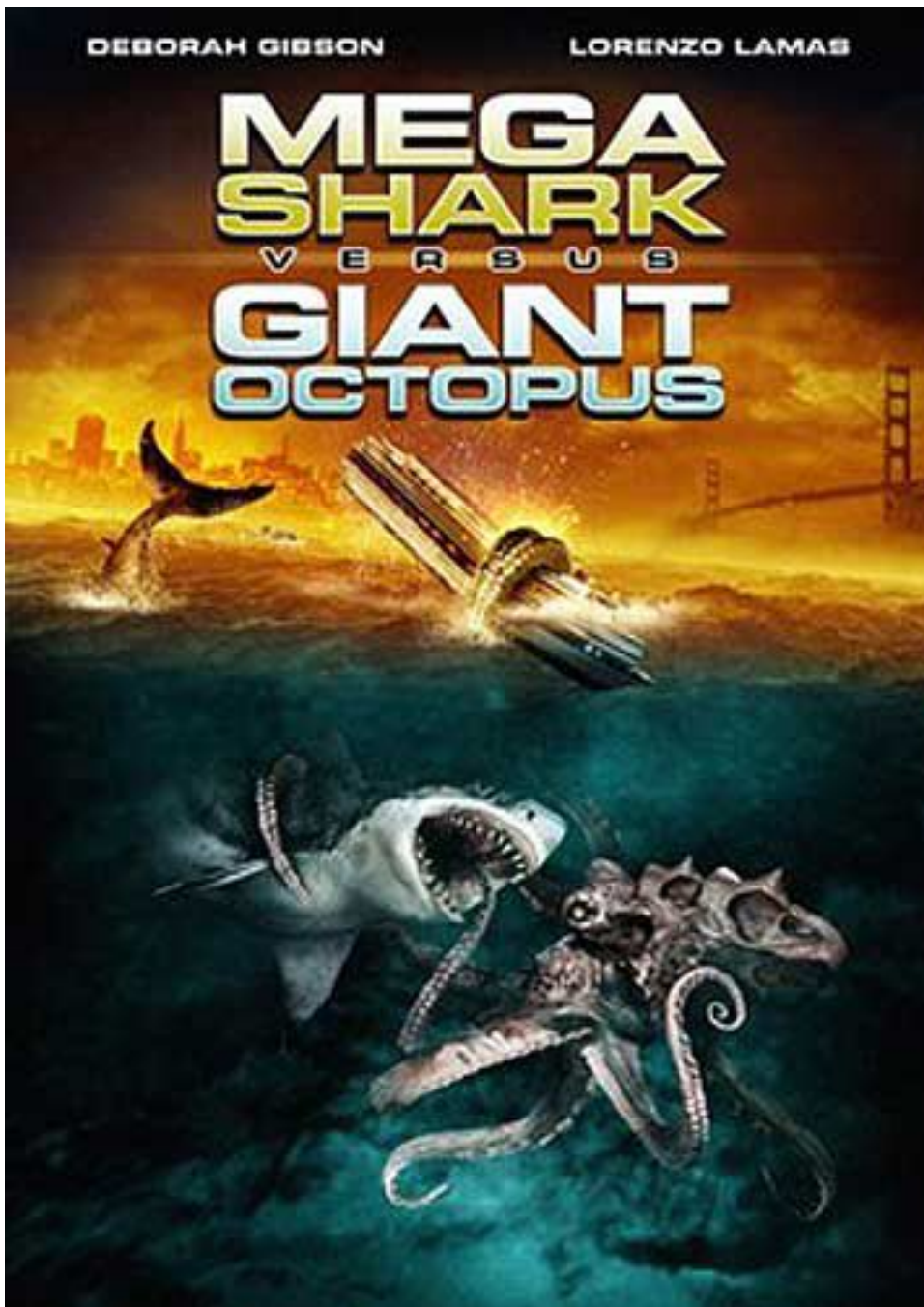
**Appendix Item 10: IMDb Top 50 Independent Chart User Locations (from results)**

<b>United States</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Mexico</b>	<b>Sweden</b>
192 / 55%	33 / 9%	28 / 8%	18 / 5%	4 / 1%	4 / 1%	4 / 1%	3 / Less than 1%
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Spain</b>
3 / Less than 1%	2 / Less than 1%	2 / Less than 1%	2 / Less than 1%	2 / Less than 1%	2 / Less than 1%	2 / Less than 1%	2 / Less than 1%
<b>Russia</b>	<b>Israel</b>	<b>Switzerland</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>Turkey</b>	<b>Norway</b>	<b>South Korea</b>
1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%
<b>France</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	<b>Romania</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Argentina</b>	<b>Armenia</b>	<b>Austria</b>
1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%	1 / Less than 1%
<b>Unknown Location</b>	<b>Total</b>						
31 / 9%	350 users						

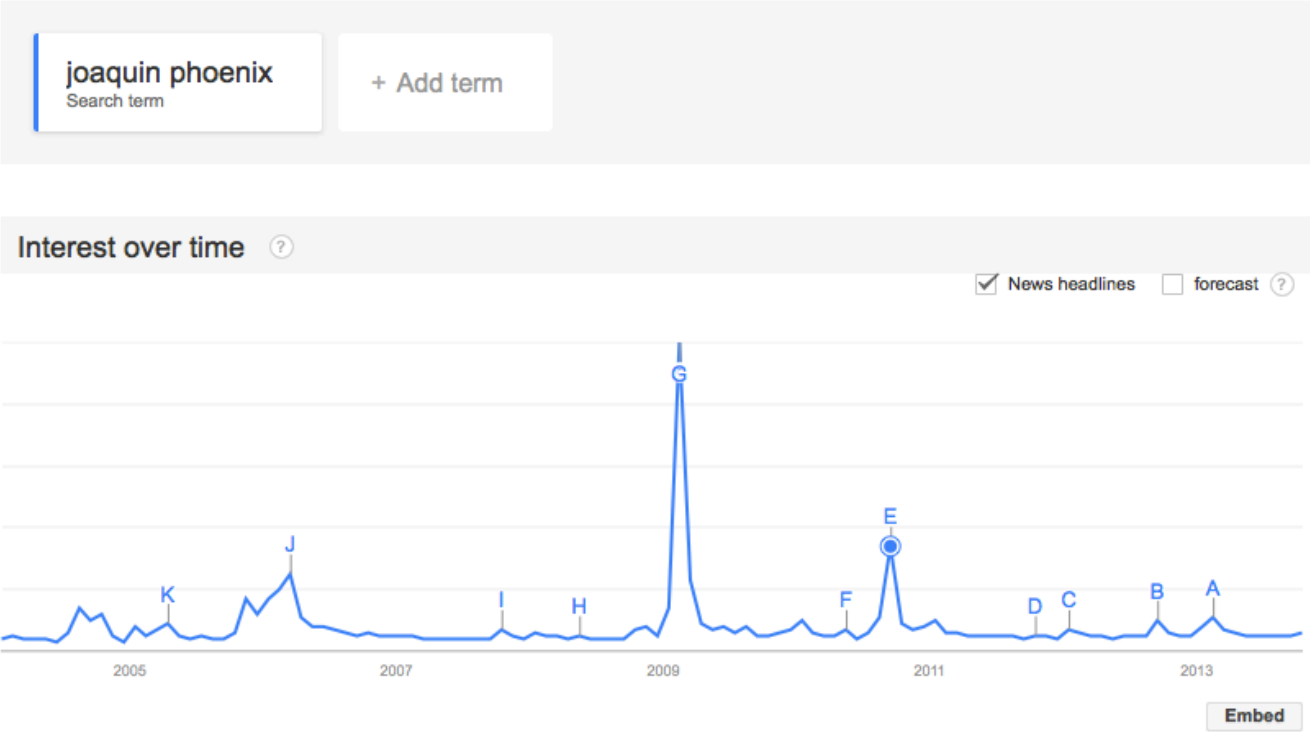
Appendix Item 11 - Defiance (2008) Poster



Appendix Item 12 – *Mega Shark Versus Giant Octopus* (Perez, 2009)  
Poster

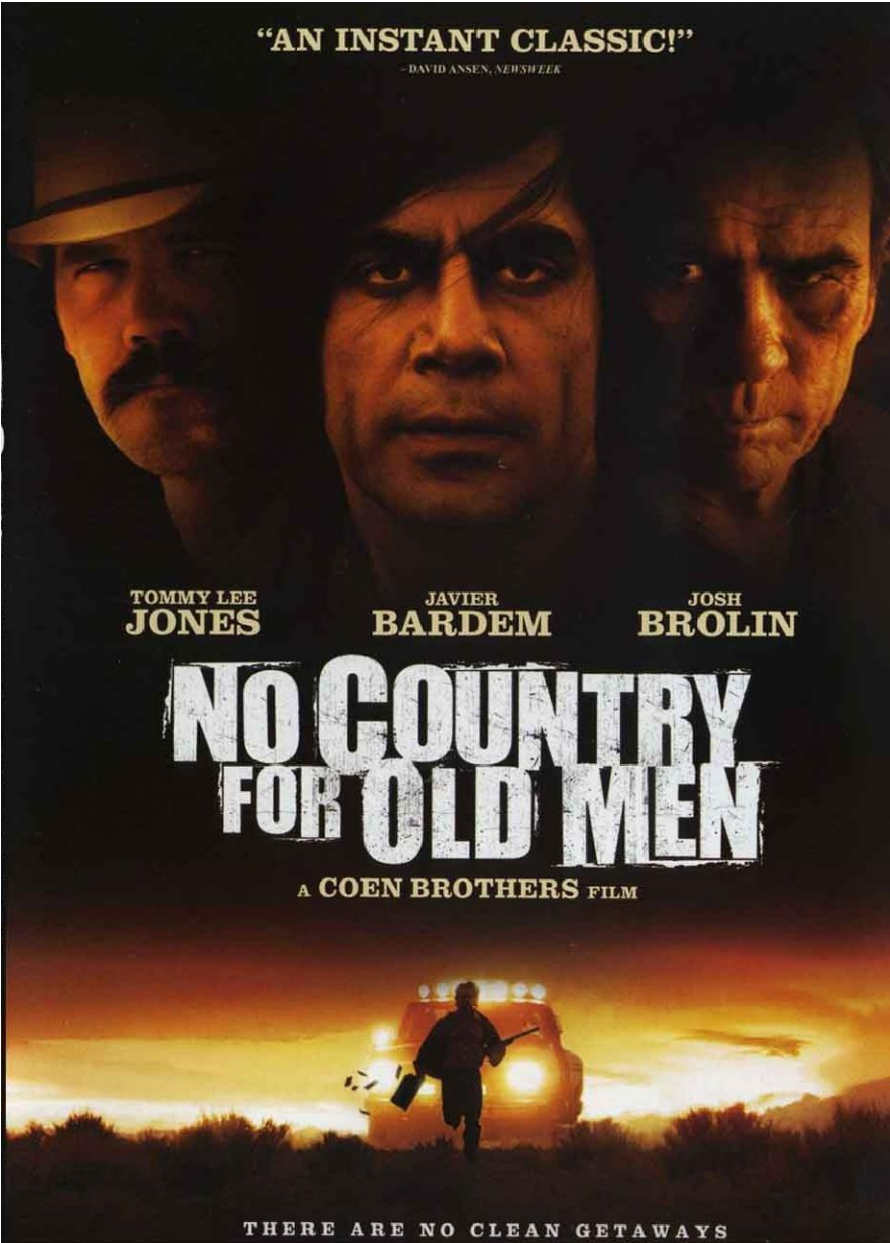


Appendix Item 13 – Google searches for Joaquin Phoenix





Appendix Item 14- No Country For Old Men (Coen and Coen, 2007) Poster



Appendix Item 15 – The Outbreak Map



