

Origins, Funding and Accessibility in an Evolving Movie Culture - The Indie Film, Elements of the Misconstrued and Its Resurrection



By Louis Holder

What defines '*Indie Film*' or '*The Indie Film*'

Introduction

Before I begin, I'd like to make it clear that this is an expansive topic - which stretches far beyond any reasonable measure this Presentation can cover. I intend to narrow down my choices as I research into the broadness of this area first although there are a few favourable avenues I'd like to investigate which include:

- Systematic/Political/Institutional Factors - Studio Conglomeration System, rise of the American Minor Studios in the 80s and 90s.
- Online Content Generation (Vimeo Creators etc)

All of these avenues are prospective ways I could narrow my research to act as the spine of my main criticism of 'indie film' as a way of stating an 'independent film' but is used in a genre sense and how both have evolved. Even posing the question; has 'independent film' ever existed?

What defines 'Indie Film'

There are Indie Films and there is Indie Film.

Indie Films - Coming-of-age films, sweeping romantic perspectives of American/European frontiers, towns, lifestyles, and the people, loose plot, usually a drama (but can also be an Action, Horror, and the common one - Romantic/Comedy, The term is easy to manipulate into any genre to form a hybrid but harder to contextualise when considering the values therein (i.e studio involvement, production value, genre value - is it still 'small-town, big-heart'..

Indie Film - when phrased like this - short for independent film. What is the independent film landscape of today and how has it been shaped through Film History? Large effectors include the rise of Home Video/VHS markets - democratising the medium to people with access to lower budgets + Crowdfunding / HD Video

Thinking of the superficial values that come with these terms... Ultimately, Distributors (who represent different audience niches/mass markets), who in turn represent Audiences, care about Superficiality

The Factors in Defining 'Indie Film'

The key thing to note about 'Indie Film', what makes it indie is a reflection on the Society at the time. It is a contemporary alternative to what is considered to be mainstream/commercial (i.e Transformers, Fast & The Furious, Marvel Films etc.. Indie Film is also a genre in itself; here the aim is not to confuse it as such and treat this as 'Independent Film':

- Audience
- Genre
- How it came to production/fruition
- Themes/Storyline > Production Value/Scale

All of these elements informed by a variety of systematic, political and institutional factors too!

Where is the Grey Zone?

A low-budget, independent film becomes commercially successful - does it count as an indie film? (In most cases it does, the 'genre' part of it being defined as 'indie' takes precedence over what has come of the film). Genres can't also be re-thought of and changed during a title's theatrical window, it just wouldn't make sense and distributors / cinema chains wouldn't. Think **Boyhood** (2014, *Richard Linklater*), **Primer** (2004, *Shane Carruth*)

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Is the reaction wide-spread, do many people see the film, is it distributed wide/limited/selective (i.e repertory, specialist cinemas / contemporary screening venues).

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Indie Film... A Brief History

- There are many arguable roots to the very beginning of 'Indie Film', it can be argued as far back as the invention of the cinematic form. The social and cultural seismic divide between commercial filmmaking and independent filmmaking which had the most notable impact (for the latter) was at the start of the 1970s during the New Hollywood Movement.
- Francis Ford Coppola, makes his directorial debut with *The Rain People* (1969), produced through his own company, American Zoetrope. George Lucas makes his debut with *THX 1138* (1971)
- These filmmakers then move onto more commercial films, and thus escape the relevance of the discussion here.
- New Hollywood Generation ends abruptly, it's considered a revived incarnation of the studio system. *Taxi Driver*, a seemingly independent film, was a studio film - for instance.
- Outside Hollywood; new depictions of realistic sex and violence were realised, many peers of those in the New Hollywood Movement began to take different approaches i.e David Lynch..
- Alongside this movement, Bergman and Fellini are making films which begin to shape (European) Art House Cinema.
- 1985 - Actor Robert Redford founded the Sundance Film Festival, spawns a whole new generation of filmmaking talent including Tarantino, Paul Thomas Anderson, Steven Soderberg etc etc...

Indie Film... A Brief History

- 1990s saw the rise of successful independent films.
- Acquisitions of smaller studios by 'conglomerate Hollywood' (a plan to take over the independent film industry and at the same time start independent studios of their own - once again no true independence here).
 - Sony Pictures Classics
 - Fox Searchlight Pictures
 - Paramount Vantage
 - Focus Features
 - Warner Independent Pictures

By early 2000s, Hollywood was producing three different kinds of film

1. Big Budget Blockbusters
2. Art Films (speciality films, and niche market films included too produced by conglomerate-owned indies... something which still occurs today).
3. Genre and Speciality Films coming from true indie studios and producers (also films which ended up on the Midnight Movie / 'Cult Movie' Circuit

How Independent Filmmaking works today?

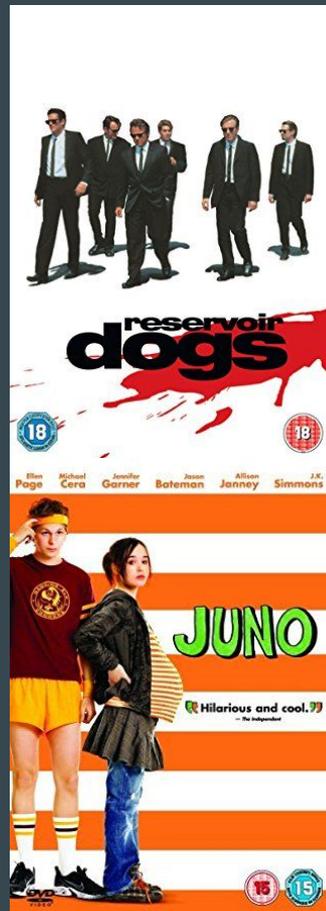
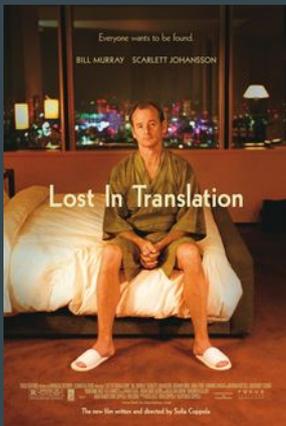
Independent Filmmaking of today is characterised by a number of different factors. There are two main levels of Independent Filmmaking we'll characterise here:

- Independent Films (which are still released by a minor studio, so it is therefore dependent), a lot of major/minor studios own production companies branded as 'independent' to distribute 'indie' films, whatever hybrid the genre finds it. - this is NOT independent. For the sake of the argument; we'll characterize this as a theoretical indie film.
- Crowdfunded Films (films which are, by definition, in the hands of the people, the public, thereby democratising the chain of production and distribution completely - and end-to-end solution to the traditional process). These are *truly* independent. The same can be said for Student Films and information videos

Examples of Indie Films

Made by a Studio

- Lost In Translation (2003),
 - Prod Company: American Zoetrope,
 - Distributed by Focus Features (part of Comcast = Universal)
- Reservoir Dogs (1992),
 - Prod Company: Live America Inc.
 - Distributed by Miramax Films
- The Blair Witch Project (1999)
 - Prod Company: Haxan Films
 - Distributed by Artisan Entertainment (at the time one of the largest mini-majors until it was acquired and absorbed into LionsGate Ent.)
- Juno (2007)
 - Prod Company: Mandate Pictures
 - Distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures (the 'indie' child of 21st Century Fox)



The Lobster

Moonlight

I Am Not Your Negro

Frank

A24

Magnolia Pictures

Amy

Ex Machina

Under The Skin

Tangerine

Nymphomaniac

“New, Hip Distributors Are Targeting Millennial Tastemakers with Bold Films”

Eric Kohn, Indiewire

The Last Five Years

It Follows

The Silent Storm

Moon

RADiUS

...and then they got bought by TWC

Taking Liberties

Neon Films

Only God Forgives

Citizenfour

Quote

“Hollywood” as both fantasy and material reality dominated the world of American entertainment for virtually the entire twentieth century. But from very early in the history of the industry, there were challenges to the Hollywood hegemony, with various attempts to create alternative sites of movie-making outside of the big studios.

independent film is defined—to varying degrees and in varying ways—as the antithesis of a Hollywood studio film. The contrast can be seen in a variety of relatively objective indicators. Where studio films are very expensive, independent films are made on relatively low budgets; where studio films are in the business of “entertainment,” independent films often set out to challenge their viewers with relatively difficult subject matter or techniques or both; where Hollywood films generally eschew taking sides on political issues, independent films are often explicitly political and critical;

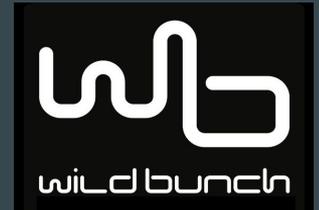
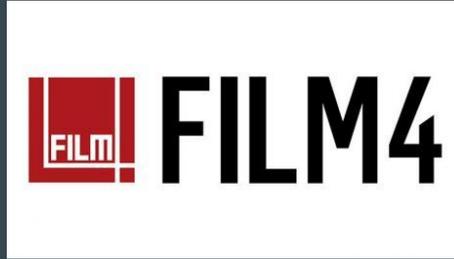
it must be understood that there is a spectrum of what is seen as an independent film, with a more Hollywood-y end of the spectrum and a more radically avant-garde and experimental end.

From the point of view of the indie world, independent films are made from passion, from the filmmaker’s intense personal commitment (*personal* is another keyword here) to tell a particular story in a particular way. Passion is the opposite of a commercial sensibility; the heat of passion is opposed to the coldness of cash. Passion is also the opposite of a mechanical filmmaking sensibility; a film emerges from the filmmaker’s personal vision, as opposed to (in the worst case) the formulas and franchises and mechanically stamped out “cookie cutter” movies of Hollywood.

- Research Article: Against Hollywood: American Independent Film as a Critical Cultural Movement
- Sherry B. ORTNER
- Lecturer: University of California, Los Angeles

Note: There's going to be some contention here (are the following really truly independent / represent the wholesome image of 'indie' film today?...

The Independent Studios of The Modern Era (Today!)



The Illusory 'Independent' Distributor (when in fact it's a major studio behind it).



Owned by Comcast
(Universal...)
Brokeback Mountain,
Hanna, Mr. Turner,
Gosford Park, Nocturnal
Animals, Eternal Sunshine
of the Spotless Mind



Owned by 21st Century Fox...
*Birdman, Little Miss Sunshine, The
Tree of Life, The Grand Budapest
Hotel, Brooklyn, Three Billboards
Outside Ebbing Missouri*

Owned by Sony Corp...
*Call Me By Your Name, Elle, The
Diary of a Teenage Girl, Whiplash,
Kill Your Darlings*

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

PARAMOUNT
VANTAGE

Owned by Paramount Pictures...
(defunct).
The Gift (2001), The Virgin
Suicides, No Country for Old Men
(with Par. Classics), There Will Be
Blood (with Par. Classics)

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is a way of raising finance by asking a large number of people each for a small amount of money.

Until recently, financing a business, project or venture involved asking a few people for large sums of money. Crowdfunding switches this idea around, using the internet to talk to thousands – if not millions – of potential funders.

Typically, those seeking funds will set up a profile of their project on a website such as those run by our members. They can then use social media, alongside traditional networks of friends, family and work acquaintances, to raise money. There are three different types of crowdfunding:

Donation

Debt

Equity

Donation or “Reward” Crowdfunding

People invest simply because they believe in the cause. Rewards can be offered (often called reward crowdfunding), such as acknowledgements on an album cover, tickets to an event, regular news updates, free gifts and so on. Returns are considered intangible. Donors have a social or personal motivation for putting their money in and expect nothing back, except perhaps to feel good about helping the project.

Debt Crowdfunding

Investors receive their money back with interest. Also called peer-to-peer (p2p) lending, it allows for the lending of money while bypassing traditional banks. Returns are financial, but investors also have the benefit of having contributed to the success of an idea they believe in. In the case of microfinance, where very small sums of money are lent to the very poor, most often in developing countries, no interest is paid on the loan and the lender is rewarded by doing social good.

Equity Crowdfunding

People invest in an opportunity in exchange for equity. Money is exchanged for a shares, or a small stake in the business, project or venture. As with other types of shares, apart from community shares, if it is successful the value goes up. If not, the value goes down.

Forget Indiegogo & Kickstarter...

New Crowdfunding Methods...
LiveTree Adept.

LiveTree

- Came into the Public Eye in 2017.
- Revolutionary New Vision for the Film and TV Industry that uses blockchain technology to give power back to creators and viewers.
- Recent, strongly considered agitator of the Film & TV Industry; supported by the BFI - the first publicly recognised body in the UK to represent Film in this way. Followed by Film London and The Screen Arts Institute.
- Its purpose is to reach audience via a game-changing, decentralised distribution model that changes how content is shared and consumed.

Main Idea:

- Enables end-to-end creation, funding and distribution.
- Breaks down these traditional methods.
- LiveTree has their own distribution platform to play films - Blossom
- System can be used to find Cast/Crew, every referral (or 'share') of the
- Project enables each contributor to also earn a portion of the 'seed'
- Seed is a new example of cryptocurrency...

 **LIVETREE ADEPT™**
Own the future of entertainment

Advanced Decentralized Entertainment Platform for Transparent distribution

Reimagine film,
TV and content
creation,
funding and
distribution

PRODUCTION
Finding actors, crew and contracting a team is complex and costly



Film, TV and content supplier and talent contact database

CREATION

ADEPT

1st

First platform to build contracts for team

CONTENT CREATION

Automates contracts & connects extended network, all fees paid in our digital token - LiveTree Seed.



FINANCING
Professional financing is unstructured and crowdfunding leaves all the marketing to the project owner



KICKSTARTER

Game-changing funding where people pledge money for rewards



INDIEGOGO

Indiegogo adds equity crowdfunding

FUNDING

ADEPT

1st

First to combine rewards, IP, shares future sales

FUNDING

Cheaper, smarter and structures to build a fanbase who own what they watch and earn Seed from sharing it.



DISTRIBUTION
Beginners struggle to market their projects and build a slate. Professionals face inefficient sales processes and restricted access



World's first video sharing platform based on ad-revenues

NETFLIX

Netflix revolutionizes subscription-based film and TV

BLOSSOM

ADEPT

1st

First to provide pre-pay-to-view model combines with subscription, ads and pay-per-view.

BLOSSOM

Automates contracts & connects extended network, all fees paid in our digital token - LiveTree Seed.



What does the future of 'Indie Film' hold?