

INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE REGIONAL FILM LANDSCAPE

by

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Thousands of films are produced every year in the United States, and only a fraction of these is made by mainstream Hollywood film studios. Independent filmmakers working in regional locations produce the majority of these films, retaining financial, creative and distribution control and working with locally-based cast and crew members. This film activity must be acknowledged in order to fully understand the American film industry. This study examines regional independent filmmaking through case studies of two film communities: Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington. Using political economy of communication as the primary theoretical foundation, this study focuses on the infrastructure (systems, policies, resources and practices) that supports and/or limits the production and distribution of independent films. The research utilizes extensive document analysis of historical materials and contemporary documents produced by organizations and individuals, as well as a survey of 60 film professionals and interviews with over 40 film professionals. A central challenge to independent filmmaking is the term “independent,” which has been contested by film professionals and scholars; therefore, this study analyzes and offers a new definition of “independent filmmaking.”

The history of filmmaking activity in Portland and Seattle is presented, as well as an extensive discussion of the contemporary landscape of regional independent filmmaking in these two communities.

The study finds that there are a multitude of contradictions pertaining to financing, distribution, labor and myths of independent filmmaking. These contradictions present a range of opportunities and challenges that often simultaneously conflict with each other. The filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle have notable networks of support, including professional and educational organizations, film festivals, government initiatives and a few locally-operated distributors. However, filmmakers in both cities also share challenges in financing, distribution and labor. The study argues that regional independent filmmaking has made a dynamic and influential contribution to the American film industry and cultural production but has been under-explored in academic scholarship. The research also points to the need to examine and understand the contradictions of independent filmmaking to improve the circumstances and infrastructure that support regional independent filmmaking.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There's a story that Kelley Baker likes to tell. Baker, based in Portland, Oregon, has had a successful career as a sound editor for Hollywood studio films, working with the likes of Gus Van Sant, Danny Elfman, Brian Grazer and Todd Haynes.¹ He was the supervising sound editor and sound designer for Universal Pictures' 1998 remake of *Psycho*, a film that performed poorly at the box office and in which critics struggled to find some redeeming value. Baker himself thought that a *Psycho* remake was a bad idea. But he put in the work, got paid, and funneled that money into his first solo feature, *Birddog*, which cost \$150,000.

Kelley Baker calls himself the Angry Filmmaker. He ended up losing his house to the IRS after making *Birddog*, because he sank his personal assets into financing the film and the film never earned back his investment. Although the financing and production decisions were his own to make, he was following a studio model of filmmaking: he filmed *Birddog* on 35mm, the conventional Hollywood film format and the most expensive way to shoot a film. But his film had a major flaw, according to potential distributors: it didn't have any stars. "Distributors liked the film," Baker said, "but there was nobody famous. So at the end of the day, I'm left with these huge bills and no way to

¹ Gus Van Sant has directed over 15 feature films, including *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989), *Good Will Hunting* (1997) and *Milk* (2008). Danny Elfman has composed music for countless films, including *Mission: Impossible* (1996), *Good Will Hunting* (1997), and *Spider-Man* (2002). Brian Grazer produced *Apollo 13* (1995), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001), and *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), among other films. Some of Todd Haynes's films include *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), *Far from Heaven* (2002), and *I'm Not There* (2007).

pay them” (Russell, 2007). The policies of the mainstream Hollywood film industry dictated the terms for which many distributors would (or wouldn’t) take risks, which made Baker angry – hence, his nickname.

Instead of returning to Hollywood to make more money to repay his debts, however, Baker continued to make his own films. The Angry Filmmaker also took his anger on the road, self-distributing his films, teaching filmmaking workshops around the country, and writing a book about how to make no-budget films. He has stayed true to his ideals of independent filmmaking, free from personal and professional compromise. He is a genuine modern-day huckster, devoted to selling his persona as the Angry Filmmaker as a brand. As a result, he is one of the most well-known and highly respected filmmakers in the Pacific Northwest and in independent film circles around the country.

Kelley Baker is a quintessential example of the passion and dedication that independent filmmaking can inspire. His experiences also mirror many of the interactions between the Hollywood and independent film industries, in which one dominates the other to suppress and squash creativity, competition, and vitality. Yet independent filmmakers continue to spring up, ready to make another film at whatever the cost, because, as Baker (2009) says, “I have to! I have stories I have to tell and I won’t be satisfied until my movie is done, and out” (p. xx).

This project is an examination of independent filmmaking that happens outside of the Hollywood core, focusing on the activity in two cities in the Pacific Northwest. Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, are homes to thriving film communities that have established some level of infrastructure to support regional filmmaking. This study

probes the nature of this infrastructure to understand how regional filmmaking is supported and/or challenged. It is a critical analysis of the mechanisms of the film industry that structure its operations, infrastructure, policies, participants, and content; political economy of communication is used as a lens through which to conduct this analysis.

Definition of Terms

“Film” is defined in this study as a stand-alone work of audiovisual entertainment with the following characteristics: it is conceived by a filmmaker(s) or filmmaking organization (such as a studio); it is not episodic (meaning, it is not a television series or set of webisodes); and it may be exhibited in any number of outlets (including theaters, television, online, home video, private venues, etc.). In this study, a film can be short or feature-length; documentary, narrative or experimental; and live-action or animation. In the current technological environment, films have all but lost their connection to actual film (i.e., 8mm, 16mm, and 35mm), as many projects are shot on digital formats, and thus, a “film” is not necessarily associated with the actual format of its creation. Indeed, the boundaries surrounding what may be counted as a film are increasingly blurred, particularly as formats and technologies overlap.

“Independent filmmaking” as a term has been contested in both the literature and in everyday usage by filmmakers themselves, and has acquired a myriad of definitions depending on who uses the phrase and for what purpose. The same is true for “regional filmmaking.” “Independent filmmaking,” for example, can mean an aesthetic film style, a genre, a financing model, or filmmaking philosophy. Similarly, “regional filmmaking”

might indicate aesthetics, the origin of creative or financing resources, story setting, or production location.

In this study, an ideal independent film is defined as a film over which the filmmaker has full creative and distribution control, investors have no involvement with the film outside of providing financing, and the filmmaker undergoes substantial risk to produce and distribute the film (this definition is explored further in Chapter IV). I refer to “filmmaking” as filmmaking at any stage of production or distribution. Many film professionals and film scholars consider filmmaking to apply only to production, but this study asserts that the concept of filmmaking as a process must include both production and distribution when independent filmmakers are involved. Independent filmmakers’ involvement with their films often do not cease when a film reaches the distribution stage. Indeed, a crucial phase in independent filmmaking happens during distribution. Therefore, because the issue of distribution control is central to this study’s definition of the ideal independent film, we must consider distribution as a vital part of the process of filmmaking.

Regional filmmaking is that which engages with the filmmaking community located in a given region (usually defined geographically). It can be any one of three types of film production: indigenous productions, out-of-state productions, or international productions. The geographic designation indicates the location of a production’s key creative and financial decisions; an indigenous production’s key creative and financial decisions tend to happen locally, an out-of-state’s decisions happen elsewhere (usually Hollywood), and an international’s decisions happen outside of the U.S. The concept of “regional” is discussed further in Chapter II.

Therefore, regional independent filmmaking is the practice of filmmaking that occurs in a regional location, using regional cast and crew, and whose financial, distribution and creative control rests with the individual filmmaker or small-scale and locally operated production company, not a multinational media corporation. This is not to say, however, that all decisions and control pertaining to independent film exist in a vacuum; regional independent filmmakers participate in an industry that operates regionally, nationally and internationally, and few filmmakers can exist without support or involvement from elsewhere.

Because these filmmakers participate in this broader industry, we must also define the term “industry.” Many organizations and agencies in the U.S. rely on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to hierarchically categorize various economic sectors and industries.² Motion Picture and Video Production is defined thusly: “This industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in producing, or producing and distributing motion pictures, videos, television programs, or television commercials” (NAICS, 2008a). Independent or freelance film workers are categorized in a separate economic sector and are defined thusly:

This industry comprises independent (i.e., freelance) individuals primarily engaged in performing in artistic productions, in creating artistic and cultural

² The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is a system used by the United States government to gather statistical information about various areas of the economy. Each industry is hierarchically categorized with a six-digit number that designates its economic sector (the first two digits), subsector (the third digit), industry group (the fourth digit), NAICS industry (the fifth digit), and national industry (the sixth digit). Most of the film industry, including Motion Picture and Video Production is categorized under the “Information” economic sector (economic sector 51), although the category of Independent (freelance) Artists, Writers and Performers resides under “Arts, Entertainment and Recreation” (economic sector 71). According to the website for NAICS (2010), “NAICS categories do not distinguish between small and large business, or between for-profit and non-profit.” See Appendix B for a list of NAICS industry segments related to the motion picture industry.

works or productions, or in providing technical expertise necessary for these productions (NAICS, 2008b).

“Industry” is a term that can refer to the industry at its broadest (which encompasses all activities at the national and even international level), but it can also refer to regional and local activities. The Governor’s Office of Film and Television in Oregon commissioned a report, published in 2008, to assess the economic impact of the Oregon film and video industry, which was understood as the following:

The film and video industry is defined as all of the film and video production done by groups, firms, and self-employed individuals in Oregon for entertainment, news, advertising, and educational programming. This includes production spending and filming in Oregon by non-resident firms and individuals (ECONorthwest, 2008, p. 4).

This report further divided this regional industry into three segments: indigenous film and video, television and cable broadcasting, and out-of-state film and video productions.

Therefore, for this study, “industry” can refer to multiple levels of activity, from international and national to regional and local. Generally speaking, this study will use “American film industry” to indicate the national industry as a whole, “mainstream Hollywood industry” to indicate the dominant American studio system, “independent film industry” to indicate the activity happening outside the dominant studio system, and “regional film industry” to describe the filmmaking activity in a regional location like Portland or Seattle (regardless of whether a production’s origins are indigenous, out-of-state, or international). “Small-scale industry” refers to organizations and companies that

operate at the regional level and that are generally small- to medium-sized for-profit and nonprofit organizations.³

Although my use of the term “industry” connotes economic activity, it is not my intention to suggest that filmmaking activity is solely economic in nature or value, as its cultural importance is just as significant, if not more so. “Film community” is another term used in this study, which describes the collection of organizations and individuals that work within the film industry in a regional location. Regional film community and regional film industry are used in this study somewhat interchangeably.

There are “infrastructures” within the American film industry that impact filmmaking activity. “Infrastructure” is defined in this study as the systems, policies, resources and practices that enable or restrict filmmaking activity. While infrastructure is generally understood to be supportive, in this study, “infrastructures” are both supports *and* challenges to independent filmmaking. There are numerous policies and systems, for example, that present obstacles to independent filmmaking, and there are others that simultaneously help and hinder independent filmmaking.

Independent Filmmaking: A Brief History

Independent filmmaking has always existed outside of, in resistance to, and in conjunction with Hollywood studio filmmaking. The attention afforded to independent filmmakers by Hollywood has alternated between lavish and scant as the major studios assess the value of independent films to their overall financial and creative objectives. In

³ For comparison, it is useful to reference the guidelines set forth by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), which determines that small businesses are independently owned and operated, and are not dominant in their respective industries at the national level. These businesses have, on average, less than \$7 million in annual receipts (SBA, n.d.).

return, many independent filmmakers pay attention to Hollywood studios as prospective employers, financiers, distributors, professional training grounds, and competitors. The complexity of the interactions between independents and Hollywood cannot be reduced to a simple binary wherein one exists completely separate from the other; after all, they are participants in the same industry and they compete for the same audiences, albeit on extremely uneven ground.

For nearly all of its lifetime, Hollywood has dominated the American (and, except in a few instances, the global) film industry. Its vertically and horizontally integrated corporations have long held oligopolistic control over the film industry, utilizing business strategies that favor concentration, conglomeration, homogenization and standardization. Today, the film industry is dominated by six major studios that controlled 96 percent of the box office total in the U.S. and Canada in 2009 (MPAA, 2010c, p. 12), and 82 percent of home video rentals and 85 percent of home video sales in 2007 (Video Business, 2008).⁴ This command over the industry creates a complex and challenging environment in which independent filmmakers operate, as both studios and independents alike compete for the same theater screens, home video shelf space, and audience attention.

Independent filmmakers have historically been characterized as those operating outside the mainstream dominant system, as was the case in the 1910s when the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), a trust of the major film companies also known as the Edison Trust, controlled the majority of film production and exhibition by owning most motion picture technology patents. Independents during this era surreptitiously (and often

⁴ “Home video” is defined here as DVD, Blu-ray discs, and VHS (although VHS is a negligible segment of home video in the late 2000s).

overtly) subverted the monopolistic system by engaging in various strategies such as importing unpatented equipment and other resources from Europe. Many of these independents soon became studio moguls by the mid-1910s, such as William Fox (whose company grew into today's Twentieth Century-Fox), Carl Laemmle (founder of Universal Pictures), and Adolph Zukor (founder of Paramount Pictures).

In 1919, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith and Douglas Fairbanks started United Artists (UA), a studio that produced films independently of the major Hollywood studios. This venture broke away from the machinery of the dominant studios, championing creative freedom, but still relied heavily on Hollywood studios for studio space, cast and crew, and distribution networks (Schatz, 1988, p. 176). UA also soon required additional producers (and their accompanying financial investment) to survive, and began acquiring and distributing independently produced films.

There was some independent filmmaking happening outside of the primary filmmaking centers of New York and Hollywood in the early years of the 20th century. A great deal of this activity, according to Greg Merritt (2000), was generated by groups who did not see their own images and stories onscreen, such as ethnic filmmakers like Jewish director Sidney Goldin and Japanese immigrant Sessue Hayakawa, African American filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux and female filmmakers like Alice Guy-Blaché. The avant-garde film movement that grew in Europe in the 1910s and early 1920s arrived in the United States in the late 1920s with films like *The Life and Death of 9413 – A Hollywood Extra* (dir. Robert Florey, 1927).

Beginning in the golden era of Hollywood (generally recognized as the late 1920s to 1950s), independent filmmakers were primarily those who produced films on their

own, but who contracted with vertically integrated major studios to acquire financing and distribution for those films. Among these independent producers was former Hollywood studio executive David O. Selznick, who founded Selznick International Pictures and produced films like *Gone With the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) and *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940). Walt Disney and Samuel Goldwyn were other major independent film producers who partnered with Hollywood studios to finance and distribute their films.

Poverty Row studios, which were fly-by-night operations producing cheap B westerns, gangster films and other genre pictures, filled another segment of non-studio filmmaking; some of the more well-known Poverty Row studios were Republic, Monogram and Producers Releasing Corporation (PRC) (Hurst, 1979; Tzioumakis, 2006). Republic and Monogram transitioned into producing larger budget films in the mid- to late-1940s, and Poverty Row studio film production began to scale back, soon to be replaced by exploitation filmmakers like Roger Corman and others.

In 1948, the Paramount Decree forced the vertically integrated Hollywood studios to divest their exhibition holdings. The major studios looked for ways to lower operation costs and, as a result, released stars, directors and other employees from their contracts, among other strategies. This move opened the door for increased independent production, as the major studios began partnering with independent producers to fill their release slates. For a short window of time, there were more financing options for independent producers, as banks increased lending to these productions (Wasko, 1982).

In the years after World War Two, the number of independent filmmakers increased thanks to the growing availability of 16mm film cameras. Many of these filmmakers worked almost entirely outside of Hollywood. For example, documentarian

Robert Flaherty financed his films through government and corporate funding; Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1946) was financed by the Standard Oil Company. Kroger Babb made a name for himself with exploitation films like *Mom and Dad* (1945) and *The Prince of Peace* (1949) and he continued producing these types of films, with accompanying road show theatrics, well into the 1950s (Merritt, 2000).

The trend of exploitation defined an influential segment of independent film production in the 1950s and 1960s, as filmmakers like Roger Corman partnered with Samuel Z. Arkoff at American International Pictures to quickly produce movies like *The Fast and the Furious* (1954), *The Day the World Ended* (1956), and *The Wasp Woman* (1959), which appealed to youth audiences flocking to drive-in movie theaters. Other filmmakers continued breaking away from the restrictions of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s and 1960s. Ida Lupino and Collier Young started the Filmmakers studio in 1949, which was credited with producing a number of social issue films like *Never Fear* (1950) and *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953) (although RKO financed and distributed Filmmakers' films) (Donati, 1996). John Cassavetes, an early television actor, alternated between studio work and independent work, and is considered by many to be the founding father of American independent cinema by producing and directing films like *Shadows* (1959) and *Faces* (1968) (Fine, 2005).

Other filmmakers also worked separately from Hollywood, including those who formed part of the underground and experimental film movement that was primarily based in New York. These included Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, and the Kuchar Brothers. Maya Deren (*Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943) and Shirley Clarke (*The Connection*, 1961; *The Cool World*, 1964) were two independent women

filmmakers working in the avant-garde and experimental film traditions (Rabinovitz, 2003).

During the 1960s and onward, many individual filmmakers worked on much more artistically challenging or socially aware works, as part of a movement called New American Cinema, that were often distributed through self-developed theatrical and nontheatrical⁵ networks. Major studios began to recognize the profit potential of cheaply-made and popular films like *Easy Rider* (dir. Dennis Hopper, 1969), and began enlisting independent producers to tap into this market (Berra, 2008).

The late 1970s and early 1980s signaled a sea change in the nature and makeup of independent filmmaking. The timing of this shift is significant, as it accompanied revolutions in technological capabilities: film and video equipment became cheaper and easier to use, which facilitated production for independently operating filmmakers. As well, the rise of home video and cable television allowed for additional distribution outlets for filmmakers. A surge of films, many of which had distinct regional content and aesthetics, captured the attention of studios and critics alike, including *Northern Lights* (dirs. John Hanson and Rob Nilsson, 1978), *Gal Young 'Un* (dir. Victor Nuñez, 1979), and *Heartland* (dir. Richard Pearce, 1979). Individual filmmakers also made their mark, initiating a generation of filmmakers that would soon be recognized by scholars and film aficionados as forefathers of contemporary American independent film; these included Jim Jarmusch (*Stranger than Paradise*, 1984), John Sayles (*The Return of the Secaucus*

⁵ “Theatrical” markets typically refer to commercial cinemas, while “nontheatrical” markets are public exhibition spaces which are not commercial theaters. These can include home video, television (broadcast, cable and satellite), educational institutions, transportation venues (airplanes, ships, trains, buses), hospitals, correctional facilities, military posts, community centers, nonprofit film societies, churches, and so on.

Seven, 1979), and Susan Seidelman (*Smithereens*, 1982). Infrastructures that supported independents were in their infancy, such as the U.S. Film Festival (soon to be known as the Sundance Film Festival; started in 1978, Robert Redford's Sundance Institute soon took it over),⁶ the first branch of the Independent Feature Project in New York, and independent film distributors New Line Cinema⁷ and Miramax.⁸ Home video distributors such as New World Video, Vestron and Orion also grew substantially, providing independent filmmakers with more accessible distribution outlets (Tzioumakis, 2006).

Scholarly and popular attention turned towards independent filmmaking more determinedly in the late 1980s and early 1990s as independent films emerged into the spotlight. Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape* (1989) is often heralded as the forerunner to the indie film movement of the 1990s that saw artistically challenging and social/political filmmaking receive financing and distribution deals, primarily initiated by Hollywood studios looking to counteract declining box office revenue in the wake of a

⁶ Robert Redford started the non-profit Sundance Institute in 1981 as an annual conference to provide independent filmmakers with professional and artistic development programs. The Sundance Institute took over the financially ailing U.S. Film Festival in 1985, using it as a platform to integrate distribution and marketing into its programs for independent filmmakers.

⁷ New Line Cinema started in 1967 as a distributor of art house and foreign films to colleges around the U.S., expanding into production in 1976. In 1984, it produced and released the first film in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise. Six years later, New Line released *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), which was, at the time, the most profitable independent film ever made. In 1993, the Turner Broadcasting System acquired New Line, and both companies eventually became part of Time Warner, the largest media conglomerate in the world.

⁸ Brothers Harvey and Bob Weinstein started Miramax in 1979 as an independent film distribution company. The company quickly became known for bringing foreign films to American audiences, and the Weinsteins moved into film production as well. The company's reputation in the independent film world exploded in 1989 when it paid a \$1 million advance for independent filmmaker Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape*. Over the next few years, Miramax continued to build its independent film portfolio with *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1989), *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), and *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992), and racked up Academy Award nominations to secure its reputation. The Walt Disney Company acquired Miramax in 1993, and Miramax grew to dominate the "Indiewood" scene. The Weinstein brothers left their own company in 2005 to start another film production and distribution outfit, The Weinstein Company. Miramax's operations were reduced in 2009 and eliminated altogether in 2010.

boom in home video. Hollywood studios, themselves owned by major media conglomerates, bought independent distributors (Disney acquired Miramax and Turner Broadcasting, soon to be acquired by Time Warner, bought New Line Cinema) or started their own “indie” divisions in order to cash in on this burgeoning market. These divisions became known as “Indiewood.” With Cinderella stories like *The Blair Witch Project* (dirs. Daniel Myrick and Eduard Sanchez, 1999), which earned 2,500 times its original budget at the box office, filmmakers and financiers alike flocked to independent filmmaking for what many considered a get-rich-quick scheme. However, the myth of independent filmmaking began to catch up with the reality, and very few films actually produced their expected profit margin. Hollywood studios were slow to recognize this deficiency, as it was only in the late 2000s that they began to downsize or close their “indie” divisions and refunnel that money back into larger studio pictures. As well, hedge funds and venture capitalists, once reliable funding sources for independent filmmakers, dried up with the economic recession that began in 2007.

Independent filmmaking has continued despite the tepid response from Hollywood studios and many former financiers, as independent filmmakers struggle to produce and distribute their films within an often-contradictory infrastructure that purports to encourage their work yet that, in many cases, manages to contribute to Hollywood’s dominance. While the scope of independent films is hard to enumerate, new films are registered on the online movie compendium, Internet Movie Database, at a rate of over 9,500 per year. This figure includes studio films and some foreign films, but the overwhelming majority of them can be assumed to be independent films. This indicates

that independent film production, despite its challenges, is hugely prolific and contributes in a significant way to the fabric of American filmmaking.

Much of this activity happens outside the major independent filmmaking centers of Los Angeles/Hollywood and New York City, in regional – usually urban – areas around the country. While regional filmmaking has always existed to a certain extent, it has grown substantially in the last twenty or thirty years, obviously mirroring the overall growth of independent filmmaking. Technological developments (especially cheaper high-end cameras, digital editing equipment, and the Internet) has facilitated this expansion in production and distribution. Other infrastructure has also substantially developed in that time, including film schools, professional organizations, film societies and cinemathèques, and film festivals. Other regional infrastructural components include state and local government initiatives, designed to attract and sustain film production as mechanisms to boost local economies. These initiatives are typically in the form of tax incentives and reduced permitting fees. While the organizations that administer these programs support local independent filmmaking, they also enthusiastically work with productions that originate from mainstream Hollywood studios, which involve more money and thus bring more positive economic impact to a given region than independent projects.

The filmmaking communities in Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, are active and relatively well-established, with numerous companies and organizations that provide or facilitate education and training, financing, production, and professional services like legal support, accounting and marketing. There are also companies and organizations that offer some distribution and exhibition opportunities, although these are

limited because these segments of the film industry are generally tightly controlled by major media conglomerates (even more so than the production segment).

Many filmmakers who work in regional areas like Seattle and Portland have been or are currently involved with Hollywood studios. Working in Hollywood and tapping into its corresponding networks are often regarded as the pinnacle of a professional filmmaking career, and involvement therein nearly guarantees a certain level of validation with audiences and regional film communities. Gus Van Sant and Todd Haynes, both of whom live in Portland, are two of the city's most well-respected and well-known filmmakers, in part because they have made films for Hollywood studios in addition to their own independently produced films. Filmmakers Lynn Shelton, David Russo and Robinson Devor have become near-household names in Seattle because of their successes over the past few years at the Sundance Film Festival, an institution known for delivering independent films to Hollywood distributors.

Efforts to entice Hollywood productions have raised the profile of the filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle, as these cities are home to attractive tax incentive packages and skilled film crews, thus providing cheap filming locations for Hollywood films (a practice known as “runaway production”). Although tax incentives are a relatively new phenomenon (since 2003 in Oregon and 2006 in Washington), state and local governments have long operated small-scale bureaus charged with the task of luring Hollywood productions to the state. For example, Seattle and surrounding areas hosted *It Happened at the World's Fair* (dir. Norman Taurog) in 1963, *Sleepless in Seattle* (dir. Nora Ephron) in 1993 and *The Ring* (dir. Gore Verbinski) in 2001. *Five Easy Pieces* (dir.

Bob Rafelson, 1970), *Mr. Holland's Opus* (dir. Stephen Herek, 1995), and *Twilight* (dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 2008) were all filmed in the Portland area.

In addition to these high-profile cases, Portland and Seattle also have vibrant independent filmmaking communities that operate outside the mainstream Hollywood studio system. For example, Portlanders Kelley Baker and Mike Shiley both self-distribute their work, traveling all over the U.S. and abroad to screen their films. Matt Wilkins, from Seattle, has received numerous state and local arts grants to fund his films. These individuals, working alone or with organizations and other infrastructural support, sustain the local industry by initiating productions creatively and financially, an activity that in turn creates local jobs and, more importantly, contributes to the diversity of voices in American cultural production.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the landscape of regional independent filmmaking through an examination of the infrastructure and conditions that impact this activity. There is little scholarly attention to this stratum of the film industry, although it is responsible for the production of thousands of films every year. With the sheer volume of film production happening in various regions around the country, one wonders who is making these films and under what conditions these films are being made. Do these films ever see the light of day, or are they relegated to the depths of someone's basement or computer hard drive? What is the role of the regional filmmaking community in contributing to or hindering its own survival and growth? What are the external pressures

imposed by the state, the mainstream Hollywood industry, and local business and civic communities? Therefore, this study addresses five central research questions:

1. How has the term “independent film” historically been defined, and how is it understood today?
2. What is the historical development of regional filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest, namely Portland and Seattle?
3. What supports the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking?
4. What are challenges in the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking?
5. What are the relationships between regional filmmaking communities and Hollywood and between regional filmmaking communities themselves?

By investigating these questions through document analysis, a survey, and interviews with over 40 members of the film communities in Portland and Seattle, we can begin to understand the place of regional filmmaking within the broader film industry and the nature and conditions of cultural production in a complex environment. The first four questions will each be addressed in their own chapters, and the fifth question – the relationship between regional and Hollywood filmmaking and between regional filmmaking communities – is answered throughout; this relationship is woven throughout the definition of independent film, the history of the regional film industries in the Pacific Northwest, and in the infrastructure that supports and inhibits regional filmmaking. It cannot be disconnected from the various historical, economic, industrial and cultural contexts in which American regional filmmaking operates.

This study will assess the range of infrastructural contradictions that arise in independent filmmaking, which are rooted in financing, distribution, labor relations, and myths, among other factors. The very definition of “independent film,” as I have already

hinted, is complicated and contradictory, and demands a more nuanced understanding in order to assess the dynamics of independent filmmaking as a cultural and economic activity. The range of individuals and organizations, and the accompanying objectives of each, compound the filmmaking process. This study documents and examines the range of challenges for independent filmmakers, but it also analyzes the systems, resources and practices that enable independents to produce and distribute films; this infrastructure is constantly shifting and evolving in order to accommodate and overcome challenges. This study will demonstrate that regional independent filmmakers are a resilient sort, adapting their own practices so that they can continue to make films.

It is important to acknowledge the role of exhibition, audiences and the cultivation of appreciation for independent film as vital components of nurturing independent filmmaking, but this study only cursorily addresses these aspects of the regional independent film communities in Seattle and Portland. Analyses of film texts can also contribute to a greater understanding of regional filmmaking, but the content produced by filmmaking activity is not examined here. Rather, the focus here remains on production and distribution aspects of regional independent filmmaking.

Significance of this Study

This study is significant in that it contributes to the literatures of political economy of communication and film studies. Its contribution to political economy of communication is most acutely achieved through its analysis of small-scale regional industry. Many political economic studies examine the nature of massive media conglomerates, analyzing strategies and processes that are typical of publicly held and

diversified corporations. These companies' adherence to the profit motive is a natural focal point for political economic analyses. But small-scale business, characterized by small, locally-owned companies and nonprofit organizations, often does not follow the same imperatives as mega corporations. How, then, can we understand the structures, strategies and processes of the small-scale industry? This study presents case studies of two regional film industries and provides an example of regionally-based media industry analysis.

This study also acknowledges the dynamic and influential contribution of regional independent filmmaking to the American film industry, which has been all but ignored in independent film studies and American film industry studies. Much of the scholarly literature has tended to examine independent filmmaking and filmmakers by focusing on exceptional cases of independent filmmakers or singular films (mostly about those that have “made it big” like Kevin Smith or Robert Rodriguez).⁹ Many studies of the conditions under which film labor works (usually examining “production clusters” or networks) are located in geography literature, not in film or political economic media studies. Regional filmmaking too has received little analysis in the literature, and one of the only recent studies of this nature has been a meticulously detailed history of the film community in Austin, Texas (Macor, 2010); otherwise, consideration of regional filmmaking, and its position within the broader film industry, has been on hiatus after it received brief scholarly attention in the early- to mid-1980s (e.g., Block, 1983). This

⁹ Kevin Smith's breakthrough film, *Clerks* (1994), reportedly cost \$27,000 to produce and won several awards at the Sundance Film Festival (where it was picked up for distribution by Miramax), the Cannes Film Festival and the Independent Spirit Awards. Robert Rodriguez produced the initial version of *El Mariachi* (1992) for \$7,000, and was picked up by Columbia Pictures which then spent \$200,000 transferring the film to 35mm stock and additional millions on prints and advertising (Shone, 2009).

study opens a dialogue that is ripe for expansion on the role of regional film communities and how independent filmmaking that originates there fits into the overall landscape of American filmmaking.

This particular moment in time is rife with dramatic shifts in how the American film industry is structured. Hollywood studios (and their parent corporations) have instigated increasing concentration and conglomeration, standardization, hypercommercialization, and exploitation of media workers, as well as tightened control over distribution and intellectual property. At the same time, however, there have been vast improvements in filmmaking equipment and other technologies that allow for increased access and widespread use. These trends are changing who is able to produce and distribute media. The academy must absolutely give scholarly attention and credence to pockets of alternative cultural production that exist in tandem with, outside of, in resistance to, and/or next to mainstream cultural production. This study brings to light a segment of the film industry that faces significant challenges in its survival, but which, despite these challenges, manages to soldier on. An understanding of the circumstances under which regional independent filmmaking operates is essential to crafting conditions that nurture a diverse multitude of cultural voices.

Overview of the Study

To provide a foundation upon which to investigate regional independent filmmaking, Chapter II presents a review of relevant literature and grounds the study in the theoretical foundation of political economy of communication. This chapter covers three broad-based areas of literature: political economy of communication (and corporate

control of media and culture); the Hollywood film industry (with focus on its political economy); and the regional independent film industry (again, with focus on its political economy). The theoretical foundation draws primarily on political economy of communication. Here, regional filmmaking is defined and the study's research questions are posed.

Chapter III explores the methods used to accomplish this study, which include document analysis, a survey, and interviews. Documents analyzed include both historical and contemporary documents from organizations, journalistic sources, websites, and promotional materials. An online survey was undertaken to assess trends and general feelings about filmmaking in a regional context. Sixty respondents, the majority of whom were from Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington, participated in this survey. Interviews were conducted with over forty individuals associated in a variety of capacities with the filmmaking communities in Seattle and Portland. Interviews were also conducted with a handful of individuals who could speak more generally to trends in independent filmmaking but who were not based in the Pacific Northwest.

Because this study hinges so crucially on the concept of independent filmmaking, Chapter IV takes on the task of understanding and defining "independent film." This is accomplished in three parts. First, the study provides a document analysis of two major newspapers over roughly the past 100 years to draw out how "independent" has been used to define particular practices and relationships in the American film industry. Second, this chapter analyzes and compares how both academics and film industry practitioners utilize "independent film." Finally, this chapter arrives at a definition of

independent film upon which this study is based, formulating a multidimensional approach that allows for gradations of financial and creative independence.

Chapter V presents the basic structure and general processes of film financing, production, distribution and exhibition that characterize both the mainstream Hollywood film industry and the independent film industry. Chapter VI gives a historical narrative of the development of regional filmmaking in Portland and Seattle. It also provides a brief description of regional filmmaking in some of the more prominent regional locations, including Louisiana, Texas and New Mexico. This chapter provides essential context for understanding the contemporary landscape of independent filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest, which is tackled in the following chapter. Chapter VII first examines this contemporary landscape, and then interrogates the infrastructure that supports regional independent filmmaking. Chapter VIII serves as the complement to this chapter, investigating a number of challenges that hinder regional independent filmmaking. Finally, Chapter IX provides conclusions and recommendations for the future study and survival of regional independent filmmaking.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
& RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This chapter will discuss the literature relevant to this study within the academic study of the film industry and the economic, political and cultural institutions that impact the film industry and, in particular, regional independent filmmaking. As well, it will provide the theoretical foundation and the research questions to be answered in the study.

Literature Review

The literature relevant to this project can be found in three broad yet interrelated areas of study: the political economy of communication, which includes corporate strategies of control; the political economy of Hollywood film; and the political economy of independent and regional film.

Political Economy of Communication

In the past few decades, corporate media control has grown exponentially; concurrently, concern over this corporate control has also grown. Many scholars have dedicated themselves to analyzing and challenging this phenomenon, primarily through the lens of political economy of communication. In this section, I will review the roots of political economy of communication and the strategies through which control is

manifested, including ownership and growth, labor, government regulation, and commercialization.

Political Economy

Political economy of communication finds its roots in classical political economy, a field that emerged as a formal area of study with Adam Smith (1776). Smith investigated the division of labor, pursuit of self-interest, and free trade as the foundational elements of political economy. However, his argument's most influential and lasting contribution to political economy was that of the "invisible hand," a concept mentioned only once in *Wealth of Nations*. The market, according to Smith, will determine the proper level of competition, guiding individuals to trade in a manner that is mutually beneficial to all involved. Smith also established terminology like "use value" and "exchange value," differentiating between what an item should cost based on labor and materials, and what the market determines that item to cost. Malthus (1820), Ricardo (1821), and Mill (1848) further refined political economic theories.

Critiques of political economy (Marx, 1867; Marx and Engels, 1845) emerged in order to understand the exploitation of labor and other problems associated with capitalism, private property and free market principles. Marx's (1977, orig. 1867) critiques have become some of the most influential in the development of critical political economy. His concepts of use value and exchange value articulate the processes of capitalism: an item's use value is its utility, or its ability to satisfy a human's wants or desires, while its exchange value is the quantitative proportion for which one good can be traded for another. While the use value is fairly stable, the exchange value is, as Marx

writes, “a purely relative” value rooted in social relations (p. 304). Labor is a key part of achieving a competitive exchange value and is, according to Marx, the central source of value in capitalism. The commodification of labor, which results in the detachment of commodities from the labor that produces them, is reinforced through Marx and Engels’ (1976, orig. 1845) concept of the ruling class and ruling ideas. This concept suggests that the ruling class reinforces its position through naturalized ideas that the lower classes (or workers) do not question. Thus, power and control can be achieved and maintained.

Baran and Sweezy (1966) contemporized Marx’s critique of political economy, shifting focus from a competitive to monopoly economy. They argued that the monopoly capitalist economy marking the twentieth century (and beyond) witnessed a “law of the tendency of surplus to rise,” or the difference between the wages paid to workers and the value derived from goods produced. Essentially, corporations are faced with the challenge of using accumulated money/capital to produce more goods and more consumptive patterns (or, as John Foster (2000) writes, “how to use the piled-up cash to make more profit”).

Characteristics of political economy, traceable back to Smith’s writings in 1776, have become only more prominent, emphasized in neoclassical economics, and even linked to political freedom by influential economists like Friedrich von Hayek (1944), Milton Friedman (1962) and Robert Lucas (1976). Furthermore, Smith’s theories are recognizable within neo-liberalism, wherein the process of economic globalization, a function of capitalism, has only served to exacerbate the inequalities of capitalism and laissez-faire economics (e.g., Martinez and García, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007).

Political Economy of Communication

The political economy of communication emphasizes processes behind cultural production and distribution; it is specifically concerned with examining structures of ownership and control. This area of media theory developed in various regions of the world, as social, political and economic situations demanded critical examination of media's structure and influence.

Dallas Smythe and Herbert Schiller, two foundational North American scholars of political economy of communication, were both affected by the Great Depression in the United States and thus interpreted flaws in the American political economy and the exercise of corporate power. Smythe (1960) proposed that the study of communications should include attention to the economic processes inherent in their production. He later incorporated the Marxist labor theory of value into his "audience commodity" work (1981), arguing that the audience is essentially employed by the media with which it engages; the media in turn "sells" the audience as commodities to advertisers. Schiller's work situated media within an increasingly global context. As the presence of the American media machine grew in other countries, Schiller documented media control and power as it pertained to American empire (1969) and cultural imperialism (1976).

Across the Atlantic, scholars like Graham Murdock, Peter Golding, and Nicholas Garnham developed another strain of political economy of communication. Murdock and Golding (1973) solidified the application of Marxist theory onto political economy of communication, maintaining that media are commodities produced within capitalist structures and should be analyzed as such. Furthermore, they argued that media possess both economic and ideological power which limit the range of interpretive frameworks

with which people make sense of their lives. However, media industries fuel consumers' false sense of independence and choice by *telling* them that there is a range of media output available; this system guarantees commercial survival through economic and ideological force. Golding and Murdock (2000) later called for an analysis of limitations imposed by media owners to control access to and use of culture.

Latin American scholars applied critical political economy to communication in the developing world (e.g., Freire, 1970; Dorfman & Mattelart, 1975). Deriving from social and political struggles that dominated the region in the 1950s to 1970s, this branch of political economy of communication focused, in part, on communications' link to revolutionary activity. This emphasis marked a departure from the European focus on Marxist economic determinism, noting the political power inherent in communications.

Smythe and Murdock engaged in one of the first major debates within political economy of communication. Smythe (1977) contended that western Marxist analyses of mass communications systems possessed a "blindspot"; in assuming that mass communications function for ideological purposes, these analyses miss what Smythe calls the basis of media: the commodity form and material production. Murdock (1978) challenged many of Smythe's assertions, noting that while Smythe's call for a return to economic attention was important, political economy of communication studies must also contextualize their subjects of inquiry. He also insisted that the ideological function of media could not be pushed aside, as "ideology is one of the key conditions for the continued existence of prevailing productive relations" (p. 114).

Whether focusing on the manifestation of ideology or economics, political economists are most concerned with issues of power (e.g., Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Murdock, 1977; Mosco, 1996). Media corporations gather this power through strategies of corporate control, namely, ownership, labor, commercialization, and government regulation and support.

Murdock (1977) differentiates between operational (or day-to-day) control and allocative (or big-picture) control over an organization. Turow (1992) discusses how media industry executives, working at the level of allocative control, have made strategic decisions to strengthen their corporations. Although allocative and operational control are not neatly separated, Wasser (2001) notes that allocative is by far the most significant and determines the level of operational decisions. These decisions authorize a myriad of methods and processes to reinforce dominance and corporate control. Among these are strategies of ownership and growth, labor, government regulation, and commercialization, discussed below.

Corporate Strategies of Control: Ownership and Growth

Media corporations have a long history of using various strategies of ownership and growth, such as horizontal and vertical integration, diversification, synergy, and globalization to solidify their market dominance (e.g., Noam, 2009; Bagdikian, 1983, 2004; McChesney, 1999; Turow, 1992; Kunz, 2007; McPhail, 2010). Noam (2009) points out that the issue of media concentration is not new; rather, “it has been part and parcel of historic discussion of media” (p. 7). However, media industries have become alarmingly concentrated, as demonstrated by Bagdikian (2004), who has tracked the increasing consolidation of the media industries from the 1980s into the 2000s. Bagdikian notes that

while 30 corporations controlled the majority of media output in 1983, only five corporations controlled the majority of media output in 2004. McChesney (1999) writes that this increased concentration has severe implications for democracy and public access to media, while Herman and McChesney (1997) note that the increasing transnationalization of media companies also has significant political and cultural implications for media and democracy.

Corporate Strategies of Control: Labor

Media labor is an underdeveloped area of academic study, with comparatively few studies bringing attention to this integral component of the process of media production, distribution and consumption (e.g., Mosco and McKercher, 2008; McKercher and Mosco, 2007; Balka, 2002; Martin, 2002). The field of media labor is slowly gaining interest, however, because of the dramatically shifting nature of the field in light of digital technologies and decentralization and deprofessionalization of media production (e.g., Banks and Deuze, 2009; van Dijck, 2009; Terranova, 2000).

Earlier studies of media labor (e.g., White, 1950; Breed, 1955; Tuchman, 1978), although infrequent, were primarily organizational or industrial in scope, such as Breed's (1955) study on adherence to newsroom policies and procedures. These studies analyze the dynamics between workers and management, with attention to policies of professionalism and media-making practices. A burgeoning field of study about media labor has emerged under the heading of cultural production studies (e.g., Levine, 2001; Kearney, 2006; Caldwell, 2008; Mayer, Banks and Caldwell, 2009), in which the culture of media work is examined by integrating cultural studies and political economy of communication. Caldwell (2008), for example, explores the culture of film and video

workers in Los Angeles in an attempt to understand identity and industrial reflexivity as contributors to production communities. A volume edited by Mayer, Banks and Caldwell (2009) highlights the agency and voice that production labor should share in media industry and production studies.

Mosco (1998) highlights the usefulness of political economy to understand the role of labor in media production, noting that labor practices are embedded in the strategies of structuration, spatialization and commodification, all of which corporations use to expand their reach and dominance. Shifts in corporate structure (such as consolidation, conglomeration and globalization) have altered the structure and practices of labor forces. Offshoring of media labor, or runaway production, has contributed to decentralization, devaluation and invisibility of labor (e.g., Lent, 1998; Day, 2007).

Another dimension of media labor studies includes those that attempt to understand the integration of audiences in media (particularly online media) production (e.g., Deuze, 2007; Banks and Deuze, 2009; Van Dijck, 2009). As mentioned earlier, Smythe (1981) proposed that the audiences are commodities themselves and their labor is sold and consumed. Banks and Deuze (2009) analyze the integration of audiences' creative labor in the production of media content. They refer to this phenomenon as "co-creation," wherein audiences are increasingly mined for their creative ideas and media production abilities without corresponding compensation, either in terms of financial remuneration or intellectual property ownership.

Corporate Strategies of Control: Government Regulation

Most American media have lengthy traditions of being private industries and, as a result, commercial media industries have long opted to self-regulate, citing that

government intervention harms consumer choice, creativity and free markets (e.g., Dennis, 1995; Inglis, 1947). While industry claims to prefer deregulation to government intervention, many scholars (e.g., Miller et al., 2005; Vaidhyanathan, 2001, 2005, 2011; Lessig, 2004; Bettig, 1996) have noted that corporations count on government regulation to guarantee access to certain markets and to protect intellectual property. Some scholars note, however, that media industries like public radio and television broadcasting have called for government intervention to safeguard the public interest and publicly owned airwaves (McChesney, 1993, 1999; Harvey, 2004; Gomery, 2002), instead arguing that self-regulation is not very effective (Campbell, 1999). Debate around protecting Internet network neutrality with government regulation has also grown in the mid- to late-2000s (Marsden, 2010; Nunziato, 2009).

Corporate Strategies of Control: Commercialization

The increasing commercialization of American media has gained more notice in scholarly literature (e.g., McAllister, 2000; Andersen and Strate, 2000; Schiller, 1989; Bogart, 1995). Even American media production that has been traditionally considered as noncommercial forms, like newspaper journalism, has been subjected to the forces of commercialization and profit motives (e.g., Underwood, 1993, 2001; Picard, 2004). Picard (2004) notes that newspaper commercialization has led to increased attention to commercial concerns, diminishing the commitment to public service and overall quality. Content is altered to serve commercial interests first, favoring shareholders over readers and the community in which the newspaper is published. The same phenomenon has negatively impacted the book publishing industry (Schiffrin, 2000). While these studies are useful in tracking the rampant extension of corporate interests into media, we must

still recognize that the majority of American media has historically been commercial in orientation and has nearly always been subject to the imperatives of business (e.g., Baldasty, 1992).

The film industry and the mainstream Hollywood film studios in particular, seeking to meet the expectations of their shareholders, employ the aforementioned strategies of corporate control in order to minimize risk and grow profits. Political economy has been used to analyze this industry, providing helpful tools with which to understand how the mainstream Hollywood film industry has asserted dominance in the U.S. and around the globe. The following is a review of literature pertaining to the political economy of the Hollywood film industry, and subsequently, the independent film industry and regional filmmaking.

The Political Economy of the Hollywood Film Industry

Hollywood has long been the subject of study for film scholars, who have examined a variety of issues pertaining to this locus of American filmmaking (e.g., Dyer, 1979; Schatz, 1981; Bordwell and Thompson, 1997; Gomery, 2005). I am most concerned here with understanding how Hollywood is defined and how it operates, so as to set it in relation to independent filmmaking. Here I will review definitions and the economic structure of Hollywood as they have been discussed in the literature, paying particular attention to strategies of control, labor, runaway production, and the role of film policy.

At its core, Hollywood is a geographic place where the vast majority of American movies are made. The term has become more complex, meaning different things, much like “independent film,” based on who is using it. According to Schatz and Perren (2004), Hollywood “refers to three interrelated aspects of American cinema: the industrial, the institutional and the formal-aesthetic” (p. 495); to this, we should also add the ideological. Particularly in recent years, many have begun to consider Hollywood to represent the full scope of industrial filmed entertainment undertaken by major American media conglomerates not just in Hollywood but all over the world (e.g., McDonald and Wasko, 2008).

Early scholarship on the film industry came primarily from economics, business and marketing disciplines (e.g., Hampton, 1931; Lewis, 1933; Cassady, 1933), with few critical examinations of the already-dominant industry’s processes. Two early studies have, however, since been identified as political economic in approach; Klingender and Legg (1937) probed Hollywood’s ownership and power structures, while Huettig (1944) investigated film’s status as a commodity and Hollywood studios’ various strategies to maintain control over the industry.

Political economic studies of film expanded as the political economy of communication as a field of study expanded. Guback (1969) analyzed the Hollywood film industry within an international context, focusing on its interactions with Western Europe in the post-World War Two era, and was one of the first scholars to apply a specifically political economic approach to film studies. As this approach expanded, new generations of scholars developed their own research agendas (e.g., Wasko, 1982; Pendakur, 1990). For example, Wasko (1982) examined the relationship between banks

and Hollywood, while Pendakur (1990) focused his research on the interactions among the Canadian film industry, the Canadian government, and Hollywood.

Today, however, as Wasko (2004) contends, film studies continues to neglect how corporate media control impacts the film industry. She points to academic weaknesses as a primary reason for this omission: there is a disconnect between film studies and communications studies (one is in humanities; the other in social science), and movies have not been perceived as “serious” subjects worthy of academic study in mass communications, unlike many other media forms like radio or television (Guback, 1978). But as scholars more closely examine all facets of media conglomerate structures, the film industry gained some attention as a serious subject of study within communications studies (e.g., Jowett and Linton, 1989; Wasko, 2003).

Strategies of Control

The systems and processes of Hollywood films demonstrate the principles and concerns of political economy of communication. Hollywood has had a long history of using various strategies like horizontal and vertical integration, diversification, and synergy to solidify its market dominance (e.g., Wasser, 2001; Wasko, 2003; Miller et al., 2005; Kunz, 2007). Miller et al. (2005) provide a lengthy examination of Hollywood’s capacity to maintain dominance in the industry through marketing strategies, domestic and international governmental policies, and other methods. Kunz (2007) uncovers many of the relationships inherent in Hollywood’s business strategies. For instance, distribution windows and modes of synergy, such as the hyper-commercialization of films through merchandising and cross-promotion, are typical sites of exploitation for studios (Wasko

et al., 1993); home video and its successor, DVD, have grown as a vital component of a film's distribution strategy (Wasser, 2001). Wasko (2003) has sought to dispel many of the myths of the Hollywood film industry and its claims about financial risk, investment and market structure. Rather, the studios engage in strategies of synergy and horizontal and vertical integration in order to maintain market dominance and squeeze others out of competition.

Among Hollywood's strategies to maintain market dominance is the treatment of film as a commodity (Wasko, 2004a). While films' cultural impact is undeniable, economic imperatives (especially in Hollywood) affect modes of production. Thus, as Prindle (1993) notes, the industry employs successful content models to minimize risk, such as relying on genres, stars, and sequels. HP (Hewlett-Packard) Labs supported research about how to use the social media site Twitter to predict box office success (Asur and Huberman, 2010). Analysts also produce quantitative models to predict the success of scripts, actors, ratings, and other factors in attempts to assess risk (e.g., De Vany and Walls, 1999, 2002; Sharda and Delen, 2006; Eliashberg, 2010; Asur and Huberman, 2010). This in turn impacts who or what is allowed to appear in the actual film, as those genres or actors who have not proven successful are less likely to appear onscreen (e.g., Wyatt, 1994; De Vany and Walls, 1999). Furthermore, a film's marketing potential (a function of distribution) is a major factor in its very production (Lukk, 1997). In fact, the nexus of power in the film industry is located in film distribution (e.g., Donahue, 1987; Prindle, 1993; Govil, 2005; Hall and Neale, 2010). The distribution mechanisms that move films from producer to exhibitor, effectively "selling" the products, are the ones that determine success. The majority of financial capital rests in

this infrastructure; it is here that resource allocation (in the form of marketing, access to distribution windows, etc.) impacts which movies move into the marketplace.

Hollywood's associations with political entities in the U.S. and abroad illustrate how power and control can manifest in a major industry (e.g., Litman, 1994; Puttnam and Watson, 2000; Wang, 2003; Valantin, 2005; Erickson, 2007). The mainstream film industry has used its lobbying organization, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), to garner favorable regulation and to dismantle unfavorable regulation (Pendakur, 2008). Studios (and their parent corporations) use intellectual property regulation to solidify and maintain ownership and control over media products (Bettig, 1996). Miller et al. (2005) discuss the dependence upon international trade protections on which film industry relies in order to safeguard its domestic interests.

Film Labor

The structure of film labor was, according to Bordwell et al. (1985), once primarily centralized and standardized within the Hollywood studio system. Labor has become more fragmented and decentralized (e.g., Scott, 1984; Storper and Christopherson, 1989; Gray and Seeber, 1996b; Sullivan, 2008), with below-the-line workers becoming nearly invisible as creative workers above-the-line become the stars of a production. For example, Sullivan (2008) describes how making-of featurettes, offered as DVD extras, celebrate the work of a few select individuals with little to no acknowledgement of the multitudes of domestic and offshore workers involved in a film's production. Workers also face increased mobility and precarity of work conditions, which are generally project-based and freelance, particularly for those in film and

television production (e.g., Blair, 2001; Blair et al., 2001; Dean and Jones, 2003). Josephine Langham characterizes these conditions as part of the “roller-coaster atmosphere” in film and television employment (cited in Deuze, 2001, p. 173). Aksoy and Robins (1992) assert that film labor includes not only those involved in film production but, rather, all of the individuals involved in every stage of filmmaking, from production to distribution to exhibition.

Furthermore, media consolidation and media conglomerates’ exploitation of new technologies have impacted unions’ bargaining strength, and have inhibited unions’ ability to address the sources of problems with both macro- and micro-level working conditions (e.g., Christopherson, 2008; Gray and Seeber, 1996; Safrath, 2010). In an exploration of the broadening scope of cultural workers in Hollywood productions, Miller et al. (2005) posit the concept of the New International Division of Cultural Labor (NICL). They describe this in terms of flexibility, human capital and social capital, and link productivity, exploitation and social control in the world labor market. The authors note that Hollywood studios want flexibility in their employment practices, which contrasts drastically with their desire for complete inflexibility in terms of ownership and copyright.

Runaway Production

With increased decentralization and ballooning production costs, studios look to minimize costs in a number of ways. One method is to locate production in a cheaper location where favorable tax policies, exchange rates and lessened union oversight contribute to lowered production costs (e.g., Elmer and Gasher, 2005; Goldsmith and

O'Regan, 2005; Wasko and Erickson, 2008). "Runaway production" is a term that describes this process; the motivations for runaway production can be either for creative or economic purposes (Newman, 2008), although most often they are economic.

There is a growing political and economic movement in the state of California against the relocation of jobs out-of-state and out-of-country (Caranicas, 2010; Verrier, 2010). The California Film Commission, representing film and television professionals there, championed the economic impact of their work (Freeman et al., 2005) and called upon the state government to save these jobs. Pressure on the government – and having an actor as state governor – induced the state to pass production incentives policies in 2009 (Schwarzenegger, 2010). Christopherson (2005), however, notes that California's claims of lost revenue and employment are problematic, as calculations of statistics are potentially skewed to reflect the results that best suit the industry's purposes.

Additionally, many of the culprits of this perceived runaway production are misguidedly identified as state and federal governments that offer attractive incentive packages, not the studios themselves who take work and workers out-of-state. Critiques of runaway production also tend to ignore the contribution of international workers to the film production process, or the fact that many productions are bankrolled by foreign investors anyway and may never have been truly "American" in the first place (Goldsmith and O'Regan, 2008).

Christopherson (2005) notes that runaway production is not so much a function of an allegedly diminishing influence of the nation-state in the face of media globalization, but is, rather, the opposite. Nation-states are fundamental actors in providing favorable conditions to lure productions, and accompanying infrastructural investment, to a given

country, as evidenced by the financial involvement of Hollywood studios in, for example, Australia (Fox Studios Australia) (Goldsmith and O'Regan, 2005). The resulting location, stocked with skilled professionals and adequate facilities and equipment, becomes known as a “foreign service location,” intended to “service” foreign productions, typically from Hollywood – and increasingly Bollywood – studios. These locations are supported by governments for their potential to diversify an area’s economic base through the development of a new and non-polluting film and television production industry (Newman, 2008) as well as the vitalization of an area’s tourism industry (Croy and Walker, 2003).

Indeed, governments may bend over backwards to attract certain productions, as they can serve as promotional tools to attract future productions, jobs, and tourists. New Zealand financed part of the production of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) through a tax loophole valued at between NZ\$120 million and NZ\$400 million (Newman, 2008, p. 224). Particularly at the American state level, there is debate over whether tax incentives designed to attract productions actually make the economic impact that they promise (Luther, 2010).

Film Policy

A corollary discussion to runaway production, and one that is underexplored in the political economy of the American film industry, is the issue of contemporary film policy. Most scholarly discussions of film policy pertain to non-American film industries (e.g., Moran, 1996; Dorland, 1998; Jäckel, 2003; Hainsworth, 1994; Falicov, 2007). When film policy studies do involve the American film industry, they primarily reference

Hollywood's interactions with non-American industries, investors, governments or citizens (e.g., Balio, 1996). This is primarily due to the fact that the United States, unlike many countries around the world, does not have a formal film policy. A few scholars (e.g., Miller et al., 2005; Pendakur, 2008; Mayer and Goldman, 2010) have drawn attention, however, to the fact that despite the lack of formal policy, the U.S. government does administer policies that directly impact film production, distribution and exhibition, such as policies regarding tax incentives, copyright, industry competition, and international trade.

The preceding review of literature pertaining to the political economy of the Hollywood film industry is helpful to preface a discussion of the American independent film industry. This review can provide benchmarks from which to assess the challenges that independent filmmakers face in producing, distributing and exhibiting their works. I turn now to a discussion of the independent and regional film industry, reviewing related literature, particularly that related to political economy.

The Political Economy of Independent Film and Regional Film

Scholarly attention to independent film has greatly expanded since the mid-1990s, coinciding with popular and industry attention to the financial potential of these types of films (e.g., Holmlund and Wyatt, 2005; Tzioumakis, 2006; Berra, 2008; Erickson, 2008; King, 2005, 2009). Despite this increased attention, there is still a shortage of critical evaluations of this segment of filmmaking. Instead, scholars tend to focus on independent films' social and political content rather than the social, political and economic contexts

within which they are produced (e.g., Lyons, 1994; Sklar, 2001; Soles, 2008). Here, I will review independent film literature, starting with alternative and independent media so as to provide a basic understanding of how media studies has typically approached non-mainstream media. I will continue with a discussion of independent film literature; my review of this literature is divided into four sections: auteurs and studios; subject matter and styles; the political economy of independent film; and regional filmmaking.

Alternative/Independent Media

As noted earlier, critiques of corporate-dominated media are generally readily available in mass communications scholarship, but challenges and successes of independent or alternative media have been surprisingly understudied. John Downing (1984) was one of the first contemporary scholars to focus on alternative media,¹⁰ arguing that this type of media has been valuable because of its potential for social and political change. He widened his examination of alternative media in a second edition of his book, including more than simply traditional print and broadcast media (Downing, 2001). The second edition was an essential step because, as Downing notes, “Common approaches to communication media are wildly lopsided precisely because they refuse to take seriously the historical persistence and geographical pervasiveness of radical alternative media” (p. v). He argues that radical media must become a more integral part of the discourse because of the growing threat to public expression instigated by corporations, policy, and social codes, among other forces.

¹⁰ Downing (1984) prefers to call alternative media “radical media”; “To speak simply of alternative media is almost oxymoronic,” he writes. “Everything, at some point, is alternative to something else” (p. ix).

This issue of public expression resounds throughout the contemporary literature on the subject (e.g., Schiller, 1989; Coyer et al., 2007; Hackett and Carroll, 2006), both as an individual response and as a mode of social interaction and engagement.

Advancements in media technologies such as Internet, social media tools like Twitter and Facebook, cell phones and digital cameras, have enabled the expansion of these practices of resistance and engagement (e.g., Bennett, 2003; Atton, 2002, 2003; Coyer et al., 2007).

Alternative media have thus expanded to include blogs, websites, fanzines, and many other types of amateur-produced media, each of which is claimed to be a valid and important form of media. Yet, as some scholars note, we can delineate between content and processes of production (e.g., Atton, 2002 and 2003). We should not solely focus on specific content being radical or alternative in nature; rather, we should study the modes and methods of media production that challenge and denaturalize the traditional mainstream structures of media, upsetting its restrictive “hierarchy of access” (Atton, 2003, p. 47). Indeed, we must engage with these areas in order to study media power more broadly, a preferred topic in political economy of communication. According to Couldry and Curran (2003), communication studies’ traditional neglect of media power has contributed to a naturalization and acceptance of media power in everyday media practice.

Alternative media struggles to be heard amidst the barrage of conventional mainstream media dominating the general public’s interaction with media. Digital technologies have enabled more people to produce their own media, skirting some of the barriers to entry imposed by media conglomerates. Independent film is one such media

form through which increased numbers of voices can be heard. But, as we have seen with other forms of media, corporate control and Hollywood studio dominance often determine how and where these films are disseminated. I turn now to a review of literature about independent film and regional filmmaking, with particular emphasis on critical political economic examinations.

Independent Film

Within most literature about American filmmaking, scholars undoubtedly mention independent film in some capacity, given that it occupies a space in conjunction with the Hollywood studio system (e.g., Sklar, 1994; Bordwell and Thompson, 1997; Lewis, 2008). In comprehensive American film histories, independent film represents a small part of the overall narrative of cinema history. For instance, Schatz's (1988) history of the studio era in Hollywood includes brief accounts of independent producers that challenged Hollywood dominance, while Lewis (2008) briefly notes the emergence of individual directors in the 1980s and 1990s who made auteur films. Sklar (1994) devotes only a few pages to the strong and capable independent film sector that arose concurrently with cable television and home video as a challenge to Hollywood.

Independent film is more often discussed in works dedicated solely to the subject, rather than as part of discussions of the entire film industry. These works, discussed below, typically address one of several aspects of independent film, and are primarily production-oriented, focusing on auteurs, studios, and content.

Independent Film Auteurs/Studios

There is a specific canon of independent filmmakers and production studios typically discussed in film literature, a group of individuals and studios that scholars and other writers revisit time and again (e.g., Pierson, 1995; Biskind, 2004; Andrew, 1999; Levy, 1999). United Artists is the most well-known historical example of a studio that challenged its Hollywood counterparts (Balio, 1987), although, increasingly, more case studies have emerged that focus on those organizations operating outside of Hollywood, such as American International Pictures (McGee, 1984), the Hal Roach Studios (Ward, 2005), Troma Entertainment (Conrich, 2005), and Canyon Cinema, an independent film distribution outfit (MacDonald, 2008). Frequently, scholars write about individuals who have contributed significantly to the development of independent film (e.g., Levy, 1999; Andrew, 1999; Carson and Kenaga, 2006); these filmmakers are typically recognized as operating successfully within both the mainstream and independent film worlds, or generating fairly significant box office revenues with non-Hollywood pictures. John Cassavetes is a prime example of an individual who effectively used his connections and profits in Hollywood to finance his endeavors in the independent film world (e.g., Carney, 1985; Fine, 2005; Margulies, 1998). More recently, we see adulation, particularly from journalists and film critics but also from academics, of Jim Jarmusch, Quentin Tarantino, Spike Lee, Steven Soderbergh, and a handful of others who represent the movers and shakers of American independent cinema (e.g., Waxman, 2006; Andrew, 1999; Pierson, 1995). More common are the accounts written by filmmakers and film producers themselves, relating their filmmaking experiences to a broad audience (e.g., Vachon, 1998; Rodriguez, 1995; Polish, Polish and Sheldon, 2005).

Independent Film Subject Matter & Styles

Closely tied to discussions of auteurs are the specific subject matter, styles and aesthetics that emerge from auteur filmmaking; these aspects are typically intertwined with a filmmaker's identity, and scholars tend to differentiate (much like in Hollywood literature) based on the filmmaker's gender, race, sexual orientation (e.g., Lyons, 1994; Redding and Brownworth, 1997; Reid, 2005; Soles, 2008). Explorations of underground and avant-garde film dot the landscape of independent film discussion, but again, these discussions typically revolve around specific individuals, such as Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Kenneth Anger, Jonas Mekas and Andy Warhol (Tyler, 1969; Rabinovitz, 2003).

Gradually, we've seen more nuanced histories of independent film, as scholars interrogate classical assumptions about the structure of Hollywood at various points in history (e.g., Merritt, 2000; Tzioumakis, 2006; Berra, 2008). In particular, the period immediately following World War Two presents interesting instances where Hollywood's dominance was challenged from the inside out. Filmmakers took advantage of readily available funding to produce and distribute films independently, thereby turning Hollywood's factory-style mode of production on its head (e.g., Ray, 1991; Mann, 2008). As well, more examinations of the other phases of filmmaking have emerged, as there is more attention now to independent film distribution and exhibition (Johnson, 2002; Tzioumakis, 2006; MacDonald, 2008; Anker et al., 2010). For example, MacDonald (2008) has compiled and analyzed copious documents from Canyon Cinema,

the California-based film collective and distributor of alternative, underground and avant-garde films.

Political Economy of Independent Film

Despite the ripe environment within political economy of communication for a discussion of independent film, there are few mentions of this subject. Much like literature on alternative media in general, independent film literature (e.g., Hillier, 2001; Lyons, 1994; Andrew, 1999) does not focus much on Hollywood's power and control over, in particular, the distribution process. For example, although John Hillier (2001) acknowledges that economics play a part in defining independent cinema, industrial considerations take a backseat to the alternative narrative and formal qualities of independent film. As well, it is evident that Chris Holmlund (2005) views films as texts to be analyzed for their narrative and formal qualities, rather than as the products of a complex set of social and economic relations; her definition of independent film includes films produced by major studios alongside true independents:

Contemporary American independent films run the financial gamut, from “no budget” (under \$100,000) to “micro” or “low budget” (under \$1 million) to – and today, more frequently – “tweeners” (\$10-30 million) produced and marketed by mini-majors, even sometimes – as is the case with the Miramax-Paramount collaboration on *The Hours* – together with the majors (Holmlund, 2005, p. 3).

A few scholars (e.g., Garnham, 1990; Kleinhans, 1998; Perren, 2004; Tzioumakis, 2006; Erickson, 2008a) address the state of independent film using a critical political economic lens, particularly looking at the ways in which Hollywood impacts the independent film world. Garnham (1990) observes that media conglomerates employ independent filmmakers to carry the risk for some motion picture projects that they can

then exploit through control over distribution rights. Operating under the myth of a thriving independent film world, major studios and their conglomerate parents can thus “mitigate public concern and pressure against oligopolistic control” (Garnham, 1990, p. 180) by acquiring independent film studios and continuing to brand them as “independent” (Wyatt, 1998; Schatz, 2007). This branding strategy assists in targeting art house audiences (Perren, 2004; Erickson, 2008a), as well as art house cinemas, which are targeted for takeover when box office returns appear bountiful (Wilinsky, 2001).

Tzioumakis (2006) offers a methodical examination of power relations that have shaped American independent cinema throughout its history. He observes the cycles of production and distribution practices that independents use, which the mainstream studios then co-opt, and independents in turn eschew for new practices. Tzioumakis tackles the conundrum of defining independent film by stating that the term is in fact “a discourse that expands and contracts when socially authorized institutions (filmmakers, industry practitioners, trade publications, academics, film critics, and so on) contribute to its definition at different periods in the history of American cinema” (p. 11). Tzioumakis interrogates “independent” as a definitional term, noting that it frequently becomes situated in language and marketing in order to serve power relations.

Meanwhile, Berra (2008) examines independent film’s contemporary position in relation to the dominant Hollywood system. He situates the rising popularity of independent film in the 1990s and 2000s in a socio-political context in which marginal cinema, typically bankrolled by major studios but labeled as “independent film,” tackles themes that reflect contemporary anxieties but which does so in a way that ultimately fails to challenge the dominance of the Hollywood studio system. King (2009) further

interrogates the intersection of independent and Hollywood (also called “Indiewood”), examining the appeal of cultural products for audiences that may identify as being outside the mainstream; he examines how Indiewood films are commodified and constructed to appear alternative. Audiences who seek alternative fare can find it easily by flocking to these so-called “independent films,” and studios can continue to maintain control over the film industry.

Broadly speaking, scholarship on independent film focuses on auteurs, studios, and content, with a handful of political economic studies that take into account the economic, social and political conditions under which independent films are made. The regional dimension of independent filmmaking – the *location* where films are made – has been only briefly discussed in the literature (e.g., Block, 1983; Storper and Christopherson, 1985; Lyons, 1994; Levy, 1999) and, as I discuss next, deserves a more comprehensive analysis.

Regional Independent Film and Filmmaking

Little information or interest existed in the academic literature about the regional nature of film and filmmaking in the U.S. prior to the late 1970s and 1980s. For a number of reasons, in the early 1980s, regional film industries started competing with Hollywood and secured scholarly attention (e.g., Block, 1983; Edgerton, 1986; Lev, 1986; Jacobson, 1989). The home video industry was challenging Hollywood’s dominance over film distribution and exhibition, as independent home video distributors like Vestron and New World Video sprung up with a range of cheap alternatives to Hollywood movies.

Jacobson (1989) credits the early days of the Sundance Film Festival (then called the Utah/U.S. Film Festival) for directing a critical spotlight on independent filmmaking outside Hollywood and New York. *Northern Lights* (directed by John Hanson and Rob Nilsson in 1978 and released in 1982; about North Dakota), *Gal Young 'Un* (directed by Victor Nuñez in 1979; about Florida), and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (directed by Robert M. Young in 1982; about Texas) are among those films most often cited as the forerunners of regional independent film. *The Journal of the University Film and Video Association* published issues in 1983 and 1986 that examined the nature of regional and independent film.¹¹

Taking a cue from regional literature studies, the bulk of the studies that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s about American regional film focused on the films themselves rather than on regionally-based production processes. For example, some studies discussed how region contributes to identity construction through film in the South (e.g., French's *The South and Film* and Campbell's *The Celluloid South*, both published in 1981) and the American West (e.g., *The War, The West and the Wilderness* (Brownlow, 1979)). Later, Lyons (1994) analyzed films from a number of regions in the U.S., from New York and Long Island to the Heartland and the Northwest. Levy (1999) also discusses regional films, noting that while "most American independent movies are set in New York or Los Angeles, the country's two cultural centers," there are numerous films set in small-town locations across the country (p. 154). Levy equates "regional"

¹¹ Of particular interest from the 1983 issue are Mitchell W. Block's (1983) article, "Independent Filmmaking in America," which proposes three categorizations of independent film: independent film artists, regional independents and Hollywood independents. Key articles in the 1986 issue include Peter Lev's (1986) "Regional Cinema and the Films of Texas" and "The Film Bureau Phenomenon in America and Its Relationship to Independent Filmmaking," by Gary Edgerton (1986).

with “rural,” with less attention to specific geographic location than a *type* of place and, consequently, a *type* of film (he characterizes regional rural films as “high-minded,” “nostalgic,” and often “dull”) (p. 162). Levy does give brief attention to regional filmmaking in Texas and Florida, although he continues to focus on the content of films like *Ulee’s Gold* (Victor Nuñez, 1997; set in Florida) and *Slacker* (Richard Linklater, 1991; set in Texas), rather than the context of their production.

Popular media attention grew in the 1970s and 1980s toward regional film centers such as Texas, Florida and North Carolina, as did Hollywood studios’ attention (Texas has been called “the third coast” (following the two “coasts” of Los Angeles and New York), while Florida was once known as “Hollywood East”). These locations drew productions and money away from Hollywood, and studios and other investors began to open studio complexes to tap into these markets.¹² But at the same time, concern in Hollywood grew over this so-called runaway production (and still exists today in the form of political platforms and publicity campaigns built around “keeping Hollywood in Hollywood”). Storper and Christopherson (1985) published a landmark study that examined the impact of runaway production in Los Angeles. They discovered that “employment, payroll and establishments continue to concentrate in Los Angeles, while only filming activity has dispersed” (p. 4). The majority of a film’s budget, between 70 and 90 percent, was still being spent in Los Angeles and film-related business and

¹² Disney and MGM partnered to build a \$300 million studio complex in Orlando in 1988, and Universal Studios Florida opened two years later a few miles away (Nordheimer, 1988). Dino De Laurentiis opened the De Laurentiis Entertainment Group in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1984; the studio went bankrupt a few years later, but the facility is still used today, now by EUE Screen Gems Studios. Prominent Texan investors pumped money into their homegrown film industry in the form of studio complexes such as the Dallas Communications Complex, which opened in 1984 (according to its website, this complex, now called The Studios at Las Colinas (2010), remains the largest soundstage and accompanying facilities between California and Florida to this day) (Hulbert, 1984).

employment was, in fact, growing quite rapidly. Storper and Christopherson (1987) applied the concept of flexible specialization to the film industry, commenting that as Hollywood went through vertical disintegration, “production [has been] carried out by a larger number and a more diverse set of firms” (p. 107). Major studios depended on independent production companies to produce films in the 1950s-1970s, and these independents subcontracted with small, specialized firms. “This type of production organization,” they write, “can be described as ‘flexibly specialized’” (p. 104).

The intersection of geography and film production has produced a number of studies that problematize the notion of Hollywood as a place. With flexible specialization and runaway production characterizing many of the industry’s operations, some argue that Hollywood is an idea rather than a specific geographic location (e.g., Schatz and Perren, 2004). However, as Scott (2005) reminds us, Hollywood is still very much alive as a production center, even 20 years after Storper and Christopherson’s study, and the sustained concentration of production and distribution enterprises in Los Angeles attest to the city’s preeminence in the industry. Regional film production does continue, however, and grows increasingly competitive with the expansion of tax incentives and rebates that are offered at the state level to film productions. Bhayroo and Meehan (2008), for example, analyze the legislative structure for incentivizing film productions in Louisiana, describing the state’s efforts to make itself attractive for Hollywood productions that would also help to build an indigenous industry. State governments and citizens should decry these “handouts,” as tax incentives are not as lucrative as often claimed, as some scholars note (e.g., Mayer and Goldman, 2010; Tannenwald, 2010).

Most scholarly accounts of regional filmmaking examine historical roots, as does Spehr's (1977) examination of Fort Lee, New Jersey. Fort Lee was home to a filmmaking community before and during the foundation of Hollywood, a history later taken up by Koszarski (2004) in a compilation of archival material documenting the city's early days of motion picture production. Nelson (1983) details Jacksonville, Florida's ultimately unsuccessful bid to compete with Hollywood in the early part of the twentieth century. One of the few accounts to examine contemporary regional filmmaking is Macor's (2010) comprehensive and detailed accounting of the filmmaking in Austin, Texas, from the early 1970s to the 2000s. She traces the burgeoning reputation of Austin as a film production center through case studies of celebrity filmmakers such as Richard Linklater, Robert Rodriguez and Mike Judge, who got their start in Austin, made films for Hollywood studios, and returned to Austin to help build and strengthen a homegrown film industry. Corti (2009) examined the policy environment as it impacts regional independent filmmaking in his study of the Indigenous Oregon Production Incentive Fund (i-OPIF), the state-level tax incentive program aimed at independent filmmakers whose film budgets fall within the \$75,000 to \$750,000 range. Generally speaking, however, regional studies are typically devoted to matters of film exhibition and censorship (and, to a limited extent, distribution), such as Waller's (1995) look at theaters in Lexington, Kentucky, between 1896 and 1930, Aronson's (2008) examination of Pittsburgh's film distribution and exhibition during the silent era, and my own study of motion picture censorship in Portland, Oregon, in the 1910s (Erickson, 2010).

By the 1990s, the concept of regional filmmaking had all but disappeared from the scholarly and popular literature. Jacobson (1989) explains that "regional" as a term to

describe independent filmmaking outside traditional production centers was dropped in the latter half of the 1980s. According to Jacobson, the “regional” label seemed to detract from independents’ potential for collaboration with and success in Hollywood (p. 2). The connotation of “regional” as “marginal” also contributed to this perception.

While regional film production is certainly nothing new, scholarly analysis of American regional film production is clearly lacking. There have been many studies of historical and contemporary regional film and filmmaking in other parts of the world; significant attention, for example, has been paid to regional filmmaking in India (e.g., Govil, 2005), the United Kingdom (e.g., Nicholson, 2000; Redfern, 2005), Latin America (e.g., Shaw and Dennison, 2005; Shaw, 2007), and the Third World more broadly (Armes, 1987). Gasher’s (2002) account of the film industry in British Columbia examines the complex environment in which filmmaking takes place in western Canada, working against competitive and dominant forces from both Ontario and Hollywood (see also Coe, 2000).

With increased attention to the potentially dramatic economic impact of film industries in various cities and states around the country since the mid-2000s,¹³ coupled with expanding municipal- and state-level film policies, it is apparent that studies of regional independent filmmaking (especially critical studies) are warranted and, indeed, crucial to understand the landscape of contemporary American independent film.

¹³ The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) (2010a) has begun turning its attention to producing industry reports on the economic contribution that the motion picture industry makes, both nationally and at the state level, and provides a snapshot of statistics on film and television production by state.

Having traced connections among political economy of communication and Hollywood and independent (and regional) filmmaking, it becomes clear that a study of the regional independent filmmaking is a much-needed contribution to the literature. As an increasingly prevalent and consequential economic and cultural activity, regional independent filmmaking has the potential to help restructure the dynamics and institutions of the film industry, which in turn may shift where power resides. An investigation of regional independent filmmaking helps to uncover the political, social and economic processes that have continually defined the independent film world and, more broadly, reveals implications for independent film and the role of culture in American society.

Theoretical Foundation and Research Questions

Independent film exists despite, in opposition to, and increasingly within the mainstream Hollywood film industry, and regional film industries are even more dependent in many ways upon their relationship to Hollywood studios, which bring lucrative production work to a given locale. This study focuses on how and why regional independent filmmaking has continued to exist and how it has even become stronger in some respects in the face of increased media concentration and consolidation of the Hollywood film industry.

This study employs political economy of communication as the theoretical foundation for this exploration of regional independent filmmaking. In this section, I discuss how political economy of communication is integral to this study's analysis of regional independent filmmaking. I then discuss regional filmmaking, offering definitions

and parameters that, along with the theoretical framework, will provide the foundation for this study's subsequent chapters, in which I analyze the history, infrastructure, strategies and conditions of regional independent filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest.

Political Economy of Communication

Political economy of communication is, according to Mosco's (1996) seminal work, the study of "social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources" (p. 25). The resources involved in the film industry include not only the actual films themselves, but also labor, financing, personal and professional connections, institutions, and other resources that enable films to be made and distributed. We must also consider the media spectrum within which film operates, as mainstream films are produced by media conglomerates that also own television, internet, and print holdings, among others.

By studying the social relations and, by extension, power relations, engaged in the production, distribution and consumption of media resources, political economy of communication uncovers relationships and networks that often otherwise go unexplored. It is most often these networks that structure media institutions' practices. Despite media economists' claim to the contrary, media institutions are not monolithic organizations that operate independently of human behavior; rather, they are guided by decisions made at allocative and operational levels. How and why are decisions made, and by whom, to create vertically or horizontally integrated companies? What drives a corporation to estimate its communities' (or "consumers," in economic language) needs based on responsiveness to advertising? How do film studios make decisions to relocate

production to take advantage of cheaper labor? Individuals within organizations make these decisions, and these collective decisions create and perpetuate systemic conditions under which many individuals and organizations are compelled to operate. We can say, then, that many structures within the current media system in the U.S. (and which are rapidly spreading throughout the world) have become naturalized as a force of presupposition that “this is the way things are,” rather than “this is the way things should or could be.” Political economy of communication helps to uncover these assumptions.

Specifically, political economy of communication examines industry structures (which may include conglomeration, concentration, ownership, diversification), strategies (vertical and horizontal integration, synergy, product placement, globalization, commodification and commercialization), labor practices, financing, allocative and operational control, and relationships with other institutions such as government, and so on.

This project is explored through the lens of political economy of communications, rather than other theoretical frameworks found in film studies, which has historically focused more often on issues such as themes, genres and aesthetics.¹⁴ Film studies has tended to align itself with the arts and humanities, in part to legitimize cinema as “the seventh art.” Film is often analyzed as a closed object, without much attention to the conditions in which it was produced or distributed. In doing so, Hollows (1995) notes, film studies scholars often lack critical institutional analysis skills that accompany research in social-science based disciplines like mass communications and media studies.

¹⁴ Some of the more dominant theories used in film studies include realism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, auteur theory, and genre theory (see, for example, Stam, 2000).

Film studies has broadened as a discipline in the past several years, pushed by technological advances and the need to incorporate newer scholars' interests in television, internet and other moving image media (e.g., Grieveson and Wasson, 2008; Rodowick, 2008). These changes have created somewhat of an identity crisis for film studies, as even the celluloid format is not often studied. For instance, Kaplan (2004) laments that many of her film studies students have never even seen a 16mm film or 16mm projector. Although scholars in the discipline are excited to incorporate changing media formats and new areas of study (e.g., Sickels, 2010), the emphasis remains primarily on thematic, ideological and aesthetic concerns, with less attention on industrial processes (e.g., Grant, 2004; Kaplan, 2004; Lewis, 2004). Increasingly, however, many historical studies of the film industry focus on industrial practices and relationships in film production (e.g., Hill, 2010; Wright, 2009; Mann, 2008).

The landscape of regional independent filmmaking can be effectively studied within a critical political economic theoretical framework. In this study, I contend that the factors that constitute political economic analyses (industry structures, strategies, etc.) are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they corroborate and reinforce one another. At the core of a critical political economic analysis is the dynamic of power, and this theory helps to illuminate places where struggles for power are occurring and where power has already concretized. Specific attention is drawn in this study to the policies, practices and impact of various actors and institutions, including labor, the local and Hollywood film industries, government, civic and community organizations, and technologies.

Critical Political Economy for Analysis of Small-Scale Industry

Political economy of communication does not often explore the dynamics of small-scale industry. This approach generally analyzes multinational and/or publicly-held corporations that engage in practices and strategies that pursue profits, expansion and dominance. While small industry often adheres to many of the same business principles, there can be fundamental differences in the strategies (and motivations for these strategies) employed by small business.

One of the contributions of this study is to help build theory in political economy of communication that focuses on small business and regional industry. There are certainly critical political economic studies that focus on small business (e.g., Benson, 2003; Hilliard and Keith, 2005; Noam, 2009), and this study contributes to this literature by using some of political economy's analytical tools to examine a particular industry. I apply the principles of political economy to the independent film industry by asking questions pertaining to regional industry to understand the nature of small-scale filmmaking and its relationship to Hollywood. These questions include:

- How is the industry organized or structured? What is the available infrastructure?
- Who owns elements of the regional industry? How is it financed?
- Whose voices are heard? How are voices heard?
- Who has power or control over what aspects (from financing and production to distribution and exhibition)? Who makes decisions?
- What is the nature of relationships between various parties (including film professionals, the state, investors, big business, unions, the local community, the public, Hollywood, etc.)?

These questions are by no means atypical of political economic analyses of the media industries. However, by focusing on the regional independent film industry, these questions turn attention towards a segment of the film industry that has mostly been outside of the critical spotlight.

It is equally important to assess the impact of major corporations on regional/local industry, particularly as practices of concentration, conglomeration, vertical and horizontal integration, and diversification alter the landscape of media production and distribution to favor and maintain the dominance of these major companies. How is independent filmmaking impacted by these practices and strategies? Do independent filmmakers engage in these practices too, or do they construct alternative practices that empower independent filmmaking? Political economy of communication is a useful lens through which to examine these questions.

I turn now to a discussion of regional filmmaking in which I propose the definitions and parameters of regional filmmaking that are implemented in this study.

Regional Filmmaking: Theorization and Definition

As previously discussed, regional became significant in American cinema in the late 1970s and early 1980s when independent films made outside the Hollywood sphere gained critical and popular attention. The idea of “regional film” can be as complex and vague as “independent film,” and therefore to define “regional independent film” is also a challenge. The concept of “independent film” is considered in Chapter IV, but here I discuss “regional” in order to establish parameters around the term within the context of this study.

Most broadly, regions are identified as parts of a whole, the pieces that, when assembled, make up a picture of somewhere in its entirety. Regions may be delineated by boundaries that are geographic, political, economic, cultural, social or psychological in nature. “Regional” or “regionalism” as a lens of inquiry connotes an inquiry into identity, a set of shared characteristics bound by one of the afore-mentioned sets of borders. For one early scholar of regionalism, “it is possible to have a general definition of the region as a unit of areal and cultural differentiation” (Vance, 1951, p. 123). Vance continues: “Each region must differ from neighboring regions but must approximate a mode of homogeneous characteristics if it is to possess identity.” The distinctiveness that defines one region makes it a cohesive unit separate from its neighbors, and one component that contributes to the identity of the whole.

Regionalism as a concept has been applied to various disciplines as a way of examining some level of identity construction as it manifests in phenomena ranging from visual art, literature, and architecture to economics, politics and environment. In studies based on American regions, these applications have shifted, retrenched, and grown to accommodate changing perceptions of region, boundaries, identity, and place in various regions of the U.S. such as New England, the South, the Southwest, the Heartland, or the Pacific Northwest. It is the last region with which we are concerned in this study.

“Regions” in this study are characterized by loosely defined geographical boundaries that may share economic qualities and cultural values. “Regional filmmaking” happens within these boundaries; regional filmmaking means film production communities around the country that are actively making films, with film professionals collaborating with each other and creating and sustaining support organizations. Regional

filmmaking mostly takes place at the municipal, county, or state level, as these film communities make economic and cultural-creative contributions to their regions, and the regions claim those contributions, working to support them in some respect. There is a reciprocal relationship with the larger community, wherein business and/or government invests in regional filmmaking, and the film community provides exhibition, education, and indirect economic impact. This is not a perfect relationship, however, as many in the region may be unaware or unsupportive of the local film industry. Film professionals in the region may not work with (or get along with) their peers, and support organizations may compete for the same audiences, membership and dollars. Regional filmmaking is rife with contradictions and conflicting motivations. But we can say that there are certain qualities shared by regional filmmaking communities across the country.

Block (1983) differentiates among various types of independent filmmakers, using four central phases of filmmaking (finance, production, distribution and exhibition/audience), to assist in categorization. His three types are: Independent Film Artists, Regional Independents, and Hollywood Independents. Independent Film Artists generally rely on government support to make non-commercial works. Regional Independents bridge the gap between non-commercial and commercial works, often making films to build their portfolios. Hollywood Independents are usually those filmmakers who bring their personal visions to the screen, but who often work with the financial and logistical support of a major studio. Independent Film Artists and Regional Independents share more qualities with each other than with Hollywood Independents, facing more struggles in terms of securing financing, labor, and distribution. It is these

two groups, according to Block, that created and nurtured the regional filmmaking scene in the early 1980s.

We can also say that there is, for the film professional, some sense of identity wrapped up in the location or a connection to and association with a loosely defined geographical area. This does not mean that a filmmaker has to be “from” a region to represent regional filmmaking from that area. There are many transplanted film workers who contribute to the overall fabric of regional filmmaking in a given area. Yet there is a sense that a filmmaker is working in one region over another because of specific qualities about that *place* and what it has to offer. “[Austin, Texas] really is the wonderful, frustrating, exciting, productive, lazy town that everyone thought they were moving to,” notes one individual involved with the South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin. “That’s kind of what it’s become” (Macor, 2010, p. 314).

In the case of Oregon and Washington, “regional” can be examined as a construct that may identify and unify the Pacific Northwest, economically and culturally. The Pacific Northwest has a distinct regional identity, according to various sources (e.g., Robbins, 2001a; O’Connell, 2003). It is overwhelmingly associated with the environment: “The influence of nature on everyday Northwest life carried over to its literature and culture,” writes O’Connell (p. x). “This has been the case as far back as when the first tribes settled the region thousands of years ago and began telling stories about it. This obsession with landscape pervades all of Northwest literature.” According to Robbins (2001b), “It can be said with some truth that the region’s sense of well-being has centered on celebrating the big outdoors” (p. 8). Characteristics of the Pacific

Northwest were proposed in a 1987 article in Portland's newspaper, *The Oregonian*, in which Jeff Kuechle asks, "Who are we?" He answers:

Why, we're Northwesterners. The few. The Proud. Rugged. Outdoorsy. Absolute individuals. Healthy. Environmentally virtuous. The envy of our fellow countrymen. Dwellers in God's own corner of America. We're different. Or are we? (cited in Robbins, 2001c, p. 175).

Perhaps this litany of qualities, upon which Pacific Northwesterner identity and pride is constructed, is not so distinct; are other regional identities – in the Midwest, in the South, in San Francisco – similarly designed?

Film professionals in the Pacific Northwest, more often than not, have made a conscious decision to remain or relocate here, citing the region's quality of life, environment, pace, and communities. Portland-based animator Joanna Priestley says, "I think Oregon is the best place to live. I've lived all over the world, and Oregon's the best... There are so many incredibly talented people here. It's really inspiring."¹⁵ The factors that are listed on the Oregon Governor's Office for Film and Television's website as particularly attractive to out-of-state productions revolve around geography ("We've got the kind of diverse locations that other regions only dream about"), peace and quiet ("We're conveniently close to LA, while being strategically located far enough away to dim the buzz of leaf blowers, traffic, and helicopters."), and community ("Like local cooperation? So do we. We're all about cooperation."). The physical and cultural values touted here reflect a certain identity about Oregon that can also be translated into economic values.

¹⁵ All quotes from individuals are drawn from interviews conducted for this study and are not accompanied by citations, unless the quote is followed with its own citation noting the source.

Regional filmmaking is a mixture of three types of film production: indigenous productions, out-of-state productions, and international productions. In this study, the indigenous film community is defined as the segment of the industry that resides and works primarily in Oregon or Washington.¹⁶ This film community is making its own productions, which are financed, produced and distributed regionally, nationally and internationally. This community is supplemented by out-of-state and international productions, which are primarily Hollywood studios and international producers shooting on location and, in some instances, using production or post-production facilities in regional locations. Both out-of-state and international productions may bring some cast, crew and equipment with them, but they also rely on the location's existing film community to support them. To be considered regional, the production must engage with the regional filmmaking community, primarily through hiring to work on a given production. Simple location shooting on the part of Hollywood studios that does not engage with the regional filmmaking community is not considered here as regional filmmaking.

The regions analyzed in this study are primarily Portland and Seattle, although some discussion involves Pacific Northwest. Portland and Seattle are shorthand for each city's metropolitan areas. For Portland, this includes Multnomah and Washington Counties in Oregon and Clark County in southern Washington State; for Seattle, this

¹⁶ A 2007 economic impact study identified indigenous film and video in Oregon as "the segment of Oregon-based producers of feature films, television commercials, animation, instructional videos, television programs and movies, documentaries, animation, and multimedia products. Most of the sector consists of establishments and freelancing individuals who reside in Oregon and are primarily engaged in making motion picture film and video productions. This sector also engages in postproduction work such as editing, closed captioning, special effects, and film processing, and companies that specialize in producing programs for distribution on cable or satellite television" (ECONorthwest, 2008, p. 5).

primarily includes King County but can bleed into Pierce County to the south and Snohomish County to the north. This study recognizes the Pacific Northwest as Washington and Oregon, although some might also consider southern British Columbia, northern California, Idaho, and even Alaska, as part of this region. The focus on Washington and Oregon is, in part, because their state governments' interest in filmmaking (primarily through state-level economic policy) is integral to the development of the film industries (see Appendix B for maps of the region).

The preceding discussion of region, particularly as it is applied to filmmaking, is key to understanding why the independent film industry in the Pacific Northwest (specifically, Portland and Seattle) is worthy of study and how it relates to the rest of independent filmmaking in the U.S., as well as to Hollywood studio filmmaking.

Research Questions

Thus far, I have provided a discussion of relevant literature from political economy of communication, and political economic analyses of the Hollywood, independent and regional film industries. As well, I have presented the study's theoretical foundation, which rests in political economy of communication. The discussion of regional filmmaking has provided a framework for understanding the dynamics that define and shape the interactions among the local film industry in the Pacific Northwest and its relation to the dominant Hollywood film industry.

In order to examine these dynamics, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How has the term “independent film” historically been defined, and how is it understood today?

The concept of “independent film” is contested, depending on who is using the term and for what purpose. As well, “independent” has had different meanings at different times over the course of cinematic history. It is necessary to interrogate the nature of these definitions, both historically and in their contemporary context, before proceeding with an examination of regional independent filmmaking.

2. What is the historical development of regional filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest?

An understanding of how regional filmmaking developed in the Pacific Northwest is fundamental to analyzing its current environment. This history provides an introduction to the interactions among various local professional, civic, community and government organizations, as well as Hollywood studios, all of which have shaped the development of the filmmaking landscape in Seattle and Portland.

3. What supports the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking?

The filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle are supported by certain organizations, policies, and resources that facilitate film professionals’ ability to work and create films. This question examines the nature of this infrastructure and the dynamics among the various actors that help to create a sustainable environment for filmmaking by regional independents.

4. What are challenges in the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking?

This question complements the previous research question by examining challenges that face regional independent filmmakers. Many of these challenges are deeply embedded in the structures and operations of the dominant Hollywood film industry and are thus difficult for independents to overcome.

5. What are the relationships between regional filmmaking communities and Hollywood, and between regional filmmaking communities themselves?

A central thread that runs through any discussion of American independent filmmaking is its relationship to the Hollywood film industry. It is necessary to unpack this relationship in order to dispel myths about independents, as well as to more adequately understand the motivations of Hollywood. As well, while regional independent film industries share many qualities, they are not homogenous. Rather, distinct qualities emerge based on a number of factors, from geography to local economy to the makeup of the community. How do regional independent film communities interact with each other and how do their filmmaking experiences differ?

An in-depth critical examination of the regional independent film landscape, as illustrated by the case studies presented in this study, is a necessary and crucial addition to the existing literature on the film industry. There is a gap in scholarly *and* popular understanding about the nature of independent filmmaking at the site in which it occurs most frequently – the regional setting outside the dominant independent filmmaking

centers of Los Angeles and New York. This study addresses that gap by providing a window into the inner-workings of a specific regional filmmaking industry.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study gives a voice to a set of people who are often swept aside by the media, by audiences, and by power players in the mainstream Hollywood film industry. They are the people on the ground, making films happen and leading the charge to revamp traditional models of film production, distribution and exhibition. Through document analysis, interviews and a survey, this study provides a window into the activities of the regional independent filmmaker. As noted elsewhere in this study, most academic (and popular) focus on independent filmmakers privileges the quintessential success story – the Kevin Smiths and the Steven Soderberghs – rather than those individuals who represent the general and everyday story – the Kelley Bakers and the Beth Harringtons. Much of the myth surrounding the quintessential success story derives from a fascination with the idea of the “little guy who makes good,” wherein influence and authority shifts from the powerful to the powerless. The fundamental dynamic of this relationship – that of power – is the basis of this study, and it is what drives the methodology to uncover the particulars of this dynamic.

This chapter will discuss the methodological approach employed in this study, including the research strategy, case study selection, methods of selection, organization and analysis of data, and limitations of the study.

Research Strategy

A research strategy is that which links theoretical paradigms to methods of collection (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It is the frame that determines research questions, sets of methods, and types of evidence likely to be collected. Designed within a critical paradigm, this study is guided by political economy of communication, which forms the basis of the inquiry into regional independent film. This subject demands attention to the dynamics of power and issues of media access and diversity. It also necessitates attention to the social, political, economic and cultural context in which film communities operate, as there are a myriad of factors that impact the production, distribution and exhibition of film.

The four central pillars of political economy of communication are social change and historical transformation, social totality, moral philosophy and praxis. These characteristics provide guideposts for shaping a political economic study and its resulting role in informing economic, social, cultural and political change. Furthermore, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) note that critical researchers often use their findings as a stepping-stone to rectify injustices and imbalances in social relationships. Therefore, for this study, it is necessary to examine the history of regional independent film (and American filmmaking in general) and the various contexts in which independent film operates. It is also necessary to uncover the moral philosophy that shapes both mainstream Hollywood and regional independent film activities and how these impact regional independent film communities. In doing so, this study aims to help strengthen the landscape of regional independent film.

The complexity of personal and professional relationships, as well as the surprising lack of information about the life of the average independent filmmaker, necessitated the use of qualitative methods at the grassroots level, in order to become familiar with and trace networks within the regional film industry. In order to explore this grassroots level, I needed to connect directly to the object of study; thus, the case study proved to be the most useful point of inquiry to connect to independent filmmaking.

The Case Study

This dissertation utilizes case studies as a way to investigate the phenomenon of independent filmmaking in its real-world context. Using case studies, researchers can uncover both the particularities of a case as well as its commonalities with other cases. According to Stake (2005), researchers gather evidence on the nature and activity of the case, its contexts (historical, economic, political, physical, cultural), and informants who are involved with the case. Furthermore, Yin (1994) notes that case studies are useful when “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). In other words, with regard to this study, it is important to understand the regional context in which independent filmmaking occurs in order to understand independent filmmaking itself. In this study, I have optimized my understanding of the two cases of Portland and Seattle, comparing and contrasting them and situating them within the larger context of American filmmaking.

I focused on cities in this study, rather than specific filmmakers or companies, because the study centered on regional filmmaking. In other words, it was essential to examine specific geographic areas. Filmmakers’ circumstances are not permanent, as

they may move to a new city or leave filmmaking altogether. Companies also are impermanent, going out of business or moving offices to new locations. Analyzing filmmaking communities at the city level provides a consistent backdrop, or a constant amid continuously changing factors. The infrastructures of cities rather than entire regions were analyzed because most regional independent filmmaking is located in urban centers and because cities are more likely to host communities in which a diversity of film professionals works. In this study, infrastructure is defined as the systems, policies, resources and practices that enable or disable film production, distribution and exhibition.

Portland and Seattle were chosen as case studies for a number of reasons. Most studies of independent filmmaking focus on individual filmmakers or, in rare cases, on the independent filmmaking centers of Los Angeles or New York. A few studies have examined Austin, Texas, because of the rise of well-known Austin-based independent filmmakers like Robert Rodriguez and Richard Linklater in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see, for example, Lyons, 1994; Macor, 2010). There has been much less attention given to Portland and Seattle.

While there are vibrant regional film industries across the country – *MovieMaker Magazine* names Albuquerque, Shreveport, New York and Austin as examples (Jacobs with Wood, 2010) – Portland and Seattle stand out both for their unique physical and geographic environments. Filmmakers are drawn to these cities that offer a range of landscapes suitable for filmmaking. For instance, Oregon’s film office boasts, “We’ve got the kind of diverse locations that other regions only dream about. Others can claim it, but we’ve got the mountains, beaches, ghost towns, deserts, lakes, rivers, streams, little towns, modern cities, and lava flows to prove it” (Governor’s Office of Film and

Television, 2010). These cities are also geographically close to Los Angeles and share the same time zone as that city, which can facilitate business dealings with filmmaking operations there. Furthermore, tax incentives in Washington and Oregon make these locations attractive for film productions.

Both cities host vibrant creative communities that attract creative people. Seattle has been called a city with a “pioneering spirit” that generates “big ideas” (Stein, 2009). Its reputation of being home to “a lot of brainy people,” coupled with a “diverse high-tech sector, cultural life, access to rugged natural terrain and a strong university presence,” appeals to young people especially (Shellenbarger, 2009). For many, Portland is a symbol of “West coast hipness,” drawing newcomers with its eco-friendly culture, diverse landscapes, and entrepreneurial, creative, and open-minded climate (Shellenbarger, 2009; Cortright and Coletta, 2004). Despite a sour economic climate in the late 2000s, creative types have continued to come to the Pacific Northwest, which translates to a proportionately higher number of artists and other creative professionals than other cities (Welker, 2009).

Certainly, it must be considered that each city’s proximity to my current location facilitated data gathering, as well as continued involvement with film-related activities in both regions. My own background as a former film publicist with a nonprofit film organization in Seattle further reinforced my ability to connect with the filmmaking community and legitimized my position as researcher.

Methods of Collection and Analysis

The selection of methods for data collection and analysis is crucial for producing quality research. These methods are predicated on what the researcher wants to study and why she chooses to study it. In the critical paradigm, researchers generally use qualitative methods, although there is value in quantitative methods as well. For this study, I primarily utilized qualitative methods to triangulate findings, which included interviews and document analysis. I also used a survey to gather information about the nature of the film communities in Portland and Seattle. Triangulation of methods is essential in order to confirm and reinforce reliable results (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

Document Analysis

Document analysis provides the basis upon which this study's interviews and survey were constructed and conducted. Scott (1990) notes that documents must be carefully selected and considered according to various criteria in order to assess their value and legitimacy for research. Among these criteria are authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. With the vast array of documents pertaining to independent film, from newspaper articles to filmmaker blogs to independent films themselves, I had to carefully comb through and select the most salient materials that would contribute to a broader understanding of the context and condition of independent film. Determining value is especially important for online sources, as the sheer volume of online sources available on a given topic (in this case, regional independent film) can quickly overwhelm the researcher and detract from a study's legitimacy if one is not careful. I tried to focus on sources that related to people with whom I would be speaking

personally, or that related to situations to which interviewees or reputable news articles referred. However, given the groundbreaking and innovative nature of emerging film industry models, I could not solely rely on phenomena about which everyone is already aware, and I had to expand my searching (primarily via the Internet) accordingly.

I examined a wide array of documents to shape this study and to provide additional examples, discussion points and historical context. These can be categorized into three types of documents: historical, film worker-related, and industry-related.

Historical documents were examined in order to reconstruct a history of regional independent film, and to clarify the very meaning of “independent film” as a term that has been used over the course of cinematic history. These sources included newspapers from Seattle and Portland, regional organizational documents, and secondary histories on specific periods of filmmaking and other history in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, I examined filmmaker biographies (such as Marshall Fine’s (2005) biography of John Cassavetes, and an autobiography of Joe Camp (2000), the creator of the *Benji* films), film studio case studies (including Richard Lewis Ward’s (2005) *A History of the Hal Roach Studios*), film history textbooks, and anthologies of filmmakers’ manifestos (such as the First Statement of New American Cinema Group (Sitney, 1970)). I also examined articles from 1908 to 2009 from *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* (see below for explanation).

Documents relating to film workers enabled me to gather additional information about specific filmmakers, mainly those interviewed for this study. I focused mostly on film workers’ professional websites, social networking website profiles, news articles that featured these film workers, and film workers’ own writings (such as Portland filmmaker

Kelley Baker's (2009) book, *The Angry Filmmaker Survival Guide*). These provided insight into the types of information these people present to the public about their craft, which reveals explicit and implicit motivations for working in film.

Industry-related documents provided a window into how the film industry, both mainstream and independent, is structured and how it deals with challenges. The types of documents included newspaper and magazine articles, organizational documents, government documents, blogs, email newsletters and online discussion forums. I examined Hollywood industry documents, but I also focused on organizations that directly work with and impact Portland and Seattle filmmaking, such as the Seattle chapter of the Independent Feature Project and the Governor's Office of Film and Television in Oregon. Many of these organizations produce email newsletters and blogs, which provide weekly (and even more frequent) updates to the activities in these communities. As well, I considered non-traditional documents, such as videos, workshops, industry meet-and-greets, and seminars, which were especially important for gaining a sense of the filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle.

In order to analyze many of these documents, I examined framing devices, rhetorical strategies, and consistencies and contradictions in presentation. Lakoff (2006) writes that frames structure one's understanding of the world through an unconscious and automatic process. Frames can be used to establish patterns, codes and conventions used, and they can indicate which patterns and codes are deeply embedded to the point that they are unrecognizable as such in superficial analyses.

The basis for the historical inquiry of the phrase "independent film" (explored in Chapter IV) was drawn from two major American newspapers, *The New York Times* and

The Los Angeles Times. These publications were selected because they would identify common popular and industry understandings of independent film in the United States. These newspapers are located in the two largest cities in the U.S., which have also been home to the two most substantial sites of filmmaking (independent and mainstream) in the country. Both newspapers have treated filmmaking as a legitimate and forceful industry almost since its inception. The newspapers also have comprehensive and searchable digital archives.

I searched the publications' archives for the term "independent film" and began the analysis from the first mention of independent film that appeared (May 9, 1908 in *The New York Times* and December 24, 1909 in *The Los Angeles Times*). I chose this term over others, such as "indie film," "art house film," "experimental film," and the like, because it has been used longer and more widely than these other terms.

I grouped the stories by decade and examined the headlines for every story to get a general sense of trends. The stories were then selectively analyzed according to the most salient trends because of the sheer numbers of articles that mentioned "independent film" (the 1990s, for example, returned over 600 articles from *The New York Times* that contained "independent film"). Various elements of these stories were analyzed, including type of story (filmmaker profile, studio announcement, festival story, etc.); how "independent film" was discussed (economic or artistic terms); and how independent filmmakers were discussed, paying particular attention to the organizations for which they worked, how their films were financed, and the subject matter of their films. Then, I compiled a list of themes that emerged from each decade in order to isolate how "independent filmmakers" were discussed.

Survey

A survey of the filmmaking communities of Portland and Seattle was useful in gauging the general climate and perceptions of these communities' participants. The survey was designed to assess how independent filmmakers feel about their work and the kinds of activities and compromises in which they engage to achieve their professional and personal goals. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), surveys can complement qualitative research because they can be “a valuable exploratory method” and, “due to their ability to capture demographic, behavioral and attitudinal attributes, surveys can offer a comprehensive look at an entire social unit” (p. 119). The survey in this study was used for two purposes: to establish some overall attitudes and trends about independent filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest, and to locate more potential interview subjects.

Various film production surveys and studies were consulted in order to design questions (e.g., Skillset, 2008; Dahlström and Hermelin, 2007; Jones et al., 2005; Neff et al., 2005; Statistics Canada, 2004). It is interesting to note that the most useful film production surveys were not administered in the United States and were instead administered in countries like the U.K. (Skillset, 2008), Australia (Jones et al., 2005), and Canada (Statistics Canada, 2004). While the filmmaking environments in these countries do share many similarities with the U.S., they also differ in many ways, particularly with regard to government involvement. Therefore, some questions regarding film financing, training and education, and distribution had to be altered somewhat for this study's survey to reflect the American filmmaking environment.

The survey contained various categories of questions, including questions about film workers' backgrounds, their filmmaking experiences in the past year (including

financing, promotion, and distribution), their goals and perceptions about filmmaking, and demographic information (see Appendix D for survey instrument). Respondents were also given an opportunity to provide their contact information if they self-selected to participate in the study's in-depth interviews.

Survey questions were, for the most part, the same for all respondents. However, because this study compares the filmmaking communities of Portland and Seattle, some survey questions differed depending upon respondents' geographic location. Survey respondents were thus asked if they work primarily in Washington, Oregon, or elsewhere. Another location-specific question pertained to specific local film organizations with which a respondent was involved.

Survey respondents were restricted to primarily discussing their filmmaking in the past year or most recent filmmaking experience with regard to financing, promotion and distribution. It was necessary to make this limitation on these questions because work arrangements in the film industry are most often temporary and contract-based. By only discussing their most recent filmmaking experiences, film workers would be able to isolate their responses to specific instances. Despite these restrictions, many of the other questions were open-ended in order to allow respondents to provide more detail in their answers. This was particularly important in questions pertaining to respondents' perceptions about filmmaking, such as "How do you define success in filmmaking?" and "How do you define independent filmmaking?"

The survey was administered through an online survey service, Survey Monkey, and targeted people involved in any capacity with the Oregon or Washington film communities. The MPAA (2010a) estimates that there were 11,290 people employed in

film or television-related jobs in Washington and 8,200 in Oregon in 2008. Survey respondents were recruited from a variety of sources, including the Oregon Media Network (an online community for media professionals), Craigslist, and weekly email newsletters sent by the Northwest Film Forum in Seattle and the City of Seattle Office of Film + Music. The survey was available online for approximately three months in the fall of 2009, although the majority of respondents completed the survey within the first month.

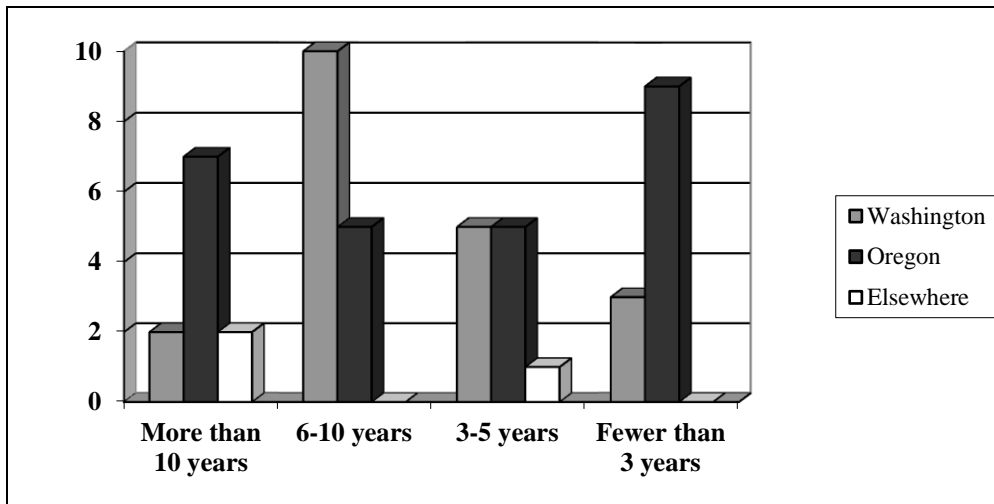
Because the survey was intended to give a flavor of the filmmaking environment in the Pacific Northwest, it was not necessary to obtain a high number of respondents. Sixty people responded to the survey, and most questions were answered by 53 respondents. Of these, 53.5 percent were men and 46.5 percent were women. Most respondents were between the ages of 20 and 39 (56 percent), with 23 percent between ages 40 and 49, 16 percent between 50 and 59, and 5 percent between 60 and 69.

Fifty-three percent worked primarily in Oregon, 42 percent in Washington, and five percent elsewhere. Over half (53 percent) of respondents have been working in filmmaking for three to 10 years, while nearly a quarter (22.4 percent) have worked in filmmaking for over 10 years (Chart 1).

Of those who responded to the question about the types of job titles used to describe work in filmmaking, on average, respondents said that they used approximately three job titles, which could include director, producer, writer, editor, and so on. One respondent, for example, identified as a director, editor, producer and cinematographer. Respondents said that they worked on an average of three types of media productions,

which could include feature live-action films, short animation films, documentaries, web or other interactive productions, among others.

Chart 1: Length of time working in filmmaking, according to survey respondents

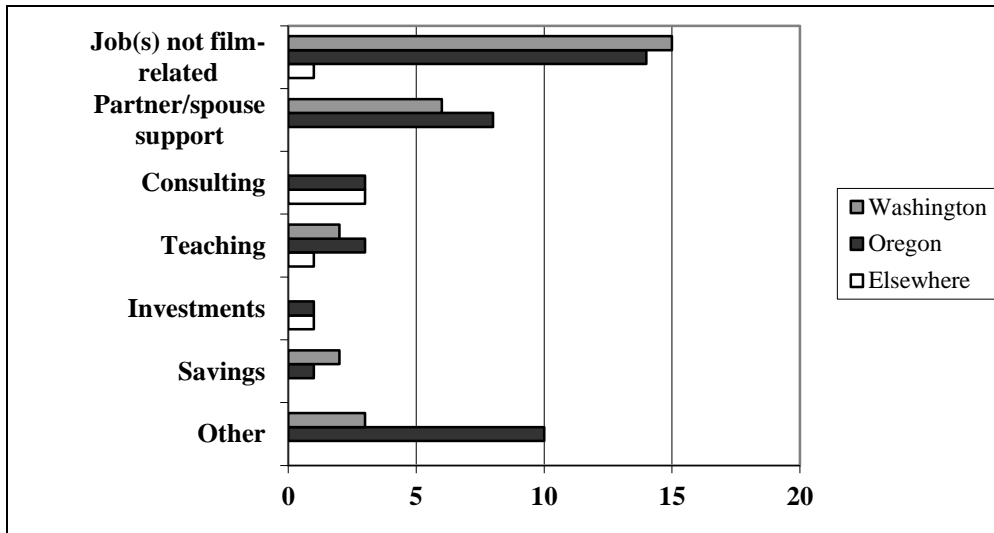


Source: Author's survey

Eighty-one percent of respondents supplement their filmmaking income with other work or financial sources. The most common source of income is from a job that is not film-related, while other sources include teaching, partner/spouse support, consulting, investments, savings, and other financial sources (unemployment, student loans, rental properties, etc.) (Chart 2).

The survey provided crucial information upon which I constructed many of my interview questions. It also provided me with a list of potential interview subjects, as survey respondents were able to give their name and contact information if they chose to further participate in this study.

Chart 2: Sources of income to supplement filmmaking income, according to survey respondents



Source: Author's survey

Interviews

Interviews made the most substantial contribution to my understanding and analysis of the film communities in Portland and Seattle. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) describe the interview as a way to discover people's experiences within a given context so that the researcher can understand their perspectives, as well as the social or cultural structure of the phenomenon being observed.

It was vital to consult a range of contacts in order to gain a balanced perspective of the film communities in these cities. Types of contacts included directors, producers, film finance consultants, publicists, distributors, government officials, owners of film-related businesses, and film educators. The first several interviewees were selected based on my preexisting contacts in and knowledge of the film industries in Portland and Seattle. These included directors, producers, publicists, government officials and directors of film organizations. To branch outward from my own network of contacts, I

utilized the snowball technique, soliciting names of contacts from interview subjects. Other contacts were made by attending film-related events in Portland and Seattle, as well as through the survey, wherein respondents were given the opportunity to give their name and contact information for further questioning. A handful of contacts were made through cold calls, wherein I would introduce myself without any reference to another contact. I targeted individuals who are presently or formerly part of the Seattle and Portland filmmaking communities, or who could speak knowledgeably about certain activities in at least one of these communities (for example, I interviewed a professor at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon, who has worked with Portland's public television station). I interviewed a total of 43 individuals, most from the Seattle and Portland filmmaking communities and two affiliated with independent filmmaking elsewhere (one in Los Angeles and one in New York) (see Appendix E for sample questions).

Most subjects were interviewed by telephone, with some interviews conducted face-to-face or by email. By far, live conversations were the most productive, with in-person interviews yielding the most comprehensive and intimate conversations. Telephone interviews also generated quality responses, as I was able to carry on more in-depth two-way conversations with the subjects. Although some criticize telephone interviews, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) contend that these may not only be "as intimate and engrossing for the callers" as in-person interviews, but may also prompt subjects to "disclose private thoughts because they never expect to meet the researcher in person or even hear from the researcher again" (p. 186). Email interviews, however, proved less useful and fairly impersonal. It is likely that the subjects were unsure of how much

information they should include in an email interview, which tended to thus substantially reduce the quantity and quality of their answers.

I strived to create an air of casual formality with the interviewees, in order to more easily develop rapport. It was also important that the interviewees recognized that I was approaching this project from a perspective of respect and professionalism. My understanding of and former role in the regional film industry as an independent film publicist helped to legitimize my position as researcher. I approached each interviewee with a set of questions tailored in some respect to the subject's specific circumstances. These open-ended questions, asked in a conversational manner, prompted informal and off-the-cuff answers that often led to unexpected information. Interviews, which typically lasted 30 to 60 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed, and in cases where interviews were not recorded, extensive notes were taken. These interview documents were then compiled with background information obtained online about the subjects and the organizations with which they were affiliated.

Organization and Analysis of Data

Because I approached the collection of data from a critical political economic perspective, much of the evidence points to issues that are fundamental to political economic research, such as financing, access to resources, and dynamics of power. The interviews and the survey were particularly useful in conjunction with document analysis because they not only reinforced many of these political economic issues, but they also turned up additional evidence that situated the political economic nature of independent filmmaking within its social and cultural context.

While this study is approached through the lens of political economic analysis, grounded theory principles provide a useful framework through which to organize and analyze this data. Grounded theory, according to Charmaz (2005), “details process and context – and goes into the social world and setting far beyond one investigative story. Grounded theory contains tools to study how processes become institutionalized practices” (p. 529). It enables the researcher to listen openly to the data and to recognize the mutability of categorizing experiences, contexts and relationships.

After gathering data, I identified a range of ideas in the survey, interview transcripts and other documents. The survey data was used to indicate trends in independent filmmaking, and because the majority of respondents were from Washington or Oregon, this study was able to identify trends in the regional independent filmmaking context based on survey answers. As I conducted more interviews, various themes consistently emerged, which began to reshape the study and the resulting interpretation of the findings. These themes included: financing, distribution, labor, professionalism, government involvement, community involvement, and myths of independent filmmaking. While many of the themes became apparent early on in the research process, it was not until I conducted more interviews and collected and analyzed more documents that their relevance and salience were revealed. Sometimes, for example, an interviewee would restate a point in a different manner before I understood that point to be important. I also used this approach to develop definitions of key terms and concepts, such as “independent film” and “success.” Eventually, the study reached theoretical saturation, wherein “new incidents add little new value to the concepts” proposed by the researcher (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 222).

Limitations

Certainly, every research study has limitations, which might be rooted in the researcher's personal experience, energy, and resources, or in the types of data available for collection. But the researcher must work within these limitations to secure and maximize the most valid evidence in order to produce a compelling study.

One limitation of this study might be the range and number of people interviewed for the project. While I tried to interview various types of people, from producers and directors to publicists and government officials, there are always segments of any given community that remain hidden despite the researcher's best efforts. People involved with the Portland and Seattle film communities, directly or indirectly, number in the thousands; a sample of 43 interview subjects and 60 survey respondents from both communities hardly covers the diversity and scope of these communities. There are also numerous types of community members that I did not personally approach, including actors, various crew positions, entertainment lawyers, and others, simply because of lack of time and resources. Audiences and other individuals related to exhibition of motion pictures were not surveyed or interviewed either.

This study focuses primarily on urban centers rather than other geographic designations like counties, states, or rural areas. The majority of independent filmmaking that happens in Oregon and Washington – and indeed, around the country – is centered in urban areas where resources are available, even though rich and dynamic filmmaking occurs outside of urban centers, and non-urban filmmaking communities are surely interesting case studies, as well.

It must be noted that while this study examined independent filmmaking, it did not examine independent *films*. The projects on which filmmakers work and collaborate are the fixtures around which this entire study revolves, yet I do not examine them as objects of study in and of themselves. This study focuses on the processes, activities and participants that make up independent filmmaking; these areas are, in my experience, the lesser-studied phenomena of independent filmmaking than independent films themselves, and thus necessitate a holistic examination all of their own.

By examining regional filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle, we can further our understanding of American independent filmmaking. Document analysis, a survey, and in-depth interviews provide ample evidence to give a picture of these communities and the underlying economic, social and political conditions that have a hand in their survival.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT IS INDEPENDENT FILM?

Introduction

This study hinges on the very definition of independent film, a hotly contested concept in scholarly literature and in the world of filmmaking. It seems that there is no one definition that adequately fits every film that might qualify as independent, because there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes “independence.” Labor of love, quirky, offbeat, non-studio, and low-budget are all phrases used to describe independent film by numerous sources, from the media to publicists to audiences to filmmakers themselves. In many ways, these characterizations have always been used to describe independent film, but the definition has never remained totally static.

Filmmakers who call themselves independent most often articulate a two-fold characterization of independent film. Firstly, there is a sense of freedom and personal expression that working in independent film allows. But secondly, there are nearly always financial considerations: who is funding a project and why? One Oregon filmmaker defines independent filmmaking as “making movies that retain the creators’ artistic vision, not taking cues/orders from those whose primary motivation is financial.” But beyond this vague template lay numerous interpretations and the need for ways of understanding just what this template means.

This chapter considers the term “independent film,” which is one that defies precise definition. The definition of the term shifts depending upon who uses it, the

context in which it is used, and how it is being used. Academics, filmmakers, journalists, and other interested parties define the term differently based on their motivations and perspectives. However, we can identify various strains of characteristics that enable us to draw a box around the concept so that we can devise a rubric, or a starting point to understand what is meant by “independent film.”

First, this chapter will consider the term “independent film” from a historical perspective by examining how independent filmmakers have been discussed in two journalistic publications over the past 100 years. This enables us to interrogate the assumptions surrounding the role of independents in the film industry and can therefore deconstruct the history of independent film as it has been reported in two major American newspapers. Following this analysis is an exploration of the ways in which “independent film” is theorized and used by various groups of scholars, journalists, and film professionals. Then, a new theorization of “independent film” is proposed that includes four crucial perspectives: creative control, investor involvement, distribution control, and level of risk.

A Historical Look at “Independent” Filmmakers

It would not be too facetious to say that all producers at the very outset were independents, but who, as they grew in stature and power, yielded to the almost universal human weakness of attempting to seize almost universal power over the sphere of their activity.

-- Donald Nelson, 1947

The definition of “independent film” is rooted in the definer’s perspective and motivation for using the term. Considering that, at any given moment in time, there are a

multitude of contradictory definitions of “independent film,” we must start to question how “independent film” has been defined over the entire history of film. Certainly, we can observe that, by the very nature of its name, “independent film” has always been characterized in opposition to mainstream Hollywood film. It is “independent” of something, and that something is Hollywood, whether that is the Hollywood financial structure, Hollywood sensibilities, or Hollywood filmmaking conventions or clichés. Overwhelmingly, this theme is more pronounced when considering “independent film” from a historical standpoint. Accordingly, we must uncover what is meant by “independent of Hollywood.”

It is useful here to consider filmmakers themselves, in order to determine who, over the years, has been identified as an independent filmmaker. This point of interrogation uncovers substantial differences and expectations of “independence,” providing us a lens through which to understand the nature of how independence has shifted over the past several decades. Of course, we must remember that this analysis is not intended to be a complete description of every type of independent filmmaker. But it does hint at how we can characterize the typical independent filmmaker in the 20th and early 21st centuries. These characteristics that have changed, as well as the perceptions that have remained constant, are reflected in shifts in the structure and makeup of the industry, the link of filmmaking and art, and social, political and economic concerns.

Using *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* as sources for popular and industry writings about independent film from the turn of the 20th century to the late 2000s, I can dispel myths and offer insight into the development of independent filmmaking in the United States. While these sources cannot represent the full breadth of

independent filmmaking over the years, they can collectively be used as a barometer for gauging the common and popular understanding of “independent film.” This analysis is extremely useful in beginning a conversation about what different parties mean by the phrase “independent film” and “independent filmmaker.”

It must be noted that this section is not intended to be a comprehensive history of independent filmmaking in the U.S. Rather, the history presented here is selective, analyzing the discourse of two major newspapers and the ways in which they refer to independent filmmakers. Therefore, some significant events in independent filmmaking history may be omitted because they were not among the major themes that emerged from this analysis.¹⁷

Characteristics of Independent Filmmakers

Generally speaking, independent filmmakers have been situated in opposition to Hollywood. However, the concept of the independent filmmaker has not always remained static; in fact, there have been monumental shifts in the definition of “independent film” and what it has meant to be an independent filmmaker. The following discussion presents characteristics of independent filmmakers over the decades that can be drawn out of the newspaper articles analyzed here, which I have highlighted in Table 1.

In the 1910s, independent filmmakers were characterized by these newspapers as “outlaws,” producing and exhibiting films without the required licenses from the Motion Picture Patents Company, also known as the Trust (“Film War,” 1912, p. 15). The sense of good (competition) and bad (monopoly) industrial practices continued into the 1920s,

¹⁷ For a comprehensive history of independent film, see Merritt’s (2000) *Celluloid Mavericks*.

as major companies that we recognize today began to emerge from their independent roots of the previous decade (William Fox, for instance, was one of the “outlaws” who then became a studio mogul at Fox Film Corporation, now 20th Century Fox).

Table 1: Characterization of independent filmmakers over the decades

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Independent filmmakers characterized as:</i>
1910s	“Outlaws” ¹ ; unlicensed
1920s	Providing a “public service” and “fighting for liberty” ²
1930s	Professionals working outside major studios, oftentimes struggling
1940s	Professionals temporarily working outside major studios; setting up “‘one-shot’ picture corporations” ³
1950s	Professionals operating outside major studios, but aligned with studios for financing and distribution support
1960s	Professionals and artists outside major studios, typically making films with low/modest budgets in variety of formats (documentary, art, avant-garde, underground)
1970s	Testing new models for production, distribution, exhibition; using film to make (political/social) statement
1980s	Expanding possibilities for success in individualized process
1990s	Amateurs who are driven, hungry, scrappy underdogs and who will/should make it big
2000s	Anybody can be a filmmaker, but must fit within Hollywood structures for financial success

Source: Author

¹ “Film War May Go On,” *The New York Times*, 4 May 1912, p. 15.

² “Will Ask Hughes to Lead Movie War,” *The New York Times*, 13 May 1925, p. 24.

³ T.F. Brady, “The Hollywood Scene,” *The New York Times*, 4 August 1946, p. 49.

Independent filmmakers were charged with the duty of providing a “public service,” “fighting for liberty,” and “securing freedom” primarily from the oligopolistic Hollywood movie industry (“Will Ask Hughes,” 1925, p. 24; “Producers to Battle Film Trust,” 1921, p. II12). They were faced with an implicit obligation of resisting exploitation for profit, however, in order to avoid succumbing to anticompetitive practices that plagued big industries like automobiles and steel (“Would Save Movies,” 1925, p. 22).

The “golden era” of studio filmmaking came firmly into existence in the 1920s and the film industry settled into regular routines of filmmaking. Heading into the 1930s, filmmakers were characterized as professionals, skilled at their craft. Independents were professionals working outside the major studios and outside an accompanying studio contract, and they often struggled to complete their films. Independent productions were valuable in a number of ways to those who would likely return to work in Hollywood studios. For example, independents’ methods of working quickly and cheaply could be adapted for Hollywood productions which received a great deal of pressure from financiers during the Depression era to cut production costs (Scott, 1931b). As well, independently produced films afforded some actors a second chance in their careers, as “several people have actually ‘come back’ into prominence through the independents” (Scott, 1931a, p. B13).

Despite this recognition that independents could fill gaps left by Hollywood, they were still often considered by many as substandard at their craft; qualities of some independent films were called “badly acted...technically worse than that,” while the cost of a “superior photoplay...could scarcely be less than \$200,000” (Sennwald, 1934, p.

X5). David O. Selznick was one independent who succeeded in producing movies that were comparable to the quality of Hollywood productions; with films like *Gone With the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939), the chair of the board for Selznick's company hoped "to take the commanding position in the independent field and be the first independent company operating on a large scale which will concentrate solely on high quality pictures" ("News of the Screen," 1936, p. 35). Furthermore, independent production companies allowed for quality filmmaking "without the red tape that encircles the major film groups" (Scott, 1935, p. A1). Clearly, writers at *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* recognized the professionalism of the industry and the imperative to respect the structures that had already become institutionalized.

This association with professionalism continued into the next two decades and independents were primarily those working outside the major studios temporarily, often taking a leave of absence from their studio contracts to work on "independent" productions. While working on a project, these individuals would set up a "'one-shot' picture corporation" for tax purposes and then would dissolve the company within six months of completing principal photography (Brady, 1946, p. 49). Banks willingly loaned money to independent productions in the late 1940s, but this faucet was generally shut off in the early 1950s and independents aligned with studios for financing and distribution support; studios in turn relied on independents for large part of their production slates (Pryor, 1954). Recognition began to emerge, however, that, in order to achieve artistic freedom – and financial freedom – one needed to operate outside the studios (Scott, 1951; Schallert, 1953).

This air of professionalism began to blur with an air of artistry and experimentalism in the 1960s as these newspapers turned their attention towards independent filmmakers like Shirley Clarke, John Cassavetes, and Andy Warhol. “Independent” was increasingly associated with low or modest budgets in a variety of formats (for example, documentary, art, avant garde and underground). There was also a sense that independent was becoming synonymous with wild and even clandestine film material, and the explosion of art house cinema and foreign films in the U.S. contributed to this perception (Crowther, 1966).

Filmmakers were not only making social and political statements with their films, but civil rights organizations and religious groups also turned to film to vocalize their causes (“Documentary Filmmakers,” 1965). For example, *Felicia*, a 12 minute documentary released by the University of California Extension Media Center in 1965, followed a teenaged girl from the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles a few months prior to the area’s explosive riots in 1965. According to a spokesperson for the film, it was “not a ‘protest’ film as such, but expresses some of the hopes as well as the frustrations experienced by Negroes as a whole” (“Film on Watts Girl Released,” 1965, p. WS3).

The New York Times and *The Los Angeles Times* profiled independent filmmakers in the 1970s who tested out new models of production, distribution and exhibition and challenged traditional structures dominated by Hollywood. It was during this era that Super-8 became popularized as a film medium, enabling increased access to equipment and more ventures into independent filmmaking. Some filmmakers enjoyed success at self-distribution, as was the case with Tom Laughlin and his film *Billy Jack* (Farber, 1974; Wilson, 1977). John Cassavetes, who had long drifted in and out of the Hollywood

studio system, experimented with new ways to cast extras in independent films: “The pink flyer was distributed in supermarkets, handed out on Pasadena street corners and sent by mail to hundreds of senior citizens in the area. It was corny, but effective. It read: WANT TO BE IN THE MOVIES?” (Simross, 1977, p. F1).

Independent filmmaking also continued to push boundaries of conventional material and format. Some explored drug use and sex in documentaries, narrative films and experimental films. Charles Hill produced *The Legal Pusher* (1970), examining the distribution of non-narcotic drugs in the U.S., and John Cosgrove’s *Angel Death* (1979), about the growing use of PCP or angel dust. In 1979, UCLA’s Film Archive sponsored multiple programs featuring sex and eroticism, in a series called “Sex and the American Independent Film.” Others opened up venues to exhibit “the kind of films that Hollywood doesn’t make and the usual theaters don’t show,” as was the case with Kenneth Belsky, a student in USC’s cinema department (Smith, 1974). Sheldon Renan started the Pacific Film Archive at the University of California-Berkeley in 1971 “while Hollywood is still debating whether it should have a museum of its own”; here, independent filmmakers were encouraged to donate their films to the archive that wished to preserve the diverse legacy of filmmaking (Thomas, 1971).

The newspapers documented vast changes in the 1980s, particularly on the technological front, which allowed for quicker film production and cheaper distribution and exhibition through VHS, cable television and satellite technology. Public television emerged as a particularly friendly outlet for independent films as programs like PBS’ *American Playhouse* and WNET’s *Independent Focus* showcased independent film and video work (“WNET/13 Seeking,” 1984; Taylor, 1985).

Various educational seminars and conferences were organized, such as UCLA Extension's "The Art of the Independent Film – From Concept to Screen" (1980), the Independent Feature Project's "Nuts and Bolts: Producing the Independent Feature Film" (1983), and Tom Laughlin's "The Complete Independent Film Maker: A Practical Seminar with Tom Laughlin" (1983) (Schreger, 1980; "Laughlin Film-making Seminar," 1983; Caulfield, 1983). Most of these workshops functioned to introduce independent filmmakers to the realities of working in the Hollywood film industry, and also provided studio executives with a window into the emerging talent pool.

Increasingly in the 1980s, there were growing possibilities for success in an individualized process. *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* focused more on individual filmmakers like Jim Jarmusch, John Sayles and Susan Seidelman and, in the tipping point for the mythos around independent filmmaking, Steven Soderbergh in 1989. Some filmmakers like Jim Jarmusch made conscious efforts in press interviews to acknowledge the collaborative rather than individualistic nature of filmmaking, as indicated in this *Los Angeles Times* interview:

I think the director is no more important than the production assistant who's out there directing traffic control... You're not going to get the shot if he's not doing his job, just like you won't get it if you're not doing your job as the director or the cinematographer. It's all interconnected and this personality-cult thing about famous directors defeats that delicate kind of teamwork (Volland, 1986).

Yet only Jarmusch was interviewed, and the resulting article still focused entirely on Jarmusch himself, ultimately undermining the point of his argument. Similarly, other articles profiled "maverick" filmmakers with little reference to the cadre of film crew members typically involved in the filmmaking process (Gross, 1981).

The 1990s became synonymous with the individual independent filmmaker, characterized as amateurs who were scrappy, hungry underdogs, driven to strike it rich with a lucrative distribution deal at the Sundance Film Festival. Cinderella stories of Robert Rodriguez, Kevin Smith and Quentin Tarantino reinforced this mythology and the press frequently characterized any given independent filmmaker as having the potential to be “the next Kevin Smith” or “another Quentin Tarantino” (Nichols, 1997, p. E1). Indeed, many (from filmmakers to funders) considered independent filmmaking as a ticket to easy money, particularly in the heyday of the dot-com boom in the mid-1990s.

These myths followed independents into the 2000s, where there was a perception that “everyone with the means and desire to rent a camera can (and does) call herself an auteur,” thanks to cheap and readily accessible digital equipment, the Internet as promotional tool, and a proliferation of DIY film instructional books (Eisenstadt, 2006, p. P3). Yet it became increasingly apparent during this decade that the reality of independent filmmaking was such that an independent must fit within Hollywood structures or else choose the hard road to getting a film produced and distributed. For example, “In the end, one of the best tools in independent marketing looks remarkably like the best tool in mainstream marketing: stars” (Clark, 2006a, p. C5). Furthermore, there was an assumption that Hollywood executives needed to hold the hands of independent filmmakers, as independents were perceived as not savvy enough to navigate the industry. For example, the Independent Feature Project took independent filmmakers under its wing at the European Film Market in Berlin in 2000 to help “demystify the sales process and help explain how a market works” (Swart, 2000, p. 41).

Creating an alternative system at the end of the 20th century was possible in terms of funding, production and distribution models, but it certainly did not guarantee *financial* success (the marker of legitimate success in contemporary American ethos); more often than not, it led to financial instability and, in some cases, personal financial ruin. Filmmaker Jon Jost (*All the Vermeers in New York*, 1990), who has been making independent films for 40 years, was characterized in a *New York Times* interview as:

an aging independent filmmaker...[who is] sitting in a borrowed New York apartment in hand-me-down clothes, doesn't have a place to live and no visible means of support, [who] for four years scrounged from garbage cans and lived with a single mother and her daughter in one room with no heat or running water" (Clark, 2006b, p. A13).

The sense here is that Jost's persistence in remaining an independent filmmaker directly contributed to his "plight," and has been the plight of most aging independents who stay true to their independent roots rather than switching to studio filmmaking.

By examining the role of the independent filmmaker, we can see that the concept of "independent film" has shifted based on changes in the structure of the industry, social and political priorities, art movements, and economic climates. It is especially important to understand and analyze how the role of the independent filmmaker has changed over the years, because there is the risk of romanticizing independent filmmakers and obscuring the true role of independents and the relationship to mainstream Hollywood studios. The preceding discussion has recognized the complex and nuanced history of independent filmmaking and various forces that have shaped independent filmmaking into how it is perceived today, and provides a foundation upon which to examine how

independent film and independent filmmakers are defined in academic and professional literature.

Independent Film Defined in Academic and Professional Literature

As is repeatedly evident, the concept of independent film is under contestation. Its definition seems to most often hinge on the perspective of the one defining independent film. This section focuses on how various contemporary groups define independent film, from academics, critics and journalists, industry analysts, and film professionals. These numerous definitions indicate the malleability of the term and the motivations behind its usage.

Definitions of Independent Film from Academics

Many authors acknowledge the fluid nature of the definition of independent film (e.g., Sklar, 1994; Horsley, 2005; Tzioumakis, 2006; Berra, 2008). Sklar (1994) notes, “With its fluid boundaries and hybrid forms, American independent cinema resists categorization” (p. 374). However, most scholars agree (e.g., Thompson, 2007; Waterman, 2005; Kleinhans, 1998) that independent film has some kind of relation to Hollywood, as Kleinhans (1998) writes: “‘Independent,’ then, has to be understood as a relational term – independent in relation to the dominant system” (p. 308).

Many film studies scholars focus on independent films’ formal differences from Hollywood films (e.g., Hillier, 2001; Levy, 1999; MacDonald, 1988; Margulies, 1998; Pribram, 2002). These scholars engage with independent film’s formal qualities, paying more attention to aesthetics, genre and narrative in order to isolate the qualities that

render films *independent* or different from studio pictures. For instance, Holmlund (2005) and Bordwell and Thompson (1997) primarily position films within narrative and formal analyses, with less attention to the economic and social context in which films are produced. For Holmlund, independent film connotes certain aesthetics or social themes, or what she calls “a distinctive visual look, an unusual narrative pattern, a self-reflexive style” (p. 2).

Other film and media studies scholars emphasize the context in which independent film is produced and distributed (e.g., Ray, 1991; Merritt, 2000; King, 2005, 2009; Tzioumakis, 2006; Berra, 2008; Erickson, 2008). In an (relatively) early and useful interrogation of the meaning of independent filmmaker, Block (1983) identifies various types of independent filmmakers. He uses four central phases of filmmaking (finance, production, distribution and exhibition/audience) to distinguish Independent Film Artists, Regional Independents, and Hollywood Independents. The first two groups are often characterized by precarious financing, small and cheap production, limited distribution, and specialized audiences. Hollywood Independents (or those producers who work in partnership with studios, like “independents” of the 1940s and 1950s), on the other hand, are typically oriented fully towards relatively secure financing, traditional production organization, commercial distribution and mass-market audiences. Merritt (2000) contends that an independent film has no mainstream studio financial involvement at any stage of its life. Rather, according to Merritt, independent film is “any motion picture financed and produced completely autonomous of *all* studios” (p. xii).

Geoff King (2009) acknowledges the production contexts involved in his case studies of Indiewood productions. Schatz (2008) recognizes the contradictory status of

“indie” studios like Focus Features, which is owned by Universal Studios’ parent company, but also classifies Lions Gate Studios, a major media conglomerate, as independent (pp. 29-31). In addition, King (2005) does acknowledge that major studios use “independent” as a label or brand because “association with ‘quality’, arty, edgy or ‘cool’/alternative features is good for the image,” particularly for those “individual executives with pretensions to something more than noisy blockbuster productions and [those] branches of large corporations often subject to criticism for their business practices and much of their not-so-creative output” (p. 46).

Academic definitions of independent film, for the most part, reflect the uncertain and often indistinguishable boundary between mainstream Hollywood and independent films. Academics seem careful to include more than exclude what might qualify as “independent.” As is discussed below, many film industry professionals define independent film in much the same way, often extending the boundaries of “independent film” to include everything that is not directly produced by one of the six major studios.

Definitions of Independent Film from Industry Professionals

Film industry practitioners (which include filmmakers, journalists, business analysts, and others) struggle for consensus on how to define independent film. Many film instruction books tend to define independent film as merely the genesis of an idea with an individual or group of individuals, eager to celebrate the commercial potential of any film (Gilroy, 1993; Goodell, 1998; Hall, 2006). Goodell (1998) defines independent film as anything “that is *developed* without ties to a major studio, regardless of where the subsequent production and/or distribution financing comes from. The *development*

phase...refers to the creation and packaging of the elements necessary to obtain production financing” (emphasis in original, p. xvii). For Hall (2006), it does not matter if a film starts as independent; it *must* end up as a commercial product:

Nobody makes independent films for the sake of making independent films. At least no sane person does....Energy, imagination, labor, and (most importantly) money are invested in the making of a film. What possible purpose can be achieved if all of these investments, especially the last, are for naught? (p. 2)

Some practitioners define film independence from Hollywood studios quite literally (e.g., Jacobs, 1986; Marich, 2009); any studio that is not one of the major six (Paramount, Universal, Sony, Disney, Twentieth Century Fox, or Warner Brothers) is an independent studio. Lions Gate thus is counted by many as independent (e.g., Marich, 2009; Sorkin, 2005; Grover and White, 2010; McClintock, 2006), even though it is a publicly traded company with \$1.47 billion in revenues in the 2009 fiscal year (Lions Gate Entertainment Corp., 2009, p. 39). LucasFilm, George Lucas’ studio that produced *Star Wars*, one of the all-time top grossing film franchises, also considers itself to be independent (Lucasfilm, 2011).

Oftentimes, practitioners and institutions identify films as independent despite those films’ affiliation with specialty divisions of the major studios such as Miramax (a now-defunct division of Disney) and Sony Pictures Classics (a division of Sony Pictures) (IFTA, 2010a; Film Independent Spirit Awards, 2011; Independent Film Channel, 2011). The Independent Film and Television Alliance (IFTA), a trade association representing over 160 production and distribution companies worldwide, includes Focus Features, a subsidiary of Universal Studios, which is under NBC-Universal’s parentage, as one of its members. The IFTA defines independent film as follows:

An independent film or television program is financed primarily from sources outside the six major studios. Independent product is made at every budget range, may be mainstream commercial or art-house, and is seen by the public side-by-side with major studio releases (IFTA, 2010b).¹⁸

This definition recognizes a separation from the major studios, but still acknowledges that independent films can be made under any number of filmmaking circumstances or partnerships.

Other writers articulate the sense of freedom and personal expression independent film allows (e.g., Anderson and Kim, 2006; Landau and White, 2000; Rosen and Hamilton, 1986). Michael Wiese (1990) writes, “What does it mean to be an independent filmmaker? It means to be independent, free from the control of others and to rely on one’s own abilities (for the most part) to produce one’s own ideas on film” (p. 3). To Jon Garon (2002), “the nature of filmmaking remains much more personal for films made in the independent marketplace” (p. xvi).

Among industry practitioners, there is recognition across the board that independent filmmakers operate within a challenging industrial environment, noting that the lack of financial support and professional connections often make for an uphill struggle for film production and distribution (e.g., Rodriguez, 1995; Vachon, 1998; Rocca, 2010; Krogstad, 2009; Baker, 2009; Kaufman, 2003, 2009). Even filmmakers who have managed to make full finished films, despite the lack of financial support and professional connections, face challenges if they choose to solicit studio distribution (e.g., Biskind, 2004; Polish, Polish and Sheldon, 2005).

¹⁸ The IFTA, like the Independent Film Channel and the Film Independent Spirit Awards, is a contradictory organization. While it includes companies like Focus Features and Sony Pictures Classics (SPC) as members, it also “speaks out on matters of critical importance such as the threat to a competitive marketplace posed by media consolidation,” a trend driven by the parent companies of Focus and SPC (IFTA, 2010a).

According to some (e.g., Wiese, 1990; Vachon, 1998, 2006), independent films cannot be separated from the industry in which they circulate. “There’s no such thing as an absolutely independent film. There’s still an economy at work: The movie has to go into the marketplace, and people have to want to see it” (Vachon, 1998, p. 16). Director Kevin Smith goes so far as to call independent filmmaking a “myth” (Biskind, 2000), because he considers independent filmmaking to be part of the overall film industry. Wiese (1990) writes, “Independent filmmakers do want their work to be seen and earn some income. To this degree, independents must participate in the arena of the traditional film world” (pp. 3-4).

How-to guides tend to focus on filmmaking as a business; furthermore, the bulk of how-to guides assume that independent filmmakers want to become major players in the entertainment industry, showered with industry praise and, more importantly, money (e.g., Bosko, 2003; Simens, 2003; Anderson and Kim, 2006). Advice usually includes the necessity of including a marketing hook or angle in order to have a product that is attractive to distributors. For example, according to Bosko (2003), an independent filmmaker might be able to find a marketing hook in a film’s story, genre, celebrity, special effects, uniqueness, location, exploitative content, title or budget (pp. 43-48). Only a few books describe alternative models or definitions of success (e.g., Camp, 2000; Casuso, 1999). Rather, many books (e.g., Rodriguez, 1995; Rocca, 2010; Pierson, 1997; Waxman, 2006; Mottram, 2006) recount tales of independent filmmakers such as Robert Rodriguez, Kevin Smith, and Quentin Tarantino, all of whom have achieved financial success at the box office, which many consider to be the holy grail of filmmaking

practice. One of the best-known independent film Cinderellas,¹⁹ Rodriguez considered his film, *El Mariachi*, to be his ticket into the business and succeeded in realizing his vision when his \$7,000 film started a studio distribution bidding war in 1991.

Peter Biskind (2004) chronicles the “rise” of independent film in the early 1990s through a history of Miramax and the Sundance Film Festival. He contends that these two institutions are responsible for the popularization and strengthening of the independent film world which had to that point struggled for a position among Hollywood blockbusters. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that Biskind unabashedly chronicles the efforts of Miramax and Sundance to exploit and dominate the independent film world, which resulted in doors opening for further studio involvement.

Many independent filmmakers define independent films in terms of their autonomy from the major studios. For instance, in this study’s survey, independent filmmakers in Seattle and Portland defined independent film as:

- “Not funded by a major studio”
- “No big money supporting the film”
- “Filmmaking done outside the Hollywood studios”
- “Being independent of demands made by the large studios and commercial enterprises”
- “Making movies not in the major LA studio system”

¹⁹ Trade papers and popular media often refer to stories of independent filmmakers striking a distribution deal at film festivals like Sundance as “Cinderella stories,” or the transformation from poor, unknown and unappreciated filmmakers to rich and famous ones. Rodriguez is a prime example, as are Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez with their film, *The Blair Witch Project*, which was purchased for a reported \$1.1 million by Artisan Entertainment at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival (although Myrick and Sanchez do not have the same celebrity profile as Rodriguez). This phenomenon is discussed further in Chapter VIII.

- “Independent filmmaking is filmmaking with no studio backing”
- “Creating films regardless of, and without support of the Hollywood system (studios, execs, etc.)”
- “If a studio doesn’t finance your film, then you can call it independent”

In interviews, other filmmakers agreed with these qualities. For instance, Seattle filmmaker Ward Serrill feels that independent film is “not studio driven, deal based filmmaking.” Vince Porter, Executive Director of Oregon’s Governor’s Office of Film and Television (GOFT), defines independent film as “any project that has not been financed, developed or distributed through the major studios.” Portland film publicist Lyla Foggia further explains:

Independent to me means that a film was made without the parachute, like distribution already set up before it’s shot. In other words, it’s going to be made, it’s financed independently, it’s shot, and then it would get an acquisition deal. So in other words, you know, independence to me is someone taking the big risk.

Other interviewees point to the problematic way that the definition of independent film has been co-opted, blurred, and/or neutralized. Producer David Cress says:

I think that independent film is used a lot as a marketing term. For instance there’s an awards show called the Independent Spirit Awards. Some of those films just defy the whole notion. Some of them have distribution deals in place at the time that they are made. Some of them are made for relatively big dollars. It’s hard not to be a little bit cynical about that. It’s a tool used to market those films.

Bill Foster, the Executive Director of Portland’s Northwest Film Center, feels that “independent film” has become a “useless term.” He says, “I don’t know what ‘independent film’ means. Because it’s sort of like, what does ‘jazz’ mean? It means one thing to one person and one thing to another.” Filmmaker Jon Moritsugu comments, “I think the phrase is sort of losing its meaning. It’s like ‘alternative rock’ in the 90s.”

Another filmmaker says that he has “no idea what this means anymore. Is it a meaningful term?” But most people involved with independent film still use the term, because it does mean *something*. Seattle-based film financing consultant Elizabeth Heile says that, although independent films are hard to define, “you know it when you see it. If someone were to ask me what kind of film I like to work on, I’d say an independent film.”

There is rarely consensus on how to define independent film because the term is malleable and subject to interpretation depending on who uses the term and for what purposes. Even when one attempts to assign a definition to independent film, the gradients that are inherently part of that “independence” complicate the definition. The following discussion accounts for some of these gradients and integrates them into a multidimensional approach to defining independent film.

A Multidimensional Approach to Defining Independent Film

As evidenced from the discussion in this chapter thus far, independent film is a challenging term to define. The complications grow as we move further towards an increased capacity to make films less expensively and with more easily accessible equipment. As noted above, many film workers declare that independent film is an empty term. Yet the term is still used and those engaged in the activity of independent filmmaking feel passionately about it. Therefore, it is still worthy of exploration and further theorization.

Tzioumakis (2006) calls independent film a discourse that is shaped by whoever uses the term in a given context. This provides some foundation on which to build a more appropriate definition of independent film, as there is a multiplicity of circumstances in

which the term is used. At one end of the spectrum are “true independents” who finance a film on credit cards, shoot on consumer equipment, and self-distribute. At the other end of the spectrum are the “Indiewood” divisions of Hollywood studios that acquire independent films (at festivals, for example) and pour in millions of dollars to clean up a film’s sound or color, and provide additional millions for marketing. At any given point in between, films have characteristics that qualify them as “independent” in one sense and contradict it in another. Similar to film financier Elizabeth Heile’s assessment, independent film seems to fall under the same definitional rubric used by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in 1964 to describe obscenity in the French film *The Lovers* (Louis Malle, 1958): “I know it when I see it.”

But while the discourse theory is a good foundation, we still need to build upon this foundation in order to develop a fuller idea of independent film. After all, if we know it when we see it, there must be some basic characteristics that can be identified, despite possible gradations of those characteristics. This study proposes a multidimensional approach to defining independent film, taking into account the multitude of historical definitions and, more importantly, the multitude of interpretations by filmmakers and other film professionals with regards to how they define the work they do. This study defines a true independent film as a film (at any stage of production or distribution) wherein the filmmaker has full creative and distribution control, investors have no involvement with the film outside of providing financing, and the filmmaker undergoes substantial risk to produce and distribute the film. Because the nature of independent film is such that one or more of these boundaries are blurred in nearly every case, films that veer from these four key points can still be considered independent; however, as films get

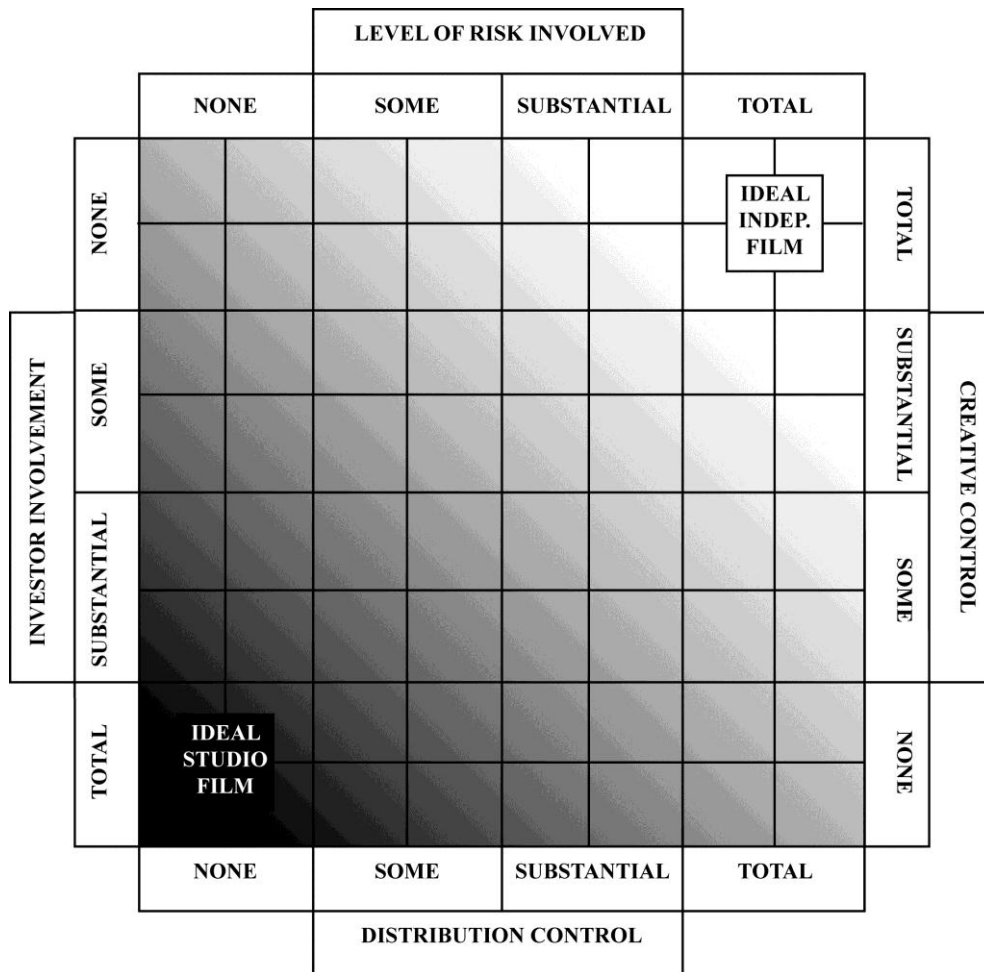
further from these points, they may have more qualities that are generally associated with Hollywood studio films. Filmmakers making films within the Hollywood studio system, then, have generally no creative control, full investor involvement, no distribution control, and little to no risk involved for the filmmakers.

Four Criteria for Defining Independent Film

We can envision this definition as a grid that allows for gradations of certain characteristics by which to define independent film. This model is bound by four sides: creative control, investor involvement, distribution control, and level of risk (Figure 1). Each of these criteria is discussed in more depth below, but it is first necessary to explain how to “read” the model. On each side of the model, there is one criterion that we can examine to assess the level of independence of a film. Each criterion rests along a continuum, ranging from “none,” “some,” “substantial,” and “total.” On the side called “investor involvement,” the filmmaking process might have any level of investor involvement, from “none” to “total.” When filmmaking has no investor involvement (or very little), it is more readily identified as independent with regard to this criterion. When it has full investor involvement, it is more readily identified as *not* independent and is, rather, typically a Hollywood studio production. Likewise, when the filmmaking process undergoes a substantial level of risk, primarily borne by the filmmaker as an individual, it is identified as independent for this criterion. When there is little risk involved, or risk is diversified across a corporation’s holdings or investments, as is the case with most Hollywood studio films, the filmmaking is identified as *not* independent, and is, rather, a major studio production. Each of the four points is discussed below, after which I will

plot a few films on the model to illustrate how films might be classified as more or less independent. It must be noted that while many independent films are associated with a particular style, aesthetic or theme, this study's definition of independent film does not consider a film's content. Although many independent films do present unconventional stories or forms, many do not and instead mimic conventional Hollywood themes and styles.

Figure 1: Multidimensional model of independent film



Creative Control

At its core, filmmaking is a creative endeavor, expressing a collaboration of artistic vision and passion. Most filmmakers hope to hold onto control over this creative endeavor, as outside influences can compromise the integrity of a filmmaker's vision and misrepresent his or her intentions. Indeed, it is often written into contracts that a filmmaker (usually the director) will retain full creative control through all stages of the filmmaking process, from scripting and casting to the film's final version, or "final cut."²⁰ A filmmaker with full creative control can be considered to have a certain level of independence, while a filmmaker who is required to consult with others (such as studio executives who, typically, manage the film's budget) cannot be said to have creative control over a film. In these cases, the look, style and content of the film is at risk of interference from non-creative entities such as marketing departments.

The central questions for assessing creative control, and thus one component of a film's independence, are whether the filmmaker has authority to make creative decisions, and to whom the filmmaker is accountable.

Investor Involvement

Independent filmmaking is a notoriously difficult activity, as filmmakers scrape together financing, crew, and equipment to produce films. Production costs have dropped drastically since the 1990s due to advances in and accessibility of technology. The end of the 2000s marked a shift in previously available film financing options for independents,

²⁰ A filmmaker may still not have ultimate final cut, however, even when one's contract says he or she will have final cut. Studios seem to be able to wiggle their way out of most creative contractual obligations. If studios do honor final cut privilege but do not care for the final film product, according to Portland filmmaker Kelley Baker, they may retaliate by reducing marketing and distribution support for the film.

however, as “Indiewood” studios folded, hedge funds faltered in a tough economic climate, and public funding for the arts continued to dry up. But independent filmmakers continue producing films at an astonishing rate, which has significant implications for the competition for film financing and investor involvement.

Typically financed through a myriad of sources, independent filmmaking follows no prescribed funding model. The range of funding sources is discussed in more depth in Chapter V, but these can include any combination of personal savings, loans, donations, grants, corporate partnerships, distribution presales, and so on.

The level and type of funding for a film may influence the types of compromises that a filmmaker makes during a film’s production. Generally speaking, grants from non-profit or government organizations do not limit the production of a film; rather, these are given based on certain criteria up front and do not place restrictions on a film after the grant has been awarded (although it must be noted that some granting organizations may only support non-controversial films). Many individual investors may not have restrictions on a film either, preferring to place all control in the hands of the filmmaker. “Crowd funding” is another mode of investment that does not generally carry restrictions or involvement. Crowd funding is a form of collective financing, whereby any number of people can invest a small amount of money in a film. The intention here is to enable anyone to become an “investor.” The Internet has facilitated this type of funding, allowing filmmakers to connect with potential funders through social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. It is most realistic for filmmakers to raise smaller amounts of money for a film (in the thousands or perhaps tens of thousands of dollars).

A filmmaker risks greater investor involvement when there is a larger financial contribution from a single entity. This may come in the form of personal and professional feelings of responsibility, as the filmmaker hopes to live up to the investor's expectations for a finished film that has potential to reach audiences so that the investment will be repaid. As well, the filmmaker may hope to secure financing from a particular investor for a future project, and thus needs to maintain his or her track record as a filmmaker who can make successful films. There may be other forms of potential involvement; one filmmaker interviewed for this study reported that an investor hoped to have an acting role in his film (he turned down the acting request as well as the investor). New York-based filmmaker Alex Gibney produced a documentary about former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer after friends pitched the project to him and claimed to have investors lined up. Gibney did not want investor involvement in a project that could potentially be controversial (which might thus limit his creative control) and told his friends: "Have the investors put the money in an account where they have no control over it and I'm fine to go forward" (quoted in Canfield, 2010, p. 25).

Corporate investment potentially carries a different style of involvement in a film, which may include direct influence in creative decisions (shaping the story, approving cast or crew choices), product placement and distribution plans, and other activities. Some independent filmmakers are opposed to this sort of involvement, but many find it to be a necessary and even beneficial component of film financing. As one survey respondent noted,

I think it's a bummer that artists have to do this, that art and ideas have to make way for corporate marketing. But I can't judge anyone for it – filmmaking is expensive and each filmmaker has her own boundary or line that is drawn with

respect to this. I've never engaged with a corporation for this purpose, but then I've not yet worked on a film that required a large budget. So who knows what I would do if some company offered this sort of set up.

Overall, some level of compromise is often necessary to obtain film financing, and independent filmmakers must reconcile financial needs with personal convictions.

Distribution Control

The key to distribution control is the ownership of copyright. The basis of the film industry is intellectual property, which is, according to Bettig (1996), a strategic corporate asset that allows control in multiple media markets. The major Hollywood studios in particular consider the protection of intellectual property to be of vital importance: "The success of our businesses," according to one such studio, the Walt Disney Company (2010), "is highly dependent on the existence and maintenance of intellectual property rights in the entertainment products and services we create" (p. 19). Of primary concern for major corporations is the issue of piracy, or the unauthorized redistribution of creative works. Govil (2005) argues that film piracy can be viewed as an alternative form of film distribution and is, indeed, desirable to Hollywood studios in its creation of "cultures of anticipation" among those audiences that eagerly anticipate the release of Hollywood films. Some independent filmmakers are concerned about piracy and its negative effects on the integrity of their work and the potential for revenue, but others concur that piracy can help to promote their work and connect with new audiences (this is discussed further in Chapter V).

For many independent filmmakers, the issue is not so much losing control over distribution to audiences but, rather, losing control to Hollywood studios or other major

distributors. Many independent filmmakers try to retain copyrights of their films to prevent studios from burying their films. Traditional distribution deals tend to require full copyright transference to the distributor for a set length of time (typically seven years or more, and sometimes indefinitely). Jon Moritsugu, a filmmaker formerly based in Seattle and director of *Scumrock* (2002) and other films, says, “Whoever owns the copyright controls the commerce of the project, and so if you sign a distribution deal with a distributor who has the copyright, then they’re controlling the commerce of the project.” He recalls several filmmakers who turned over copyrights to distributors with the promise that their films would receive solid distribution. The films were then shelved or released halfheartedly, and the filmmakers have been unable to regain control over their films. “Movies have virtually disappeared off the face of the earth that way,” says Moritsugu. “The filmmaker loses copyright and the distributor doesn’t release the movie and the movie’s gone.”

Signing multiple non-exclusive distribution deals is, for Moritsugu, the key to retaining distribution. His films are distributed on Netflix, IndieFlix and Amazon.com, all of which allow the filmmaker to retain copyright. As well, these companies expect that filmmakers will sell films through a number of outlets and therefore help filmmakers to construct a nontraditional and ultimately more flexible distribution plan.

Self-distribution is another option that many filmmakers pursue; this strategy allows maximum control over distribution, as the filmmaker personally books screenings. This strategy is discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

Level of Risk Involved

The American Heritage Dictionary (1992) defines risk as: “The possibility of suffering harm or loss; danger,” and “the danger or probability of loss to an insurer; the variability of returns from an investment” (p. 1557). These related definitions can be useful when thinking about the level of risk involved in filmmaking, particularly because independent filmmakers are subject to different interpretations of risk, from financial to professional to personal.

Filmmaking is an inherently risky financial venture. Few independent films make back their money in box office or ancillary sales. Even Hollywood studios, which are generally minor divisions of multinational and multi-industry corporations, include special notice in their annual Securities and Exchange Commission filings, cautioning that the film industry is one of inherent risk for a multitude of reasons.²¹ But for a major studio film, the risk lies almost exclusively in the huge financial obligation committed to it.

For independents, risk often means something different. While financial concerns are important, independent filmmakers may also have their professional and personal lives on the line. Some independents mortgage their houses, deplete their savings, or max out credit cards to finance their films. If a film is not financially successful (meaning it has not made enough money back to repay investors, credit cards or bank loans), a filmmaker may be forced to declare bankruptcy or lose a house. They may even become estranged from friends or family members who have been affected by the financial risk of

²¹ The Walt Disney Company, for example, cites the economic climate in the late 2000s, technological changes, labor disputes, intellectual property rights, changes in public tastes, and changes in consumer consumption patterns, among others, as risk factors that must be considered in determining the overall health of the company (The Walt Disney Company, 2010, pp. 18-23).

filmmaking. Illegal, unethical or otherwise questionable activity can also contribute to the risk of independent filmmaking, such as a lack of filming permits or other permissions for filming in a given location or the use of hidden cameras.

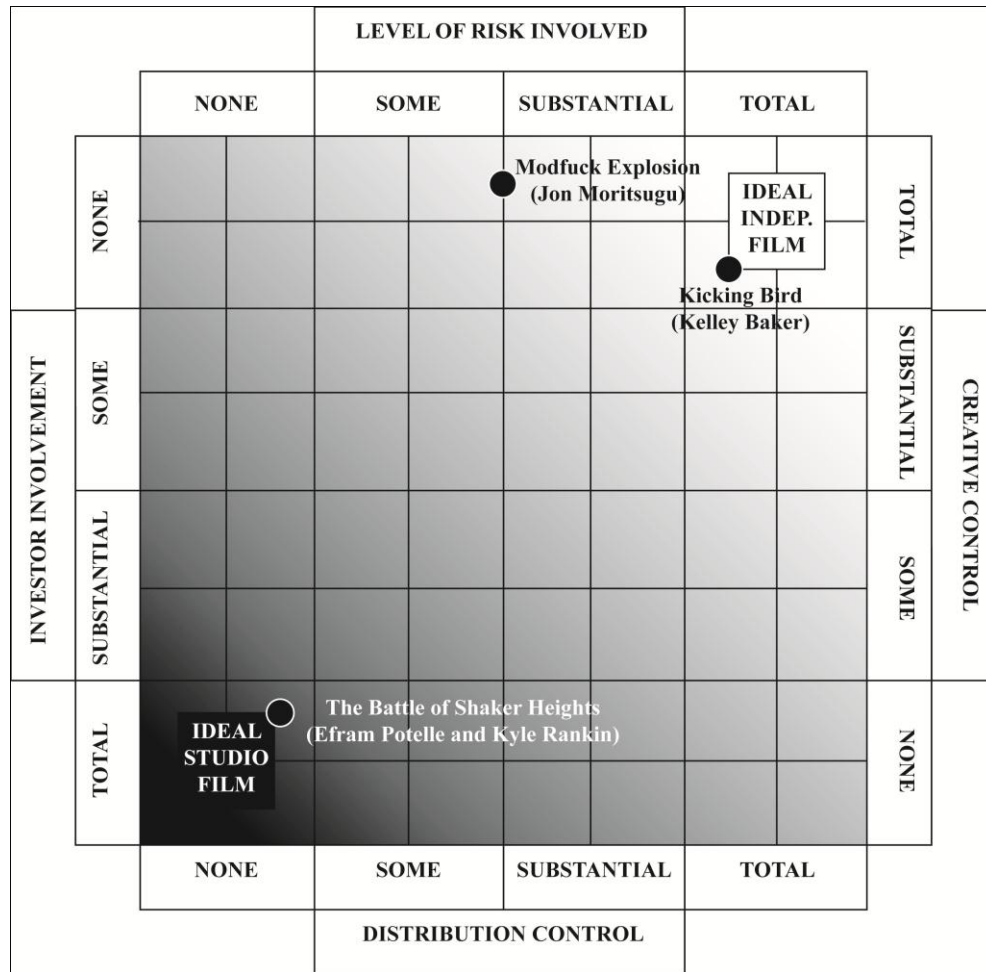
Assessing a Film's Independence

The degree of control over creative decisions and distribution, as well as investor involvement and the level of risk, all serve to determine the type of relationship a filmmaker has with his or her film. The issue of independence is rooted in control and power; if the filmmaker holds that control and power over his or her film, then the film is likely to be more independent. The filmmaker is able to make decisions about his or her film and execute those decisions. It is useful to plot a handful of films on this chart in order to demonstrate how we might interpret a film's connection to issues of distribution, creativity, investors and risk (Figure 2).

Portland filmmaker Kelley Baker is a quintessential independent filmmaker. His experiences in the Hollywood filmmaking machine on productions like the remake of *Psycho* (1998) have reaffirmed his desire to retain control over his films. He considers each of his three feature films (*Gas Café*, *Birddog*, and *Kicking Bird*) to be independent, placing them at the far corner of the chart. He retains control over creative decisions and distribution, and has no investor involvement. He says:

Since my films are so low budget, I put the money together myself and, if people do give me money, it is more that they are pre-buying tickets to the premiere or personal copies of the films upon completion. So I am truly in charge as far as creative control and investor involvement. Since I have chosen the self-distribution route I have total control over all aspects of distribution.

Figure 2: Three films plotted on the multidimensional model of independent film



Source: Author

The only element that changes from film to film, according to Baker, is the level of risk involved. *Birddog* was Baker’s riskiest film because “I gambled on *Birddog* and used money I didn’t have,” he says, “and eventually wound up having to sell my house to pay off the IRS. I would say that ended up being a huge level of risk.” *The Gas Café* and *Kicking Bird* were also risky films to make – *The Gas Café* was artistically and personally risky, says Baker, and *Kicking Bird*’s script called for physical violence and thus, actors risked injury during filming.

Jon Moritsugu is another filmmaker whose films sit at the independent corner of the chart, although his experiences as independent vary from film to film based on factors primarily related to financing and distribution. He demands creative control (“I will do a movie for less cash in order to have this type of control... This is the way I have to work.”), and a previous negative distribution experience for one film has led him to require complete distribution control as well. He felt disconnected from the distribution strategy for his film, *Mod Fuck Explosion* (1994), when one distributor released it theatrically and another released it to home video. “This is where I lost a little control (as far as poster art, box art, promotional materials, etc.). Also, I feel I lost some control in not calling the shots with the distribution strategy and not being in charge of the [money],” he recalls.

Moritsugu is somewhat less strict when it comes to investor involvement. His films have been either entirely self-funded or grant-funded, but he has partnered with producers who also act as investors. He says, “They’ve tweaked the script, acted in scenes, but I don’t feel they were overly involved or controlling of the project.” Moritsugu says that the risk he undergoes in making films is great, although not as extreme as some filmmakers. “As financially challenging as moviemaking is,” he says, “I have not gone totally ALL-OUT as far as my risk. At the end of the day, I still wanna make sure bills are paid and important stuff is taken care of.” He does acknowledge that risk comes in various forms, however: “Of course, sanity is another matter. As far as this, there is great personal danger everyday on the filmic front. So yes, the risk is great.”

To contrast the experiences of Baker and Moritsugu, we can plot films that were produced within the Hollywood studio system. Particularly illustrative are films produced

by Miramax (a recognizable “indie” brand) for a reality television show, *Project Greenlight*; this show highlighted the level of control that filmmakers may or may not experience when working within the studio system. The show aired on HBO for its first two seasons (2001 and 2003) and then on Bravo for the third season in 2005. The show’s format is a contest in which a (previously independent) scriptwriter and director are selected to produce a film for Disney subsidiary Miramax (in Season 1, an individual was chosen to direct his own script). The winning script and director then are given a \$1 million budget, a tight shooting timeline (in the case of Season 2, 22 days to shoot a feature film), and professional cast and crew members. The resulting productions were *Stolen Summer* (Pete Jones, 2002), *The Battle for Shaker Heights* (Efram Potelle and Kyle Rankin, 2003), and *Feast* (John Gulager, 2005).

All three films shared similar circumstances during their production, as the case of *The Battle for Shaker Heights* illustrates. *Battle* was directed by a pair of formerly independent filmmakers, Kyle Rankin and Efram Potelle, who had previously co-written and co-produced one feature film, *Reindeer Games* (1996), and a few short films. They were roughly introduced to the world of Hollywood studio filmmaking when they were told that they would not have control over certain aspects of the production of *Battle*, including casting decisions and editing. During the film’s shooting, they tried to improvise certain dialogue and action. Any unannounced and unapproved script changes were denied repeatedly, however, as these types of creative decisions were not in the budget and would have to be approved by multiple layers of Miramax executives. After seeing a rough cut of the film, the producers and the Miramax marketing department both felt that it needed to be more of a comedy and demanded that the rough cut be re-edited

to draw out more comedic moments. When Miramax released the film, the studio premiered it on a scant five screens, and kept it in theatrical release for four weeks. It grossed under \$300,000.

When we compare *Battle for Shaker Heights* to other films discussed here, it becomes clear that Rankin and Potelle's experience differed significantly from that of Kelley Baker. Rankin and Potelle had very little creative control and no distribution control over their film. There was significant involvement on the part of the investors (Miramax). In terms of risk, Miramax made the decision to select inexperienced directors to head up a million-dollar production. But the company covered its financial risk by working with HBO to use the film's production as the subject for an Emmy award-nominated television series. The filmmakers themselves risked their professional reputation but were financially safe if the project failed. Thus, the film is nearly at the other end of the spectrum from films like Kelley Baker's *Birddog*.

Despite the clear parameters for determining a film's independence as highlighted by this multidimensional rubric, it is still difficult to clearly assess that independence. It is highly dependent upon interpretation and perception. As Baker says: "I think that...most filmmakers they will say that they have creative control, when in fact they might not. If they have received money from a major investor, then they might not have as much control as they want you to think." Rankin and Potelle might have a different interpretation of the level of independence they had over *The Battle for Shaker Heights*, and it is possible that Kelley Baker has less independence than he claims. Nevertheless, this rubric is still useful in outlining the elements of control that are key to the independent filmmaking process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the complex and nuanced history of the terminology used to describe independent filmmakers. Since the beginning of the 20th century, “independent” has signified some level of differentiation or opposition to the conventional filmmaking system, although it has been interpreted in a multitude of ways. As a result, independence has acquired an ambiguous and elusive quality that can be molded to fit a given circumstance, regardless of a filmmaker’s independence from various constraints. Independent filmmakers seem to feel that they know independent filmmaking when they see it, but they are hard-pressed to define it affirmatively. The qualities presented in a multidimensional model – creative and distribution control, level of risk, and investor involvement – speak to the central concerns shared by most independent filmmakers, setting them apart from Hollywood. The next chapter discusses the process of independent filmmaking as it contrasts the Hollywood studio system, focusing on financing, production, and distribution and exhibition. This chapter will also introduce the current landscape of regional filmmaking in the United States.

CHAPTER V

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FILM INDUSTRY: THE STATE OF HOLLYWOOD AND INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING

Introduction

For decades, Hollywood has been the juggernaut of the film industry both in the United States and across the world. Its dominance and power have defined the structure and operations of filmmaking, influencing methods of both corporately-backed filmmaking and independently-made productions. But independent filmmaking has consistently existed and evolved to secure its place within the American filmmaking landscape, often generating new practices and models that are then adopted by Hollywood. The relation between these two segments of the film industry has been one of mutual and constant crossover in terms of labor, practices, and technologies, and both have influenced each other's growth.

This chapter provides an overview of the landscape of contemporary filmmaking in the United States, providing first a description of the structure of the Hollywood film industry and, second, a description of and new directions in American independent filmmaking. The primary focus here is on independent filmmaking, with some attention to regional filmmaking trends. This discussion will provide a backdrop to the subsequent chapters' analyses of regional independent filmmaking. A tour of Hollywood's practices is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of the interplay between this mainstream

industry and the independents that operate in tandem with, in opposition to, or removed from Hollywood's ideals and systems.

The process of filmmaking is typically broken into three phases: production, distribution and exhibition. Discussion of these phases can provide a general framework to understand how films are made and delivered to audiences. It must be noted that there are significant differences in the ways that Hollywood studios produce and distribute films as opposed to independent filmmakers. Indeed, both types of films can be produced and distributed in a myriad of ways; however, I will discuss here the most typical arrangements of filmmaking for both types.

Many scholars and professionals have documented the trajectory of Hollywood films from production to exhibition. Wasko (2003) provides a description of how Hollywood films move through production, distribution and exhibition, situating the discussion within a critical political economic framework that highlights the interrelationships between studios and individuals that reinforce Hollywood's dominance of the film industry. Critical scholarly analysis with the film industry is relatively infrequent, with many scholars (e.g., Vogel, 2007; De Vany and Walls, 1999, 2002) describing industrial mechanics and practices of the studio system without critical interrogation. Therefore, the following discussion about typical Hollywood film production, distribution and exhibition will serve to accentuate areas that often come into conflict with independent filmmaking in the United States.

The Hollywood Film Landscape

The mainstream American film industry is dominated by six major studios that are part of multinational, multi-sector conglomerates. These studios are: Walt Disney Studios, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures, Universal Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox, and Warner Brothers. The worldwide box office revenues topped \$29.9 billion in 2009, according to the Motion Picture Association of America (2010b), the industry trade association that represents these six studios. The majors distributed 23 of the top 25 films of 2009, revenues from which amounted to more than 96 percent of the box office total in the US and Canada (MPAA, 2010b, p. 12).

The film industry in the U.S. is a highly concentrated oligopolistic industry, with the majors controlling the majority of production and distribution, and exercising significant influence over exhibition. As mentioned, these studios are part of multinational entertainment corporations, which are vertically and horizontally integrated, highly diversified and globalized, and which take full advantage of synergistic opportunities across platforms and media (Wasko, 2003; Schatz, 2008). The following is an examination of the phases of filmmaking – production, distribution and exhibition – which demonstrates the dominance of the Hollywood system in the American film landscape.

Hollywood Production

A film's production phase is lengthy, actually starting well before filming begins. We can break down the production phase into pre-production, production, and post-production, each contributing to the final onscreen product. A number of individuals are

involved at the early stage, including script writers, agents, managers, entertainment lawyers, and producers (e.g., McDonald, 2008). In Hollywood, films rarely start out with full scripts submitted by individuals. Rather, in what is known as the development phase, in-house creatives pitch film ideas to executives, who often evaluate those ideas on the basis of marketability. Oftentimes, these pitch sessions are part of ongoing arrangements called production contracts, or PACTs (Wasko, 2003, p. 29). These ideas are then fleshed out into full scripts by collaborating writers, and studio executives often request “performance projections” from studio marketing departments (Epstein, 2005a, p. 140). If a film is deemed valuable enough, it is then given the “green light,” or the approval to continue the pre-production phase of planning and organizing the film’s production (Hirschberg, 2009).

Financing is the key element in the entire production phase, impacting every segment of the filmmaking process. The film concept is assessed for risk: will the film make enough money at the box office to justify an average budget of \$70.8 million in production costs and \$35.9 million in marketing costs (MPAA, 2007a, p. 7)? According to Wasko (2003), roughly 50 percent of studio films are based on adaptations, which demonstrates the lack of original material in studio productions and, thus, the dearth of diverse voices being heard in major studio films. A film blog, Den of Geek (2010), tabulated 86 movie sequels currently in development as of January 2010, which include remakes or adaptations of foreign films, books, video games, magazine stories, amusement rides, and so forth. Typical studio films are financed by the studio through various measures, which may include bank loans, co-productions with other studios (in the U.S. or abroad), or other financing arrangements (e.g., Wasko, 2003; Gerse, 2004).

Studio films are notorious for having bloated budgets, covering not only above- and below-the-line costs but studio overhead and interest expenses as well; these budgets are reconciled in what many call “creative accounting practices” (e.g., Daniels et al., 1998). According to Frommer (2003), the Los Angeles Entertainment Industry Development Corporation estimated that a typical studio feature film produced in Los Angeles spends an average of \$200,000 per day (p. 63). These exorbitant costs are often reduced by sending elements of the production process offshore, which can create a host of problems not only for the domestic workers of the film but for national film industries around the world as well (e.g., Wasko and Erickson, 2008; Lent, 2008; Frommer, 2003).

Once financing has been arranged and the film has been green-lit, the pre-production phase continues with casting, location scouting, and set design, among other aspects. Production involves the actual filming of the movie, and post-production involves shaping the filmed material into a movie through editing, music, special effects, and so forth (e.g., Epstein, 2005a; Wasko, 2003).

Trade unions and guilds have a significant presence in Hollywood, representing various segments of the industry (e.g., Gray and Seeber, 1996; Wasko, 2003; Prindle, 1993). Major unions and guilds include the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the Directors Guild of America (DGA), the Writers Guild of America (WGA), the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists (AFTRA), the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP), and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, among others. These organizations represent both above-the-line (creative and talent workers) and below-the-line workers (skilled production and technical workers). Hollywood studio productions

employ temporary contract workers, most (if not all) of whom are members of unions or guilds that safeguard minimum wage levels, benefits, working conditions, and residual and royalty payments. In the face of changing technology, many below-the-line positions have been eliminated, according to Gray and Seeber (1996). Unions and guilds often engage in heated struggles over compensation for content reproduced in new technological formats, as was the case with the Writers' Strike of 2007-2008. In this strike, the Writers Guild of America fought for fair compensation for online and mobile content (Safrath, 2010). Additionally, runaway production has implications for the bargaining power of American unions whose authority typically only extends to the borders of the country (Frommer, 2003).

Hollywood Distribution and Exhibition

Distributors are middlemen, connecting a film with an audience (Wasko, 2003, p. 84). They often provide production financing, arrange for exhibition, determine the film's release schedule, conduct market research and devise marketing strategies (e.g., Donahue, 1987; Drake, 2008). Studios rely on a number of domestic and foreign outlets through which to send a film, including theatrical, home video, cable and satellite television, broadcast television, and others. Distributors hold most of the power over a film's success, as they determine when, where and by whom a film will be seen (Maltby, 2003). More often than not, the distributor also influences a film's production, as much of the production financing may come from a deal with the distributor. Because distributors hold the purse strings, they are also able to dictate the terms of a distribution deal, making it most favorable for themselves.

For studio films, production and distribution companies are often one and the same. These are part of huge, diversified conglomerates that dominate the film industry as well as other media. Distribution deals for studio films are often in-house deals whereby the distributor and production company are the same and therefore create a production financing and distribution plan that is mutually beneficial to both segments of the same corporation. There are also negative pick-up deals in which the distributor agrees to purchase an already-produced film for a specific amount (Maltby, 2003); the distributor will then distribute the film domestically and internationally, paying for accompanying marketing costs.

Wasko (2003) points out that even though films may not be the most profitable segment of a media conglomerate, they are necessary for the various synergistic outlets associated with a film (i.e., books, soundtracks, videogames, merchandise, theme parks, etc.) (p. 102). The strategy of exploiting a film brand is integral to many films' overall financial success and continues long after initial theatrical release (e.g., Wasser, 2001, 2008; Nichols, 2008; Smith, 1998, 2008; Owczarski, 2009). According to Hoyt (2010), studio libraries, or back catalogues of films, are perfect for generating revenue with low cost and risk especially with the continuing evolution of technologies, both for theaters (such as 3-D) and for home viewing (such as DVD and Blu-Ray).

Marketing is of paramount importance to studios that produce major films (e.g., Miller et al., 2005; Wyatt, 1994). Film advertising is placed in various media, including newspapers, television, internet, magazines, and radio. Studios engage in various marketing partnerships, including cross-promotions, licensing agreements, product placement, and so on (e.g., Friedman, 2004; Lukk, 1997). Studios also often rely on

synergistic relationships within their own parent companies to maximize exposure (Wasko, 2003; Owczarski, 2009), such as Walt Disney's extensive synergistic practices for its Pirates of the Caribbean franchise (Nelson, 2008; Petersen, 2009).

As mentioned above, distributors have the most control over where, when and by whom a film is seen. They orchestrate bidding and booking with exhibitors (typically movie theaters first) and determine how revenue will be split. Exhibition outlets include theatrical, home video, television (cable, satellite, pay-per-view, broadcast and syndication), Internet, and non-theatrical outlets like airplanes, hospitals, hotels and prisons (Blume, 2004). A film's release schedule is determined by the perceived potential success of the film and value in various markets (Daniels et al., 1998). Studios often favor a wide release in which a film opens in as many theaters as possible across the country (and eventually across the world, although increasingly, this coincides with the domestic release), and in which the film plays for as long as the audience will keep attending in profitable numbers. If the film is perceived to be a bomb, the distributor may arrange a large opening weekend with the film disappearing quickly from theaters. With riskier or smaller films (so-called "sleepers"), the studio might schedule a platform release, opening the film in key cities like New York and Los Angeles and slowly opening in more cities to allow for buzz to develop about the film (Lukk, 1997). Few studios allow their films to even become sleeper hits, shuttling a film out of theaters if it is poorly attended in its first weekend of release. Seasonality is also a major factor in the timing of a film's release, and studios often prefer to release films at major holidays and during the summer (Moul and Shugan, 2005).

Distributors, declaring that they have to cover production, distribution and marketing costs, usually demand a 90/10 revenue split with theatrical exhibitors, meaning the distributor will take 90 percent of the box office receipts and leave the exhibitor with the remaining 10 percent (Redstone, 2004). Theatrical exhibitors primarily bring in revenue from admissions, concessions and advertising sales (Wasko, 2003). This segment of the exhibition business in the United States is dominated by a few theater chains (Regal Entertainment Group, AMC Entertainment Inc., Cinemark USA, Inc. are the three largest; the top 10 chains own nearly 60 percent of the screens in the U.S. and Canada (National Association of Theatre Owners, 2010)), which further contributes to the consolidation of movie options for audiences.

Acland (2008) notes that although theatrical attendance has declined in the 2000s, box office receipts have grown substantially, due to a number of factors. For example, ticket prices have increased for regular admission, and theaters now offer high-priced special event screenings and 3-D movies as well. In the late 2000s, numerous live arts performances were screened, such as the New York Metropolitan Opera's performance, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which was beamed via satellite to 850 movie theaters in 31 countries in 2009 (Wakin, 2009). The revival of 3-D movies has also contributed to theatrical revenues, as exhibitors typically price tickets for 3-D movies up to 50 percent higher than other tickets. However, only 10 percent of theaters in 2010 were equipped to project 3-D movies, which limits the impact 3-D movies can make on overall revenue (Schuker and Smith, 2010).

Following the theatrical release, a studio film will then be released on home video, Internet-based movie providers like Netflix, television (pay TV, network, etc.),

and non-theatrical markets. These ancillary outlets earn more revenue than the theatrical release does, which is often perceived as a “loss leader” for a Hollywood film (thereby generating awareness of the film and raising the potential for home video/DVD sales) (Weinberg, 2005). Domestic theatrical revenue made up 54 percent of a movie’s total revenue in 1978 (Maltby, 2003, p. 190), and that percentage dropped to 23 percent by 2004 (Acland, 2008, p. 86). In addition, merchandise and other ancillary goods are produced to enable further revenue generation (e.g., Nichols, 2008; Smith, 2008). Foreign markets are also extremely profitable for studio films and cannot be overlooked in a film’s exhibition pattern (Trumpbour, 2008). The international box office represented 64 percent of the total box office grosses for the major studios in 2009 (MPAA, 2010b, p. 3). Films are also released internationally to home video, cable and satellite television, and broadcast television, further compounding potential revenue. Home entertainment spending is by far the most profitable segment; for instance, in 2009, home entertainment spending reached \$20 billion, while domestic box office revenue brought in \$10.6 billion (Amobi, 2010, p. 6).²²

The home video market underwent changes in the 2000s that began to dramatically alter the conventional structure of home video release. As DVDs grew as the movie format of choice for home viewing in the early- to mid-2000s (for example, retail DVD sales rose 30 percent from 2003 to 2004), major retailers like Target and Wal-Mart began reducing their stock of VHS videotapes. Best-Buy and Circuit City discontinued VHS sales altogether by 2005 (Chediak, 2005). High definition Blu-ray discs, alternatives

²² The home entertainment figure includes sales and rentals of DVDs (\$16.4 billion), Blu-ray discs (\$1.5 billion), and digital downloads and VOD (\$2.1 billion) (Amobi, 2010, p. 6).

to standard definition DVDs and first released in 2006, have begun to break into the home video sales and rentals market with a rising market share.²³

Another major trend in the home video market has been the rise of non-traditional video rental companies like Netflix and Redbox. Started in 1997, Netflix is a DVD rental company that offers rentals by mail as well as online streaming movies. Netflix has grown at a phenomenal rate and boasted 20 million subscribers in the U.S. and Canada as of January 2011, the second-largest media company in terms of subscribers behind Comcast (Bond, 2011). Redbox, which was started in 2004, offers cheap DVD and Blu-Ray rentals (usually priced at one dollar per night) through vending machine kiosks in grocery stores, fast food restaurants, drug stores and convenience stores across the country. Sullivan (2010) notes that both Netflix and Redbox experienced strong growth in 2009: Netflix's profits grew 20 percent in the second quarter of 2009, while Redbox's profits grew 110 percent during the same period (p. 328). In the third quarter of 2010, these types of home video businesses surpassed conventional video stores as the primary video rental outlets. Netflix and other subscription-based services made up 41 percent of video rentals, kiosks like Redbox made up 31 percent, and brick-and-mortar video store rentals made up 27 percent (NPD Group, 2011). It is significant to note that neither of these companies is owned by any of the major Hollywood studios or their parent companies (Netflix is a stand-alone company, and Redbox is owned by Coinstar, Inc., a provider of coin-counting vending machines).

²³ For instance, for the week ending January 29, 2011, Blu-ray discs earned almost 20 percent of total DVD (Blu-Ray and DVD combined) sales, while standard DVDs earned just over 80 percent. During the same week a year earlier, Blu-ray earned 13 percent of the market share and standard DVDs recorded 87 percent (Digital Video Forums, 2011).

The major Hollywood studios have distribution deals with Redbox and Netflix, although some are more restrictive than others. Paramount Pictures allows both retailers to offer its films for rental on the same day DVDs of the films go on sale. Sony Pictures generally allows same-day release except for films that gross over \$50 million at the domestic box office; for these films, Sony requires a 28-day window before Netflix and Redbox can offer them. Disney also allows same-day release, but began charging Redbox and Netflix higher wholesale purchase prices in early 2011 (Chmielewski and Fritz, 2011). The other three major studios, Warner Brothers, Universal, and 20th Century Fox, have complained that Redbox, Netflix, and similar services damage DVD sales, and therefore have instituted a minimum 28-day window between when DVDs are available in stores and when Redbox and Netflix can carry those films. These studios implement similar release strategies for video-on-demand (VOD) releases via iTunes and Amazon (Fritz, 2010).

These home video rental businesses present cheap and convenient rental alternatives to more conventional brick-and-mortar rental stores like Blockbuster or Hollywood Video, as well as big-box retailers that sell DVDs, like Wal-Mart, Best Buy and Target. Although Blockbuster, once the largest movie rental company, tried various strategies to continue competing with both Netflix and Redbox (it operated its own rental kiosks and offered online rentals), the company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in September 2010. Movie Gallery, the parent company of the former second-largest home video rental chain, Hollywood Video, also experienced steeply declining revenues and ultimately liquidated its assets in August 2010 (Anderson, 2010).

While the conventional distribution and exhibition landscape is changing with the growth of digital online technologies, Acland (2008) notes that the rise of digital projection and other digital technologies has facilitated convergence between various media technologies. This has given rise to new opportunities for Hollywood film studios, including partnerships with Netflix, Redbox, Hulu, YouTube, iTunes, Amazon, and others to offer digital downloads or digital rentals of both new and old releases (e.g., Fritz, 2010).

But the increasing capabilities of digital technologies especially have raised concerns among Hollywood studios, particularly in the area of safeguarding intellectual property. For instance, the protection of intellectual property is paramount to major Hollywood studios, and the MPAA leads efforts to combat copyright piracy through strategies of education, enforcement, litigation and legislation (e.g., Bettig, 1996, 2008; Pendakur, 2008). Decreases in revenue from theatrical runs and DVD sales have prompted Hollywood to assign blame on rampant piracy (real or not). Several individuals interviewed for this study criticized the film industry's slow acceptance and incorporation of new technologies, noting that the music industry – and especially iTunes' model of music distribution – provides instructional examples of how to adapt to technological advances. For example, Portland-based film producer David Cress said, "The [film] industry is just going to have to shake it out for a few years, just like the music industry did...There needs to be a fundamental shift. Call back in 10 years. And see what happens."

A description of the Hollywood system is useful in understanding the conventional and mainstream approach to filmmaking and in understanding the often contrasting landscape of independent filmmaking. This landscape is marked by variations on and resistance to dominant practices that maximize available resources and highlight alternative perspectives. I now turn to an analysis of the independent film landscape, with a brief discussion of the estimated numbers and geographic locations of filmmaking professionals. This is followed by an analysis of the filmmaking stages of financing, production, distribution and exhibition.

The Independent Film Landscape

The number of independent films produced in the U.S. every year is difficult to determine, particularly because only a small percentage of these films are distributed to the general public. The MPAA (2010b) reports that, in 2009, it assigned ratings to 793 films, 677 films started production, and 558 films were released in theaters.²⁴ Of these 558 films, 400 were released by companies not affiliated with the MPAA; thus one can presume that these were primarily independent films. The number of films (677) that, according to the MPAA, were produced in 2009, however, may be understated, according to other sources. Independent film financing company IndieVest estimates that 9,000 independent films are produced every year (IndieVest, 2006, p. 4), with about five percent of those films receiving theatrical distribution (which does equate to roughly the same number that the MPAA estimates to be produced annually). Independent film

²⁴ The MPAA designates rated films as those that have been rated or re-rated (even years after their initial release). Produced films are U.S. films that have started production in a given year. Released films are those that have earned any theatrical box office revenue.

distribution consultant Mark Steven Bosko estimates that over 8,500 independent feature films are produced every year (he remarks that this works out to “about 14 a day, EVERY DAY!”); only about 500 of these receive “meaningful commercial distribution,” or reach an audience through traditional distribution outlets like theaters (Bosko, 2007). Scilla Andreen, CEO of IndieFlix, an online film distribution outlet, estimates around 13,000 independent films are made every year, with only one percent getting meaningful distribution (Caddell, 2008). In 2009, there were 9,598 feature film titles added to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website;²⁵ this number includes foreign films and therefore does not tabulate the number of exclusively American films (IMDb.com, 2010c).

Therefore, when one considers the MPAA’s numbers, one must recognize that there are a large number of independent films that are unrated or not released theatrically. The number of independent films has exploded in the last decade and a half, as more people are using cheap and easily accessible technology to make films. Geoff Gilmore, former director of the Sundance Film Festival, wrote in 2009, “The numbers of films produced [this year] as compared to the mid-1990s has quintupled” (Gilmore, 2009).

If we cannot arrive at accurate statistics for independent films, it is all the more difficult to assess the number of people working in independent filmmaking. Many of those involved in filmmaking are unofficially employed, underemployed, self-employed, or make films as a hobby. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) reported that 350,870 people were employed in all occupations in the motion picture and video industries

²⁵ IMDb.com (2010a) has certain eligibility requirements for titles that are submitted to its database. For example, a film must be of general public interest, meaning it has been accepted to screen in a public venue of some sort, such as a theater, on home video, or online. The film should also be available to the general public (either in the present or past).

(NAICS code 512100) in May 2009 (see Appendix B for a list of NAICS codes and occupations related to the motion picture industry). These occupations include a wide range of occupations, including producers and directors, lawyers, security guards, animal trainers, carpenters, editors, and financial analysts, among others. This figure includes those working for either major studios or independents. This figure does not, however, count those employed as independent artists (NAICS code 711510), as independent film workers are more difficult to isolate under this industrial category.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the process of independent filmmaking, it must first be acknowledged that this process is by no means universal and filmmakers often do not follow the same process for every film. The discussion that follows is derived from a variety of sources, including first-hand accounts from filmmakers, instructional books, conventional wisdom, and other sources. This synthesis can be useful in understanding the process by which independent films get produced and distributed to audiences. The following section includes independent film development, financing, production, distribution and exhibition, and advocacy.

Independent Filmmaking: Development

In contrast to studio productions where numerous people are involved with the development of a film “property,” independent films are usually developed by a handful of people or just one individual. The independent filmmaker²⁶ may have one or more

²⁶ I use the term “independent filmmaker” here for simplicity, but this could also mean a partnership of one or more producers, directors and/or writers; a production company; or other combination of individuals.

motivations for developing a project. Among these may be: a compelling subject for which the filmmaker feels passion; a “calling card” film that the filmmaker will use as a demo of his/her work; a project made for film school requirements; one’s own competitive nature (Tom Bertling of Portland was “tired of watching bad movies. I wanted to see if I could do better with less money.”); or a personal desire – Steve Coker of Portland had “a burning need to film a feature.” The idea is then transformed into a script, either originally written or adapted from another source. The film project is then packaged and a business plan is drafted with key cast and crew attached so that the filmmaker may approach financiers with a concrete proposal. If the filmmaker him/herself is the sole financier (i.e., personal savings or deferments), or a very amateur or guerilla filmmaker, there may be no business plan at all.

There are film development programs around the country that facilitate filmmakers’ creative processes and help them to write and direct features, shorts and documentaries. For example, the Sundance Institute, which is the parent organization for the Sundance Film Festival, has organized various programs and labs in which filmmakers are given professional and financial support to develop their projects, with the intention of creating commercially viable projects. Film Independent, the Los Angeles-based branch of the Independent Feature Project, runs filmmaker labs for directors and screenwriters, while Boston’s public television station WGBH also offers filmmaker labs.

Increasingly, many independent filmmakers are creating filmed content for multiple platforms, including online, mobile, and television outlets (the concept of transmedia storytelling). The story is developed with this potential synergy in mind,

although it is driven less by an imperative to maximize profits and more by the need to just generate revenue. When an idea is translated into multiple formats, the chances of that idea coming to fruition in at least one format are greater. According to Colin O'Neill, a film instructor at the Art Institute of Portland, "People aren't doing the traditional model where I write a screenplay or treatment and then I go pitch it. They're pitching to multiple venues. How can I make this a video game? How can I make this a comic book? How can I [just get] someone to get interested in it?" The Portland-based filmmaking duo Jacob and Arnold Pander have used a non-film format to generate interest in their film idea. "It's cynical, but we're making a comic to make a movie," they noted at the What is Film? Conference held in Portland in October 2009. Comic books can be produced and disseminated cheaply and widely in print and online, which allows them to test out an idea with audiences and even potential investors.

Independent Filmmaking: Financing

As mentioned in Chapter IV, independent film financing has historically been a risky venture. The relationship to the mainstream American film industry has shaped independents' ability to see their projects through to the final result and has structured how independents approach the acquisition of resources. Filmmaking has traditionally been a costly activity, although production (and some distribution) costs have lowered thanks to more easily accessible technologies like digital cameras and nonlinear editing platforms. But other changes in film financing in the mid- to late-2000s have complicated the ways in which independent filmmakers can secure financing, including the reduction

or elimination of Indiewood studios, fewer arts grants, and lack of interest from financially solvent investors.

Independent film is financed through a myriad of sources. In other words, there is no uniform funding model. Sources might include: family or friends; grants from public or private organizations; private investors; limited partnerships; corporate funding; bank loans; donations or in-kind resources; deferments (wherein some or all members of the crew/cast defer payment until the film turns a profit, which sometimes translates to an indefinite deferment); domestic or international pre-sales (selling the film's distribution rights for theatrical, home video and/or television release before the film is finished); negative pickup deals (selling the finished film to a distributor); and credit cards or personal savings.

Independent film budgets can range from \$0 to millions of dollars, but, as noted in this study's definition of independent film, as a filmmaker receives more financial involvement from investors, one risks losing his or her independence. Most independent films' budgets are frugal; often independent film budgets "rarely reflect what things cost, but rather reflect what had to be paid for" (Block, 1983, p. 9). This section discusses various sources of independent film financing, including personal financing, conventional sources, crowd funding, and corporate sources. These sources are not exhaustive and are intended to give an overview of trends of independent film financing as of 2010.

Sources of Independent Film Financing: Personal Financing

By far, the most common strategy of film financing is personal financing. This may include self-financing, borrowing from family or friends, and deferring salaries. A

self-financing filmmaker uses personal savings and/or credit cards to pay cast and crew members, services, and other expenses. Oftentimes, a filmmaker may also use personal assets as collateral in securing a bank loan (for example, taking a second mortgage on a house). Self-financing can also include drawing on the resources of family and friends; countless independent films have been made by individuals who have borrowed money from their parents or friends. One can also consider salary deferment as a form of personal financing, as the filmmaker does not draw a salary from the production until (or if) the film makes a profit. In this case, the filmmaker (and oftentimes cast and crew members) is giving his or her time and energy on a volunteer basis.

Sources of Independent Film Financing: Conventional Sources

Some conventional sources of film financing include bank loans, domestic or international presales, negative pickup deals, hedge funds, and grants (Davies and Wistreich, 2007). Recently, many of these types of financing for independent films have been either drying up or cutting back. Distributor funding, particularly in the form of negative pickup deals, has tightened considerably. These types of deals, which have become near-mythological in their ability (however rare) to transform low-budget filmmakers into overnight success stories, attracted attention when Miramax bought Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape* (1989) for \$1 million at the 1989 Sundance Film Festival. Indiewood studios, the specialty film divisions of major Hollywood film studios, have almost all shuttered in the last few years, closing off this financing option to independent filmmakers. Warner Independent Pictures and Picturehouse, two divisions of Time Warner, closed in 2008, and Time Warner's third "independent" division, New

Line Cinema, was merged into Warner Brothers that same year. Paramount Pictures folded the operations of Paramount Vantage (formerly Paramount Classics) into the main studio in mid-2008 while retaining the Paramount Vantage brand name (Goldstein, 2008). Miramax, arguably the most visible and well-regarded of Indiewood studios, was closed by its parent company, Disney, in 2010, five years after its founders, the Weinstein brothers, left to form a new company (Waxman, 2010). With the closure of these studio divisions, there are fewer financing options from large-scale, well-connected distributors for independent films.

An independent film may also receive presales, whereby a distributor pays for the rights to a film before it is produced. Many presales deals, especially with international distributors, are contingent on the attachment of well-known actors or directors to a project, which can be difficult for many independent filmmakers to offer (Parks, 2007). In the 2000s, international presales as an independent film financing and distribution option had curtailed somewhat, as a glut of films made it difficult for independent filmmakers to connect with foreign distributors and many distributors acquired rights to films that eventually flopped at the box office. However, some industry analysts report that international presales had revived somewhat by 2010, although distributors are typically paying 30 to 40 percent less for films than they did in 2008 (Block, 2010).

Presales often work in tandem with bank loans, as presales agreements are often presented as collateral to secure a loan. In order to get a bank loan, the independent filmmaker also needs a completion bond, which guarantees that the bank loan will be repaid regardless of production cost overruns or failed productions (Epstein, 2005). The completion bond company retains the right to take control over the film's budget and

production if the filmmakers cannot finish the film themselves. Film industry analyst Edward Jay Epstein (2005) notes that many banks are more likely to lend money if the presales agreement involves a financially stable international film distributor like Canal Plus or Buena Vista International.

Independent film financing goes through cycles and is highly dependent on the economic climate and perception of the potential success and profit of independent films. In the 1990s, the dot-com boom created a set of young millionaires who wanted to invest in hip and cool projects; the film industry proved to be profitable for some of these investors. Similarly, in the mid-2000s, hedge fund investors and venture capitalists invested in independent film. In 2006, both the Hollywood and independent segments of the film industry “hit a tipping point where real money [was] flowing into the business” (Galloway, 2006). But in 2010, as investors continued to feel the effects of the economic downturn that started in 2007, even major studios were impacted by the retraction of hedge funds, which had once made up 20 percent of Hollywood budgets (estimated at roughly \$10 billion over four years) (“Hollywood Struggles with Hedge Fund Absence,” 2010).

One of the most longstanding sources of funding for independent films has been arts-related grants from public and private granting institutions. Once upon a time, independent filmmakers were able to rely on this type of funding much more consistently, particularly during the heyday of public support for public television in the 1970s. But the budgets for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) have shrunk dramatically over the last two decades. Nearly since their inception in 1965, these federal arts and culture funding

bodies have been the focus of criticism from conservative government representatives and conservative Christian groups like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition. The Republican-run Congress that swept the 1994 elections initiated cuts to arts and culture-based programs like the NEA and NEH, slashing their budgets and calling for their dissolution (Koch, 1998). Although both programs were ultimately continued, their financial support has been perilously low, even with renewed support from the Obama Administration at the end of the 2000s.²⁷ The problems experienced by the NEA and NEH are indicative of a general climate wherein public arts funding is relatively unsupported in the U.S. However, many independent filmmakers, particularly those making noncommercial films, continue to rely on arts grants to finance their films.

But independent filmmakers are also exploring other methods to secure funding for their films. They still typically rely on a variety of funding options that collectively make up the full budget of a film. Some of these other methods include “crowd funding” and corporate partnerships in the form of cash investment or product placement.

Sources of Independent Film Financing: Crowd Funding

As mentioned in Chapter IV, crowd funding is a form of collective financing, whereby any number of people can “invest” in a film for a low amount. It must be noted that the term of “investment” is used loosely in this case. The filmmakers are generally soliciting donations, rather than investments, as there is little intention of paying back anyone who donates the small amounts that are usually generated with crowd funding. The intention here is to gather funds from those unable to make large contributions. This

²⁷ Republican lawmakers renewed calls in early 2011 to eliminate the NEA and the NEH (Pogrebin, 2011).

phenomenon is facilitated by the Internet in that filmmakers are able to connect with potential funders through social networking sites like Facebook or MySpace, as well as through project fundraising websites like Kickstarter.com or IndieGoGo.com, which facilitate fundraising for creative, cause and entrepreneurial projects. Several films have achieved relative success with this fundraising process, including Nicolás Alcalá's *El Cosmonauta* (*The Cosmonaut*, 2010), which sought to recruit "producers" for the film through small-scale donations (starting at two Euros). In four months, the production attracted over 1,000 "producers." *The Age of Stupid*, directed by Franny Armstrong in 2009, sold shares in its £450,000 budget; those who donated £20 received a credit on the film's website, while those who invested over £5,000 would get a percentage of the film's net profits (Dell, 2008).²⁸ It must be noted that crowd funding is not a new phenomenon. John Cassavetes, for example, appeared on Jean Shepherd's radio show, *Night People*, in 1957, and raised over \$2,000 in contributions from listeners for his film, *Shadows*, after he made this impassioned plea for donations:

If people really wanted to see a movie about people, they should contribute money. Just a dollar each would do it, if enough of them contributed. I think there are thousands of men and women who would like to know they could help to have a movie made (Fine, 2005, p. 79)

Sources of Independent Film Financing: Corporate Involvement

Corporate involvement in independent film financing has a long history, although some corporations have moved towards financing films as one way to overcome financial instability caused by the economic crisis that began in 2007. Most of the corporate

²⁸ The budget for *The Age of Stupid* was reportedly £650,000 and earned just over £100,000 in its short box office run (IMDB.com, 2010b).

funders to which I refer here are not traditional media companies and have only begun their foray in the late 2000s into filmmaking in order to explore an economical and innovative way to market their brands to niche audiences. We must interrogate the resulting relationship between a corporate partner and an independent filmmaker, however, as oftentimes this partnership involves overt cross-promotional partnerships or active involvement in the production, marketing and distribution of an independent film.

For example, in order to promote its Samsung Memoir, a high-end camera phone, the technology company Samsung financed *Rock Prophecies* (2009), a documentary by John Chester about rock-and-roll photographer Robert M. Knight. While Samsung and the phone did not appear in the film itself, the marketing around the film featured very overt cross-promotion; even Knight participated in a side promotion in which he used the camera phone and blogged about it during the film's festival circuit tour. According to the company, a traditional marketing campaign for this phone would normally have lasted one month, but a partnership with a touring documentary ensured six months of longevity for the campaign. As Samsung Mobile chief marketing officer Bill Ogle noted, "We thought it was a perfect way to get our message across of what our phone can do, especially for the audience we're trying to reach... The film has been helping us a lot, with sales way up in those markets (where the film is playing at festivals)" (Graser, 2009). There are numerous other examples of corporate brands partnering with independent films in the latter half of the 2000s, including Dove's \$3 million investment in *The Women* (Diane English, 2008); Mountain Dew's \$4 million investment in a snowboarder movie *First Descent* (Kemp Curly and Kevin Harrison, 2005), and

Gatorade's affiliation with *Gracie* (Davis Guggenheim, 2007), a movie about a girl's soccer team.

However, these types of partnerships do not always come to fruition, as was the case with documentarian Beth Harrington's film, *The Winding Stream* (in post-production as of 2010). Focusing on the growth of country music and the families of Johnny Carter and June Cash, this film features the last on-camera interview with Carter himself. In seeking funding for the film's production and post-production, Harrington approached Gibson Guitars as a natural fit, since the guitar brand was featured prominently in her footage of the Carter and Cash families. But Gibson was not interested in partnering with her in any way; one might presume that Gibson felt it would get adequate advertising from the film without having to make any kind of financial commitment.

Other companies have become more intimately involved with filmmaking, starting production units, buying studios, and acquiring scripts. For example, coffee giant Starbucks started Starbucks Entertainment in 2006 after the early success of its Hear Music recording label, and its first film venture involved partnering with Lions Gate Films to help market and distribute *Akeelah and the Bee* (Doug Atchison, 2006). Starbucks baristas would attend pre-screenings so they would be able to talk up the film to customers, while other promotions included sneak previews for customers, spots on Starbucks' Hear Music satellite radio station, in-store displays, and DVD sales ("Starbucks Entertainment," 2006). Its second foray into film distribution occurred the next year, with Adam Ravetch and Sarah Robertson's film, *Arctic Tale* (2007). Co-founder of the athletic apparel retailer Nike Phil Knight took over Will Vinton Studios,

an animation studio in Portland, Oregon, and renamed it Laika Animation; Knight's son, Travis Knight, was the lead animator on Laika's first feature-length film, *Coraline* (Henry Selick, 2009), which was a box office success (Travis Knight became Laika's CEO in 2009). Nike also helped to market and distribute *Beautiful Losers* (Aaron Rose and Joshua Leonard, 2008), a documentary about DIY culture in New York in the early 1990s. Amazon.com optioned the book *Stolen Child*, shopped the story around Hollywood studios, and eventually secured participation from Twentieth Century Fox. The online retailer also started Amazon Studios in 2010.

These examples of corporate funding are rare cases in the financing of independent filmmaking, as they represent isolated instances of very specific branding opportunities aligning with film subjects. Generally speaking, independent filmmakers do not rely much on corporate partnerships to finance their films, but the trends of corporate involvement in independent filmmaking are certainly noteworthy in the overall discussion of independent film financing.

Independent filmmakers tap into a range of resources to collect enough money to produce a film, which might include personal sources, bank loans or distribution deals, arts grants, crowd funding, corporate involvement, or any number of other financing options. Once they have secured at least some level of financing, independent filmmakers can begin the production of their films, which is discussed next.

Independent Filmmaking: Production

Much like its studio counterpart, independent filmmaking involves pre-production, production and post-production. Pre-production, of which development, budgeting and financing are part, continues with casting, location scouting, set design, et cetera. The duration of this phase can vary based on how much financing is in place and the timing of commitments from cast and crew members. Production is the actual filming of the movie, and is generally completed very quickly primarily because of budget constraints. Independent filmmakers often have to work around busy schedules – their own or those of the cast and crew members. Often, people working on independent films have other jobs and commitments that prevent them from working full time on an independent project; as a result, a lot of filming may be done on weekends or evenings.

Post-production, the phase that involves editing, music, special effects, and so on, takes the most time in independent filmmaking, and it is often the most problematic (except distribution). Here, filmmakers find out if they have adhered to their budgets and if the original budgets were realistic. Some productions are only financed to get through production, and additional funds have to be raised in order to complete a film.

Technological advances in the last 10 to 15 years have dramatically altered the opportunities for independent filmmakers. Shooting on digital formats has virtually replaced shooting on film (8mm, 16mm or even 35mm; 35 mm has historically been the standard in studio filmmaking), and technological improvements and cost reductions in camera equipment, such as the development of the Red One camera,²⁹ have made digital

²⁹ The Red One camera, which was developed in 2006, quickly caught on in independent and studio filmmaking as a tool to mimic 35mm. It records over 4,000 lines of horizontal resolution, which is

filmmaking not only acceptable in the industry, but all but indistinguishable in quality from its 35mm filmic counterpart to all but the most discerning eye. More importantly, digital does not carry the burden of film processing, which can add hundreds of thousands of dollars to a film's budget. Post-production work can be completed on a laptop with any number of readily available visual and sound editing software programs, including Avid, Final Cut Pro, and Pro Tools.

These technologies have made it easier for the average independent filmmaker to produce films, and have also given many aspiring filmmakers the tools to enter the field. However, as Oregon producer Gary Kout laments, "I think the proliferation of available equipment is bad for independent film. I really do. It just waters it down. Again just because you can [make a film] doesn't mean you should." Veteran film publicist Lyla Foggia comments, "A lot of films are just not worthy of being in theaters."

For many, finishing a film is reason enough to celebrate. Kout calls it "a phenomenal achievement." Many other filmmakers in Oregon and Washington agree and define success as:

- "Working with amazing people and having a beautiful end result."
- "Finishing a project and being satisfied with the results, first and foremost."
- "Making a film that works and tells a story...and technically is up to speed with industry standards."
- "Being able to say 'I finished my film' regardless of quality or budget...just finishing a project at all is the greatest success you can achieve."

comparable to the resolution captured by 35mm film cameras. The Red One is more lightweight, has a large capacity hard drive, and costs significantly less than either 35mm cameras or other HD digital cameras of comparable quality (in 2008, the Red ran \$17,500, while a month-long rental of a 35mm camera cost over \$25,000, and a high-end HD camera can cost \$150,000 to purchase) (Behar, 2008).

But for many more filmmakers, distribution is the key to a successful film. Others say that the ability to connect with audiences or to impact society in a meaningful way is of paramount importance.

Independent Filmmaking: Distribution and Exhibition

For one filmmaker surveyed for this study, connecting a film with its intended audience is crucial because it “exposes people to stories/worlds/struggles/journey they might otherwise not have the opportunity to witness or experience.” For others, the goal is more practical: success may involve “being able to support yourself financially and having your work well received by the public.” Distribution options that have previously been limited have opened up in recent years, particularly as filmmakers explore and develop online distribution models. This section discusses various distribution and exhibition methods, including conventional distribution, self-distribution and four-walling, film festivals, internet distribution, and piracy as distribution.

Conventional Distribution

The most conventional distribution options for independent films include deals with established distribution companies, such as niche distributors like First Run Features, major Hollywood studios or their affiliated specialty arms (such as Universal Studios and Focus Features, or Sony Pictures and Sony Pictures Classics), and public television or cable television channels (like HBO, Bravo, the Independent Film Channel

(IFC) or the Sundance Channel).³⁰ Types of distribution deals may include, among others, negative pickups (a distributor buying the rights to distribute a film after the film is completed) and presales (acquiring distribution rights before the film is finished). The negative pickup deal has been perceived as the fairy godmother of independent filmmaking, as some filmmakers have signed highly visible and wildly lucrative deals at film festivals like Sundance and Toronto. For example, Sony Pictures Classics acquired *Little Miss Sunshine* at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival for over \$10 million, breaking a previously held record for Miramax's purchase of *Happy Texas* in 1999 (Thompson, 2006). However, it should be noted that only 24 percent of films (or 28 of the 118 feature films) screened at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival walked away with a distribution deal from either a domestic or international distribution company (Longworth, 2009).³¹

Self-Distribution and Four-Walling

Before the development of newer distribution outlets like home video, cable television and the Internet, most independent films were relegated to non-theatrical distribution in schools, university and community film societies, and theatrical distribution in art house cinemas. Wasser (1995) relates accounts of some filmmakers in the 1970s who employed the technique of “four-walling,” or the practice of renting a theater for a number of screenings; the filmmaker or distributor retains the box office

³⁰ IFC parent company Rainbow Media bought its channel's primary competitor, the Sundance Channel, in 2008. This has effectively formed a monopoly on cable television distribution for channels perceived as being especially dedicated to independent film (Stelter, 2008).

³¹ This percentage becomes negligible when we consider the number of feature films submitted to Sundance. In 2009, there were 3,661 feature film submissions; thus, only 0.7 percent of those submissions acquired distribution deals at the Sundance Festival (Sundance Film Festival, 2008).

receipts while the theater owner retains revenue from concessions sales. These filmmakers, according to Wasser, four-walled mostly second-run theaters in regional markets and secured impressive box office receipts over a long period of time: “Through a patient and methodical approach [the filmmakers] took the profits from one weekend in one market and rolled it over into the next market to build the film slowly across the country” (p. 52). Many filmmakers started their own distribution outfits to facilitate the four-walling self-distribution model. Oregon-based filmmaker Arthur Dubs distributed his film, *American Wilderness* (1969), through his company Pacific International Enterprises (Wasser, 1995). After Warner Bros.’ mediocre distribution of Tom Laughlin’s film, *Billy Jack* (1971), Laughlin rereleased the film using a four-walling strategy and grossed \$32.5 million (Casuso, 1999) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Top 10 films by domestic box office revenue in 1971

<i>Top 10 Films of 1971 by Domestic Revenue</i>		
1	Fiddler on the Roof	\$38.2 m
2	Billy Jack	\$32.5 m
3	The French Connection	\$26.3 m
4	Summer of '42	\$20.5 m
5	Diamonds Are Forever	\$19.7 m
6	Dirty Harry	\$18.0 m
7	A Clockwork Orange	\$17.0 m
8	Carnal Knowledge	\$14.1 m
9	The Last Picture Show	\$13.1 m
10	Bedknobs and Broomsticks (revenue includes at least one major reissue)	\$11.4 m

Source: *Box Office Report*, n.d.a.

The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams (Richard Friedenberg, 1974), produced for \$300,000, grossed \$22 million in a four-walling strategy (Wasser, 1995, p. 57) (see Table 3). The same year, Laughlin released the sequel to *Billy Jack*, and secured an impressive \$31.1 million in box office revenue. However, four-walling is a strategy that requires money up front, which many independents cannot access.

Table 3: Top 10 films by domestic box office revenue in 1974

<i>Top 10 Films of 1974 by Domestic Revenue</i>		
1	The Towering Inferno	\$48.8 m
2	Blazing Saddles	\$47.8 m
3	Young Frankenstein	\$38.8 m
4	Earthquake	\$35.9 m
5	The Trial of Billy Jack	\$31.1 m
6	The Godfather Part II	\$30.7 m
7	Airport 1975	\$25.3 m
8	The Longest Yard	\$23.0 m
9	The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams	\$21.9 m
10	Murder on the Orient Express	\$19.1 m

Source: *Box Office Report*, n.d.b.

Furthermore, the art house cinemas that were formerly friendly to independents are having more difficulty freeing up their screens for small films that may draw small audiences. Most art house cinemas around the country are locked into unspoken agreements with the Indiewood distributors like Fox Searchlight and Focus Features, screening those studios' films for the majority of their available screen time.³² In

³² Employees at the two-screen Bijou Art Cinemas in Eugene, Oregon, have revealed that studios like Focus Features lock them into unwritten block booking type arrangements wherein the studio expects the theater to screen the studios' less-popular films in exchange for access to higher grossing films.

addition, many of these theaters are struggling financially and do not have the luxury of turning over a potentially lucrative Friday night screening to a small film with little publicity.

In the past decade or so, however, self-distribution and four-walling have become more feasible and somewhat less cumbersome because of the Internet. In the self-distribution model, a filmmaker handles all aspects of marketing, rentals and sales of a film. For instance, Kelley Baker, a Portland-based filmmaker, tours around the U.S. and Europe semi-annually with his films, arranging screenings, coordinating with local press outlets, and selling DVDs. He also sells his films on his website; he encourages traffic to his website and to his screenings and lectures through social networking sites like Facebook. This model of distribution is a time-consuming and admittedly exhausting process, as Baker is on the road several months out of the year, visiting cities all over the country. He also cannot work on distribution when he is making films.

New exhibition models have also opened up opportunities for independent filmmakers to connect more directly with their audiences on their own terms. Brave New Theaters, a venture from filmmaker Robert Greenwald (producer of *Iraq for Sale: War Profiteers* (2006) and *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism* (2004)), provides filmmakers with a framework for networking with unconventional exhibition sites like churches, arts organizations, coffee shops, bars and individual homes. Independent filmmakers who use Brave New Theaters as a platform for distribution and exhibition tend to be politically and socially engaged, seeking out audiences that can use their films to mobilize political and social movements (Christensen, 2007). This grassroots approach has been fairly successful, with over 460 films available for screening by over 5,700

groups who are registered with Brave New Theaters as screening hosts as of May 2010 (Brave New Theaters, 2010). Other alternative distribution and exhibition models have cropped up recently as well, including OpenIndie, which is a website database to which filmmakers can submit their films, and that audiences can search for films and request screenings in their area. This model is intended to identify nodes of interest around the country and schedule screenings accordingly.³³

Film Festivals

Film festivals have long been considered an essential part of independent film distribution and exhibition, with many independent filmmakers submitting their films to top-tier festivals like Sundance, Toronto, and Telluride, among others, before turning to regional, genre-based or online festivals. Scilla Andreen, CEO of online distributor IndieFlix, notes that there are over 7,000 film festivals worldwide (Caddell, 2008). Filmmakers hope to accomplish a number of things from festival exposure, including generating critical reviews, building audiences, making industry contacts, and potentially securing distribution. Many festivals have entry restrictions, the most important of which is premiere status. Sundance, for example, requires that entries cannot have been publicly shown anywhere else in the world. Some filmmakers are beginning to either link festival screenings with online distribution (both home video and streaming), or they are bypassing festivals altogether in favor of online, home video and television distribution.

³³ Paramount Pictures employed a similar strategy to promote its 2010 film, *Paranormal Activity 2* (Tod Williams, 2010), in which fans could “demand” screenings of the film in their communities (Warner, 2010).

At the 2010 Sundance Film Festival, there was a trend towards “service deals,” or the structure of distribution whereby a film producer pays the distributor an upfront fee and a percentage of box office revenue to distribute a film (as opposed to the more conventional model in which the distributor pays the producer). In many cases, this payment also covers some of the prints and advertising (P&A) costs for the film. The producer retains rights to the film, which is key for many independents who are distributing their films in multiple outlets (Goldstein, 2010). Some films may utilize this distribution structure to get onto screens with hopes of securing a more conventional distribution deal.

Internet Distribution

Many independent filmmakers take advantage of the growing number of online venues for film distribution. These venues include websites like Netflix, IndieFlix, Jaman and Babelgum. Some prefer what Peter Broderick (2008) calls “hybrid distribution,” or combining some elements of self-distribution with elements of more traditional distribution plans. Some filmmakers make deals with online distributors like Amazon.com, Netflix, iTunes, and brick-and-mortar video stores to sell or rent their films, receiving a percentage of the profits. Most of these companies offer non-exclusive distribution contracts, so that if a filmmaker is unhappy with the company’s performance, he or she can opt out of the contract.

The Internet has created a venue for film marketing that allows filmmakers to connect with audiences and to build buzz before their film is released. For the past ten years or more, independent filmmakers have been using websites to build relationships

with fans in order to build audiences for their films (e.g., Erickson, 2008). So it is hardly surprising that filmmakers, much like professionals in any industry, are turning to social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter to connect with audiences and members of film communities both in the U.S. and around the world. These tools are becoming integral components of a film's publicity, which may involve promoting positive movie reviews and DVD sales, as represented by Tom Bertling's Facebook page for his movie, *Lexie Cannes* (2009). Kelley Baker, also known as the "Angry Filmmaker," updates his Facebook friends on his tours, which include screenings, workshops and speaking engagements. Meanwhile, Joanna Priestley alerts her Facebook friends when she is having a screening and attracts larger audiences. "I couldn't believe it when I asked for a show of hands at my recent show," she says. "There were probably about 500 people there, and I'd say about 220 heard about it from Facebook." Updates like these, in conjunction with a film's or filmmaker's website, help to establish and maintain a community of followers that will ideally support the filmmaker's next venture. That built-in audience is vital for successful exhibition of independent films and the resulting connection with audiences.

Piracy as Distribution

Another mode of distribution is one that has confounded major studios. Digital film piracy is one of the biggest problems for studio film distribution – one of the MPAA's toughest and most active fights is against international film piracy, a practice that allegedly costs MPAA member companies at least \$6.1 billion in lost revenue in 2005 (AFTRA et al., 2010). But many independent filmmakers are open to sharing their

material this way. Film piracy can often build what Nitin Govil (2005) calls “cultures of anticipation,” or fans who are willing to buy a DVD of a film even after seeing a pirated version online. Studies suggest that this is the case, especially for pirated music downloads; in fact, people who pirate music also purchase the most music (Eaton, 2009). As well, since independent filmmakers typically have little funding for marketing, they are often willing to expose their film to audiences in any way possible. The film *Ink* (Jamin Winans, 2009), made in Colorado for \$250,000, is an exemplar of this process. The DVD of the film was released by the filmmakers in November 2009 and, two days later, was uploaded through The Pirate Bay, a peer-to-peer file sharing website based in Sweden. *Ink* was downloaded 400,000 times and became one of the top 10 most pirated movies, according to TorrentFreak, a blog that covers file sharing. It was also ranked as the 16th most popular film on the Internet Movie Database website (Ernesto, 2009). In another case, Charles Mudede, the screenwriter of the Seattle-produced film *Zoo* (2007), was more curious than anything when his film showed up online illegally. “We weren’t upset about it. It wasn’t alarming or distressing. It didn’t do damage on the financial side. We were more curious as to what would happen if this travels on the web for free.”

Independent film distribution and exhibition can take a variety of forms, from conventional to self-distribution to newer models like Internet distribution and piracy. The next section details the types of organizations that advocate for conditions in which independent filmmaking may flourish.

Independent Filmmaking: Advocacy

Independent filmmakers are scattered across the country, with larger pockets in urban areas like Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and elsewhere. Most film organizations that represent the interests of independent filmmakers operate locally or at the state level, like the Oregon Media Production Association or the New Mexico Film Producers Association. Oftentimes, representation for filmmakers (independent or otherwise) is headed by state or city film offices. These offices usually work to create and nurture economic development opportunities for state businesses and tend to favor larger (usually Hollywood) productions, which bring new money into the state without draining local or state public resources like schools or social services.

There is one national organization affiliated with independent filmmaking: the Independent Film and Television Alliance (IFTA). As briefly discussed in Chapter IV, the IFTA, headquartered in Los Angeles, is a trade association that represents more than 160 production and distribution companies worldwide. IFTA member organizations must have an established record of licensing theatrical, video or television rights for the last one to five years (depending on membership status) in at least 10 of the top 30 worldwide distribution territories. Members include 2929 Entertainment (a vertically integrated entertainment corporation that owns Magnolia Pictures, Landmark Theaters, and HDNet), FremantleMedia (which produces and distributes television shows in over 22 countries and is itself owned by RTL Group, the largest television and radio broadcast company in Europe), and The Weinstein Company (a production and distribution company owned by Harvey and Bob Weinstein, formerly of Miramax). Other members include the New Zealand Film Commission, the UK Film Council, DeAPlaneta (a Spanish film

distributor), and a number of affiliated financial institutions, including First California Bank, U.S. Bank, and Screen Capital International. The IFTA claims to advocate conditions that help independent filmmaking, addressing:

the threat to a competitive marketplace posed by media consolidation; net neutrality; the elimination of trade barriers; the impact of new technology on our traditional business models; anti-piracy and improvement of copyright protection around the world; and, the need to foster broad-based growth of the industry (IFTA, 2010a).

Most of its efforts, however, are clearly directed towards a particular tier of filmmaking organizations that does not include or represent most regional independent filmmakers.

Another independent film group has several branches around the country under an umbrella organization: the Independent Feature Project (IFP). IFP operates in New York, Los Angeles (under the name Film Independent), Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Phoenix and Seattle. Most IFP activity focuses on providing professional opportunities and education to filmmakers, including workshops, writing labs, networking events, and some financing opportunities. IFP/New York has a huge membership, boasting 10,000 members, while Film Independent in LA has 4,000 members (with many international members); IFP/Minnesota has about 500 members in the Upper Midwest region. While participation is quite active in these regional branches, many regions of the country are not reached by IFP and, therefore, their interests are not represented either.

The Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) was a very politically and culturally active film organization until its dissolution in 2006. The AIVF was started in 1975 by a group of individuals working outside Hollywood and public television who hoped to “leverage the collective voice of a largely isolated community and create a venue for sharing ideas and resources” (“After AIVF,” 2007). It ran

programs, seminars, published a magazine (*The Independent*, which continues to publish online), and promoted community to its 4,000 members. The organization served its members for 30 years, but like many nonprofit membership-based groups, it faced financial collapse and was ultimately unable to survive.

The AIVF's closing was felt widely in the American independent film community. Independent filmmaker Roger Weisberg extolled the AIVF's positive contributions to the scattered collection of independents working in the U.S.:

AIVF connects me to my colleagues and makes me realize that hundreds of other filmmakers share my experiences, struggles, and occasional triumphs. It's also comforting to know that a powerful ally is my court. Whether it's lobbying Congress to protect public television, holding workshops on the latest video technology, explaining the newest developments in the distribution of independent media, or announcing the screenings of its members, AIVF is always there to promote the interests of independent filmmakers ("AIVF," 2007).

The independent filmmaking community does not have a nationally-based organization that adequately represents its interests. The IFTA caters towards its members which are large corporations that are more comparable to Hollywood studios (and who are oftentimes one and the same), while the branch offices of the IFP are focused on their respective communities' filmmakers. The role that the AIVF once played for independent filmmakers has not been replaced, which leaves independent filmmakers with the need for a unifying organization that more vocally and actively advocates its interests.

Independent filmmaking is in constant flux, susceptible to changes in technology and economic climate, and the conditions of financing, production, distribution and exhibition reflect this fluidity. Many independent filmmakers compare their industry to

the music industry, which also undergoes many of the struggles associated with digital technologies and the prevalence of piracy. Unlike the mainstream Hollywood film industry, many independents embrace the possibilities that are afforded by these trends and are excited about being able to connect with audiences in non-traditional ways. Filmmaker Ward Serrill says that the independent film industry is “kind of like the music business. Bands now are figuring it out, how to self distribute or distribute on small labels again through their own website. Maybe that’s where independent film is going. You just start small and really find your own little audience and build on that.” Producer David Cress agrees: “In a certain way, small labels are as healthy as they’ve ever been. And maybe that’s what needs to happen [in the film industry].”

The landscape of independent filmmaking is complex and laden with obstacles that independent filmmakers must navigate in order to get their films produced, distributed, and exhibited. Hollywood studios have long dominated the film industry and continue to do so. But independent filmmakers have also continued to identify and create spaces in which they can work outside the mainstream system. As has been discussed here, these spaces allow diverse voices to bring their visions to the screen, connecting with audiences. I turn now to a discussion of regional filmmaking communities in the United States, in order to illustrate some of the institutionalized support enjoyed by independent filmmaking outside the main independent filmmaking centers of New York and Los Angeles.

Regional Filmmaking Communities

A great deal of independent film activity happens outside the traditional production centers of Los Angeles and New York in areas all over the United States, from Austin and Wilmington, North Carolina, to Seattle and Portland. Regional filmmaking takes place around the country, with film professionals collaborating with each other and creating and sustaining support organizations. Some communities are positioned for more successful regional filmmaking than others, thanks to aggressive tax incentives for production, new soundstages, skilled and experienced crew members, and favorable weather. In addition, some regional film industries have long histories of receiving support from their business and civic communities, which has in turn created an expectation of filmmaking as an integral and successful enterprise and contributor to a local economy. Texas, Louisiana, New York and South Carolina, along with Oregon and Washington, are all states that have active film production generated by both indigenous and out-of-state production companies and individuals.

Regional Film Production Centers: A Brief Overview of the U.S. and Canada

By far, the largest center of film production in terms of employment, both mainstream and independent, in the United States is Los Angeles, with New York City in second place. Independent filmmaking takes place all over the country, however, in large and small cities. Austin, Texas, is one such region that has nurtured its film community for the past thirty years or more, from the early success of filmmakers like Tobe Hooper (director of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1974) to the establishment of the South by Southwest (SXSW) Film Festival in 1994 and the opening of the Austin Studios, a 20-

acre film studio facility, in 2000. Numerous filmmakers attended the University of Texas-Austin Department of Radio-Television-Film, while the Austin Film Society screened local works, and the Texas Hall of Fame Awards recognized the state's filmmaking accomplishments. Filmmakers like Richard Linklater (*Slacker*, 1991), Mike Judge (*Office Space*, 1999) and Robert Rodriguez (*El Mariachi*, 1992) called on their own professional and personal networks to make early films, which grabbed the attention of Hollywood studio executives. Given the opportunity to direct studio productions (and, in Mike Judge's case, to create television programs *Beavis and Butthead* (1993-1997) and *King of the Hill* (1997-present), these filmmakers made valuable contacts and developed industry clout. They then returned to Austin, using their newfound influence to secure investment. They also brought productions to Austin and built up Austin's filmmaking infrastructure with the construction of studio space and development of skilled crew members. In addition, Texas Governors Ann Richards (1991-1995) and Rick Perry (2000-present) have been instrumental in supporting the state's film industry, with Richards integrating the Texas Film Commission into the Governor's Office of Music, Film, Television, and Multimedia in 1991, and Perry signing legislation that created a tax incentive program in 2007 and increased its scope in 2009. This type of infrastructural support has made Texas an attractive environment for both studio and indigenous productions (Macor, 2010).³⁴

Other states have created thriving and competitive filmmaking communities, primarily due to state-level investment and policies that attract out-of-state (mainly

³⁴ Texas' film incentives include a five to fifteen percent rebate on Texas-based expenditures; sales tax exemptions; refunds on lodging and fuel expenses; and an extensive base of skilled crew members (Texas Film Commission, 2010). In 2009, the state allocated \$60 million, up from \$20 million in 2008, for tax and spending incentives (Jacobs and Wood, 2010, p. 75).

Hollywood studio) productions. The economic impact created by film production work further supports development of a location's film industry. For instance, because New Mexico has some of the most aggressive film incentives in the U.S., it managed to attract 24 major film or television productions in 2009.³⁵ There are approximately 3,000 people based in New Mexico who are film workers (Jacobs and Wood, 2010, p. 73). Its filmmaking centers include the Albuquerque (the city's Albuquerque Studios is the largest studio facility in North America) and Santa Fe metro areas.

Louisiana is another state that has pursued the development and promotion of its film industry in the last decade. Its governor signed into law a tax incentive program in 2002 that envisioned adding a different sort of industry to the state's roster of predominantly petrochemical-related industries (Bhayroo and Meehan, 2008).³⁶ It has expanded to include various sectors of the entertainment industry, covering film, music, interactive media and live entertainment; indeed, the mission of the Louisiana Entertainment Office is "to create and grow an indigenous *entertainment* industry" (Louisiana Entertainment, 2010, my emphasis). Shreveport-Bossier City is home to several studios and post-production houses, as well as a multitude of film workers who migrated north from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. New Orleans has attracted a number of productions in the last decade, even experiencing a mini-boom in 2009. However, city and state ventures have been plagued by scandal and corruption. For

³⁵ According to the New Mexico Film Office (2010), the state offers 25 percent tax rebate on all production expenditures; a Film Investment Loan program of up to \$15 million per qualifying project with zero percent interest; state sales tax waivers; and 50 percent reimbursement of wages for on-the-job training of New Mexico residents in below-the-line positions.

³⁶ Louisiana's film incentives include a 30 percent transferable incentive for all production-related expenditures made within the state, and a five percent labor incentive for employment of Louisiana residents (Louisiana Entertainment, 2010).

example, the Louisiana Film Studios in New Orleans was built in 2009 but was forced into Chapter 11 bankruptcy after tax credits promised to some of its investors, including members of the New Orleans Saints football team, were never delivered. A bankruptcy judge ordered that the studio be liquidated in February 2010, thus ending a potentially lucrative venture (“Judge Orders Liquidation,” 2010).

Filmmaking in a number of other cities and states around the country is particularly vibrant. The film magazine *MovieMaker* annually lists “best places in America to make movies *and* to call home,” taking into consideration a region’s available financing, crew members, facilities, and other resources in order to rate various filmmaking communities (Table 4). Both Seattle and Portland have appeared on the list in the past, although their positions are tenuous at best when competing with locations with highly attractive tax incentive programs and production facilities, and their placement on the list fluctuates annually.

Another area that attracts American filmmaking and that is particularly important for the Pacific Northwest is British Columbia. The Canadian province directly north of Washington developed policies to promote feature filmmaking as an economic venture beginning in the 1970s, with accompanying enthusiasm from unions, service providers and the British Columbia Film Industry Association, a lobby group (Gasher, 2002, p. 71). Sixteen films were shot in BC in 1979, heralding a new phase in the feature film industry as Hollywood studios took advantage of favorable tax incentive policies, visually diverse

locations, and increasingly favorable exchange rates.³⁷ As noted by the BC Film Commission in the mid-1990s, “When they [Hollywood studios] discovered a community or location they could trust, they became very loyal” (Gasher, 2002, p. 107). BC’s reputation as a foreign service location³⁸ grew, as did its infrastructure of skilled professionals and equipped facilities. By 2000, foreign productions spent \$761 million in BC, representing over two-thirds of the province’s total film spending (Gasher, 2002, p. 92).

Foreign productions that co-produce with a Canadian company and that employ a certain number of Canadians are eligible for a range of federal and provincial incentives, including the Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit, the Film Incentive BC 20 percent tax credit, a Digital Animation or Visual Effects credit, a regional production credit, a Training credit, and others. As of 2008, nearly 70 percent of the productions filmed in the area known as “Hollywood North” were foreign-produced (86 service productions); \$617 million were processed in wages for Canadian workers in 2008-2009 (BC Film Commission, 2009).

British Columbia’s geographic and climatic similarities with Washington and Oregon have made it an attractive choice for film productions looking for a particular visual aesthetic with a cheaper price tag. As a result, numerous films and TV shows have

³⁷ The US-Canada exchange rate has fluctuated since the 1970s and even more dramatically in the 2000s, from a low of 1.6 (US\$1.00 = CDN\$1.60) in January 2002 to a high of 0.96 (US\$0.96 = CDN\$1.00) in November 2007 (Bank of Canada, 2010).

³⁸ The BC Film Commission (2009) defines a service production as one that is “initiated, owned and controlled by producers from jurisdictions outside of Canada; primarily interested in British Columbia as a production location; highly mobile; expends money on a project by project basis; hires local talent and crew; and key creative decision-making remains with the foreign producer” (p. 5).

Table 4: “Best places in America to make movies and to call home,” 2006-2011, according to *MovieMaker Magazine*

	<i>2011</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2006</i>
1	Boston, MA	Albuquerque, NM	Chicago, IL	Austin, TX	New York, NY	New York, NY
2	Albuquerque, NM	Los Angeles, CA	Atlanta, GA	Albuquerque, NM	Philadelphia, PA	Austin, TX
3	New Orleans, LA	Shreveport, LA	New York, NY	Shreveport, LA	Austin, TX	Portland, OR
4	Austin, TX	New York, NY	Shreveport, LA	New York, NY	Albuquerque, NM	Chicago, IL
5	Atlanta, GA	Austin, TX	Albuquerque, NM	Philadelphia, PA	Las Vegas, NV	Philadelphia, PA
6	Seattle, WA	Stamford, CT	Boston, MA	Wilmington, NC	Shreveport, LA	Los Angeles, CA
7	Brooklyn, NY	Boston, MA	Stamford, CT	Seattle, WA	Memphis, TN	Miami, FL
8	Detroit, MI	Detroit, MI	Memphis, TN	Portland, OR	Miami, FL	Baltimore, MD
9	Los Angeles, CA	Philadelphia, PA	Milwaukee, WI	Baltimore, MD	Portland, OR	Wilmington, NC
10	Richmond, VA	Seattle, WA	Austin, TX	Memphis, TN	Salt Lake City, UT	Memphis, TN
	Honorable Mention: Portland, OR		11. Detroit, MI ¹			
			12. Miami, FL			
			13. Seattle, WA			
			14. Portland, OR			

¹ The list from 2009 featured the top 25 cities, while the rest featured the top ten cities.
Sources: Wood and Percy, 2006; Percy, 2007; Wood, 2008; *MovieMaker Magazine*, 2009; Jacobs and Wood, 2010; Rupprecht and Wood, 2011.

been shot north of the border, although their stories are set in the Pacific Northwest; examples include *Agent Cody Banks* (Harald Zwart, 2003), *Hot Rod* (Akiva Schaffer, 2007), the second two installments of the *Twilight* series, *New Moon* (Chris Weitz, 2009) and *Eclipse* (David Slade, 2010), and ABC's TV series *Kyle XY* (2006-2009). For most of these, in terms of storyline, the location is inconsequential, only realized after eagle-eyed viewers pick out goofs in filming (such as the appearance of BC Transit buses and RCMP cars in *Hot Rod*), or diehard fans try to visit the locations where they were filmed (as has been the case with the *Twilight* series).

However, despite all these resources, few independent films are produced in British Columbia that achieve much visibility beyond the local community. As Seattle filmmaker and film critic Charles Mudede notes, "One would expect more independent films coming out of Vancouver... You would expect flourishing on the edges of the industry."

Filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest

Since Portland and Seattle are only 175 miles apart, they share many characteristics in terms of geography, environment, lifestyle and cultural values. Their dramatic landscapes range from mountains to coastline to desert to rainforest, with relatively temperate climates (contrary to popular notions, Washington and Oregon receive less precipitation than many other places around the country), relaxed attitudes and a preponderance of creativity and innovation in the arts and industry. All of these factors contribute to the appeal of these states for filmmaking, both as locations for shooting single projects and as permanent locations for living and working.

Both Seattle and Portland have lengthy histories of filmmaking, with relatively enthusiastic production and (limited) financial support through film-related organizations, governmental initiatives and local investors. The filmmaking communities here began to flourish in the late 1960s and have over the years encountered both prosperous and deteriorating circumstances that have affected filmmaking activity. Today, film and television production in Oregon and Washington employs nearly 20,000 people, according to the Motion Picture Association of America (2010a), which makes a significant economic impact in the region. Much of this work is connected with major Hollywood studio productions that shoot on-location in one of the two states. The cable television series *Leverage* (2008-present), for example, employs 400 cast and crew members in Portland and works with several hundred vendors and other agencies in the state; this activity generates \$20 million in the city's economy (Webber, 2010). There is also a substantial and integral indigenous filmmaking community in the Pacific Northwest that develops regional independent work and that feeds the local economy even more than its out-of-state counterparts. Independent filmmaking has evolved into a professional, community-oriented sector that contributes dramatically to the creative character of these cities, which is more fully discussed in the next three chapters.

Conclusion

The economic and cultural nature of the independent film industry has developed from its complex relationship with the mainstream Hollywood industry. The conditions of funding, production, distribution and exhibition are shaped in large part by the power

dynamics inherent in this relationship, and independent filmmakers strive to define themselves in opposition to, in spite of, and in conjunction with Hollywood.

In addition to Hollywood's influence, independent filmmaking in its regional context is also informed by its relationship with local government, industry and the public. The film industries in Oregon and Washington are centered in each state's major cities, although filmmaking communities are thriving throughout both states. In order to understand these complex relationships and how the film communities have come to view themselves, it is important to analyze the histories of each community. This helps to illuminate the patterns that define the development and conduct of regional film production in the United States. The next chapter examines the historical context of regional independent filmmaking in Portland and Seattle.

CHAPTER VI
REGIONAL FILMMAKING:
A HISTORY OF FILM PRODUCTION IN PORTLAND AND SEATTLE

Introduction

Portland and Seattle share many experiences and trajectories in the development of their filmmaking communities. The film production histories of Washington and Oregon are both rooted in geography, environment, lifestyle and cultural values, although each state has its own set of characteristics and challenges that have defined the historical development of film production. As is the case in the development of any industry or community, various prominent individuals and organizations have influenced the landscape of the filmmaking communities in each city. This chapter examines the historical development of film communities in Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington. These communities are in many ways representative of the filmmaking activity across the country, but they also represent unique circumstances with qualities that are distinctively regional.

The History of Film Production in Portland

“We hope to put Portland and Oregon
on the motion picture map in great, big letters.”

-- J.J. Fleming, manager of the Beaver Production Corporation, 1922

Film production in Portland jumpstarted in the 1910s with a short golden era of producers and studios, and did not emerge again until the 1960s. State and city support for filmmaking has fluctuated since that time, although many individuals and organizations have made a concerted effort to develop a strong and cohesive film community. This section focuses on the city's history of film production, from some of the first film exhibition in saloons to the present day's dual emphasis on supporting local and out-of-state productions.

Nature as Oregon's Greatest Film Asset

Various moving picture technologies were used to exhibit film in Portland at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 20th century. Edison's kinetoscope was the first moving picture device to be used in the Pacific Northwest in November 1894, and footage of the Corbett-Courtney boxing match was exhibited in June 1896 in a Portland saloon (Labosier, 2004, p. 287). Stage theater owners, as well as individuals who constructed theaters in temporary storefronts, introduced other innovations in moving picture projection over the next few years, including the vitascope, veriscope, animatoscope, and others. Labosier (2004) writes that two filmed segments were reportedly the first motion pictures produced in Oregon, both likely filmed in 1897; one was a "comical scene" called "Fishing on the Willamette" and the other, "The Overland Mail," featured the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company's passenger train traveling past the Columbia River near Portland (p. 300).

In 1906, the city's first motion picture theater, the Nickelodeon, opened, and over the next few years, motion picture theaters sprang up rapidly. During this time, Portland

was undergoing swift change, moving from a frontier town to the largest urban center in the Pacific Northwest. Its population more than doubled within a decade, growing from 90,426 people in 1900 to 207,214 in 1910 (Har, 2010). Struggles between theaters, film exchanges (distributors), and the municipal government emerged over motion picture censorship, which prompted the creation of an advisory censor board in 1911 (Erickson, 2010).

Early Portland-based ventures in motion picture production consisted of either independent producers/cameramen or small corporations formed by Portland businessmen. The first motion picture company, financed by five businessmen, was the American Lifeograph Company, whose first film recorded Portland's Rose Festival in 1911. The company's subsequent film productions included newsreel films documenting local and state events (1912's Rose Festival, the Pendleton Rodeo, the opening of the Broadway Bridge in Portland, among others), and "film stories" (such as "Forgotten Songs" in 1914). The first individual film producer, Jesse Sill, started the Sill Motion Picture Company, filmed newsreel footage of local events for national newsreel companies, and attempted to start a local newsreel service (Thomas, 1985). Most early films about Oregon and the Northwest featured the local landscape and culture, especially as Oregon's natural environment became more renowned and one of filmmakers' top assets, as observed in a local newspaper article: "Faking nature is not necessary in taking Oregon scenery, for the superb views taken by expert camera men are almost beyond belief when shown on the screen, and it seems impossible that they should exist outside of a fairyland" (Harry, 1919, p. 1).

Portland initiated its first bid to attract productions from Hollywood in 1916, when film studios in Hollywood threatened to relocate amid an increasingly restrictive production environment. According to Thomas (1985), Hollywood studios were incensed over censorship ordinances, overpriced equipment and other restrictions that impinged upon their ability to produce films, and they began looking for alternate locations that would be more welcoming to film production (p. 61). The Portland Chamber of Commerce highlighted Oregon's scenery, accessibility, and weather – it pointed out that, though often overcast, the region offered a “softer and more diffused light” that filmmakers might find agreeable (“Chamber Tempts Movies to Oregon,” 1916, p. 8). The Hollywood companies resolved their issues and stayed put, but Oregon's interest in hosting runaway productions was kindled. The Chamber of Commerce again made a concerted effort to attract productions in 1920, collaborating with the handful of production companies and individual producers that were based in Portland. Again, the Chamber focused mainly on Portland's advantageous access to a range of natural scenery, but also highlighted the economic benefits: “Great economy in production is possible here because for a snow scene the company can leave Portland in the late afternoon and the following morning begin work on Mount Hood” (“Portland May Be Made Film Center,” 1920, p. 16). It was recognized, however, that Portland still lacked adequate facilities, but the city hoped that its positives would outweigh the negatives. In 1922, J.J. Fleming, manager of the Beaver Production Corporation, pledged:

We will set about making honest money by the production of the best possible motion pictures in the best possible environment and we hope to put Portland and Oregon on the motion picture map in great, big letters (quoted in Thomas, 1985, p. 83).

By the mid-1920s, Portland's film production community consisted of studio facilities used primarily by California producers and local companies financed by Portlanders that produced feature-length narratives and "scenics" (films that accentuated Oregon's landscape). One of the most well-known Hollywood productions to use Oregon scenery was *The General* (Clyde Bruckman and Buster Keaton, 1926), shot in Cottage Grove, 130 miles south of Portland. But the cost of film production skyrocketed between 1914 and 1924, when it was estimated that there was a 1500 percent increase in feature film production costs, from \$20,000 to \$300,000 (Hampton, 1931, p. 313). These increases, coupled with movement towards changes in production practices (including increased use of sets, studios and production line labor), led to a decline in Portland's film activity.

Thus, there was little production activity in Portland after this short golden era of the 1920s. A few companies and individuals continued working, and a handful of Hollywood studio films were shot in Oregon. Some of these were filmed in Oregon's Cascade Mountains, such as segments of Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937) and Anthony Mann's western *Bend of the River* (1952). Others were filmed in western Oregon, like *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (John Cromwell, 1940) and *Thunderhead, Son of Flicka* (Louis King, 1944). There may well have been indigenous independent filmmaking happening during the 1930s through 1950s in Oregon, but there is little to no indication of this activity in local newspapers or other historical records.

Building Indigenous and Location Work Simultaneously

Oregon- and Portland-based filmmaking reignited to a certain extent in the late 1960s. Formerly the manager of the Oregon Fryer Commission, Warren Merrill took charge of the informal Motion Picture Promotion Committee within the Oregon Economic Development Department in 1967, and headed the promotion of Oregon as a location for Hollywood productions. Over the next several years, Merrill worked to attract numerous productions to the state, wining and dining Hollywood executives with limited state monies. The \$10 million production of *Paint Your Wagon* (Joshua Logan, 1969) came to eastern Oregon in 1968. Many extolled the virtues of hosting this industry that pumped “free” money into the state without putting a strain on state services like schools or contributing to permanent population growth. Oregon Governor Tom McCall, who served from 1967 to 1975, supported efforts to draw these productions: “We are beginning to realize the potential Oregon’s scenic wonders hold for the production of motion pictures,” he declared in his second gubernatorial inauguration address in 1971. “We must extend an even warmer welcome to Hollywood producers to enlarge this highly lucrative, non-polluting source in income.” Over the next biennium, he allocated \$20,000 to Merrill’s efforts to “hunt down movie makers” (McCall, 1971; “Oregon Earns \$12 Million,” 1971). As a result of these efforts, several other Hollywood films were shot in the state, including *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Milos Forman, 1975), and *Animal House* (John Landis, 1978).

However, governmental support during this period was short-lived, as the State Joint Ways and Means Committee voted to eliminate two positions and \$75,000 from the motion picture promotion committee. It also transferred responsibility over film industry

promotion to the Highway Division's tourism promotion office ("Joint Panel," 1973; "Panel Deletes," 1973). Merrill continued working on promoting the state, traveling to Hollywood several times a year and attracting productions. Controversy arose a few times during Merrill's tenure, first in 1974, when he worked simultaneously (and received a salary) for the motion picture promotion committee and Universal Studios during the filming of *Rooster Cogburn* (Stuart Millar, 1975) in Bend, Oregon. He had to return the salary paid by Universal. Allegations again surfaced in 1982, when he was accused of improperly using state funds for lodging, meals and phone calls. As a result, he was demoted to a non-management position, eventually resigning in February 1983.

The state government focused primarily on drawing Hollywood productions to the state, although, starting in 1979, the Oregon Arts Commission, funded in part by state monies, awarded annual film and video production grants. In 1988, the grant was increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000, "to reflect the commission's commitment to Oregon's lively, independent film community" (Hunt, 1987). And indeed, the indigenous film community was growing. Portland State University (called Portland State College until 1969) was home to the Center for the Moving Image in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which operated as a meeting space and equipment sharing center. The university's film programs, open to students and the general public, caught the eye of the fledgling National Endowment for the Arts, which was looking to fund regional filmmaking centers as part of its efforts to provide financial and institutional support for independent

filmmakers.³⁹ Brooke Jacobson led the effort to establish the Northwest Film Study Center (NWFSC) and she recalls, “I set myself the task of forming a board, generating programs, and writing the grant proposal. I quit my teaching job to devote full time to this effort and also spent a month in New York doing an internship at the Museum of Modern Art’s Film Center.” The NEA awarded \$15,000 to the NWFSC after only one month’s operation, and the center received \$25,000 two years later, the largest grant given to a regional film organization in 1973. The NWFSC started various programs over the next several years, including the Northwest Film Center School of Film (1972), the Northwest Film and Video Festival (1973), the Portland International Film Festival (1976), and a statewide artist residency program (1978). An industry group, the Oregon Media Production Association, was founded in 1982.

Another local film organization established in the 1970s was the Northwest Media Project, a nonprofit media arts organization “dedicated to encouraging, promoting and serving the growth and artistic development of the Northwest film and video community” (Northwest Media Project, 1988). Among this center’s activities were a monthly newsletter, *Printed Matter*, and seminars, such as one called “Financing the Low-Budget Independent Feature Film,” which was coordinated with the Motion Picture Seminar of the Northwest (operating in Seattle). This three-day seminar in October 1979 hosted a number of film professionals from Los Angeles and New York who lent their expertise to educating the indigenous filmmaking community about a variety of film industry issues.

³⁹ See Decherney’s (2005) chapter, “The Politics of Patronage: How the NEA (Accidentally) Created American Avant-Garde Film” for a detailed examination of the relationship between patronage (by the NEA and other government and museum organizations) and avant-garde film.

Some of Portland's most well-known filmmakers started working around the same time, such as Will Vinton and Joanna Priestley, both of whom helped to develop Portland's reputation as a center for animation.⁴⁰ Vinton's first short film, a clay-animated stop-motion production called *Closed Mondays* (Vinton and Bob Gardiner, 1974), was rejected from the local Northwest Film and Video Festival, but screened at the Seven Gables theater in Seattle and went on to win an Academy Award for best animated short film in 1975. The next year, Vinton started his own studio, Odyssey Productions, which blossomed into a full-fledged animation studio and which eventually developed the technique – and coined the term – of Claymation. Vinton and his studio gained notoriety through a number of short films, feature films (such as *The Adventures of Mark Twain* in 1986), commercials (most notably, the California Raisins), and television series (*The PJs*, which aired on Fox in 1999-2000 and on the WB network in 2000-2001).

Priestley worked as a film librarian at the Northwest Film Study Center and began to create her own films after taking a class at the NWFSC in 1979. Her first animated short, *The Rubber Stamp Film*, was completed in 1983. She was also a member of the Animation Collective, a small group of people interested in animation, and she co-founded the Northwest regional chapter of ASIFA (Association Internationale de Film d'Animation, or the International Animated Film Association) in 1988. She also began an apprenticeship program for animators, many of whom were funneled into positions at Will Vinton Studios (Iyer, 2002).

⁴⁰ Portland is also the hometown of animators Matt Groening, who moved to Los Angeles in 1977 and who later developed *The Simpsons* animated series in 1989. Bill Plympton, who directed numerous short animated films and features like *Hair High* (2004), grew up in Portland, attended Portland State University, and moved to New York in his early twenties.

Increasingly, Hollywood studios grew interested in using Oregon locations for film shoots, leading to a growth in out-of-state productions in the 1980s. More studio productions were shot outside of Portland, primarily in the mountains or at the coast, although other Oregon locations found their way onscreen as well. Some productions shot in Oregon in the 1980s include *How to Beat the High Cost of Living* (Robert Scheerer, 1980, shot in Eugene), *The Goonies* (Richard Donner, 1985, shot in Astoria), *Benji the Hunted* (Joe Camp, 1987, shot in Astoria and other Oregon locations), and *Breaking In* (Bill Forsyth, 1989, shot in Portland). The state also attracted international productions, most notably the Japanese television series *From Oregon With Love* (*Oregon Kara Ai*), a drama about a Japanese boy sent to live with relatives in Central Oregon after his parents were killed in a car crash; the show aired 13 episodes in 1984 and produced eight one-hour specials between 1986 and 1996.

Filmmaking and the Greater Portland Community in the 1980s-2000s

The Portland film industry, as well as the state and local government, worked hard during this time to provide evidence of the value of film activities to the greater community. Various studies and task forces were commissioned in the 1980s and 1990s to explore the positive economic impact that the film industry could make in Portland and statewide. One of the major task forces resulted in an industry analysis and strategic plan entitled *Action! Oregon*, submitted to Oregon Governor Neil Goldschmidt in 1988. A group of local film industry individuals proposed an Oregon Film Comeback Task Force that would analyze the local industry and make recommendations to improve and strengthen the Oregon film industry. Appointed to the Task Force were a variety of

stakeholders, including filmmakers, state and local government officials, film educators, an attorney, the manager of a local television station, and others. The Task Force focused on two central issues: (1) how to develop the indigenous film industry, and (2) how to compete with other states for location work. The report set forth a vision of the Oregon film industry for 1995 (seven years hence) that would originate its own production work; have its own studio complex; be home to a wide array of skilled professionals, equipment, technology, and facilities; and generate \$300 million in annual economic activity (Oregon Economic Development Department, 1988). In justifying the expansion of this industry, the Task Force emphasized that movie production made little impact on the environment, unlike Oregon's traditional flagship industry of timber and logging.

The recommendations in this report were ambitious and have still not been fully realized as of 2010. However, the potential for the Oregon film industry has been fairly well-supported by government policy and business leaders. Governor Goldschmidt included the film and video industry in his statewide economic plan in 1989 as a growing industry that could generate economic activity from within (other strong industries included agriculture, biotechnology, high technology, software, and forest products, among others) (Goldschmidt, 1989). In 1993, the state's Film and Video Office (1993) revisited the strategic plan and again developed priorities and objectives to enhance the indigenous film industry. These guidelines would be implemented in the following two years so that "Oregon will be in a position to be extremely competitive from both the perspective of our indigenous film industry as well as the recruitment of out-of-state productions" (p. 1).

While many film professionals worked on developing an indigenous industry, another filmmaker was beginning to develop his own reputation and can be credited with contributing a significant amount of caché to Portland as a film location. Gus Van Sant was born in Kentucky and moved to Oregon as a teenager, graduating from a Portland high school in 1971. He left Portland soon after, but returned to the city in 1983 and filmed his first feature, *Mala Noche*, released in 1985. Van Sant used Portland as the backdrop for a number of his films, including *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989), *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993, which also used locations in Central Oregon), and *Elephant* (2003). Van Sant started making films for major studios with *To Die For* (Columbia Pictures, 1995) and *Good Will Hunting* (Miramax, 1997); he earned an Oscar nomination for Best Director for the latter film. He retained a number of crew members from the Portland area for these productions, including Kelley Baker as supervising sound editor, who also worked on a number of other Van Sant's films.

Through many of his films, Van Sant has contributed to a style of artistic output termed "Northwest noir," shared by other native Northwesterners like cartoonists Lynda Barry and Gary Larson, authors Katharine Dunn and Tom Robbins, and filmmaker David Lynch. "What all of these Pacific Northwest artists have in common, aside from geography," writes journalist Timothy Egan (1991), "is a decidedly off-center view of the world and a love of characters who are less than heroic – at least in the traditional sense. Many of their protagonists are losers, or just plain old stare-at-the-wall-weird" (p. C1). This sensibility in some ways contributed to the cohesion of the filmmaking community, as well as the larger art community in the Northwest, in the 1980s and 1990s.

During the 1990s, numerous initiatives continued to generate film business and activity in Portland, many of which were recommended by the *Action! Oregon* report published in 1988. As the city began redeveloping the area of northwest Portland around Union Station, animator Will Vinton proposed the addition of a \$70 million theme park, retail arcade and motion picture studio here to be called “Claymation Station” (Pickett, 1990). Meanwhile, producer Dan Biggs tried to muster support for a \$35 million venture capital fund that would finance individual films, to be supported in part by the Oregon Investment Council, a body that oversees Oregon State Treasury investment funds (MacKenzie, 1989). In addition, a group of filmmakers, including Vinton, began the Portland Creative Conference, a multi-day film industry seminar that hosted high-profile film professionals from Los Angeles, along with a few local filmmakers, to discuss their work and experiences in filmmaking. The conference’s objective was to introduce both local and out-of-state filmmakers to Portland and the city’s potential as a filmmaking location. “We want to show off the region,” noted Vinton, “so filmmakers will visit now and make a film here later”; the first conference was successful with 600 attendees (Mahar, 1990, p. E4). In another expansion of the local film industry’s financing and promotional efforts, Vinton and others set up the Oregon Film & Video Foundation, a nonprofit organization that would “solicit and distribute money for the educational, artistic and cultural growth of the film and video industry in Oregon” (Hunt, 1992). Hoping to raise \$635,000 in its first year, the foundation would build educational programs and create an investment fund. There also were several parties interested in developing studios around town, such as Grayco Resources’ plans to build an \$11 million

studio in north Portland, and daytime television producer Gloria Monty's plan to build a studio south of Portland in Wilsonville.

With the exception of the Portland Creative Conference, none of these ambitious initiatives really got off the ground. Vinton's Claymation Station was not built, and instead, Will Vinton Studios opened a Los Angeles office in early 1994 to bid on film work from the major studios (Nicholas, 1994). However, Portland did achieve enhanced visibility in the 1990s, as the four-person staff at the Oregon Film and Video Office (OFVO), formally created in the Oregon Economic Development Department and funded by the state government in 1991, lured productions to the state. The OFVO was moved out of the Economic Development Department and given semi-independent status in 1995.

Around this time, many film professionals relocated to the region from Los Angeles. "I guess they're getting tired of the rat race [in Los Angeles]," said Bob Zurcher, whose film processing laboratory, TekniFilmLabs, experienced increased business and a heightened reputation, particularly as higher profile filmmakers like Gus Van Sant used the lab for their work (Cargill, 1991). But TekniFilmLabs' increase in business relied more heavily on work from local advertising agencies and local filmmakers: "We really started the lab for local producers and those are still our main customers" (Cargill, 1991). Will Vinton Studios' productivity peaked in the mid-1990s, with over 400 employees and \$28 million in annual revenues (Doughton, 2008). Multimedia producers (both software and content-based) also began utilizing TekniFilmLabs' services, as the multimedia sector increasingly became part of the local economy. The film industry explored alliances with multimedia production and, in 1997,

the executive director of the Oregon Film and Video Office (the state-level film promotion office) co-founded the Oregon Multimedia Initiative with a local software company executive; the initiative was intended to partner filmmakers with companies looking to produce content.

In a 1993 article in *The Oregonian*, arts writer Kristi Turnquist posed the question: “What is Northwest regional filmmaking about?” Her response was: “The answer used to be easy: Trees. Salmon. Water. More trees. More salmon. More water.” Turnquist reflected on the changing nature of Portland’s film community in the early 1990s, led by filmmakers like Gus Van Sant, Jim Blashfield (*Suspicious Circumstances*, 1984), Joanna Priestley (*She-Bop*, 1988; *All My Relations*, 1990), and Joan Gratz, and declared that it was beginning to come “out of the woods” (Turnquist, 1993, p. K5). Indeed, the Portland independent film community was growing, with animation taking root as a strong component of filmmaking in the city. According to animator Rose Bond, “Portland has more animators per capita than any city anywhere” (Levy, 2001a). Bond, along with other animators like Gratz and Priestley, made numerous films that were partially supported through grants provided by the Northwest Film Center. Gratz’ short film, *Mona Lisa Descending a Staircase* (1992) even won an Academy Award. Claiming to have “stumbled upon this incredible little pocket of creativity,” the associate director of film programming at the Sundance Film Festival honored Portland’s animators in 2001 by programming a 13-film retrospective called “A Celebration of Portland Animation.” This sold-out program included films by Gratz, Bond, Priestley, Blashfield, Mike Wellins, and others (Levy, 2001a).

Portland's experimental film scene also grew during the 1990s and 2000s, with Matt McCormick (*Sincerely, Joe P. Bear*, 1999; *The Subconscious Art of Graffiti Removal*, 2002) and Vanessa Renwick (*Crowdog*, 1998; *Richart*, 2001) paving the way for filmmakers to screen non-traditional works. McCormick founded Peripheral Produce in 1996 as a distribution label for experimental film and video, and the organization started the Portland Documentary and eXperimental Film Festival in 2001. "[Portland is] the experimental film capital of the U.S.," Renwick commented. "Even when the films are bad and the shows are uncomfortable or poorly curated, there are huge audiences for these shows" (quoted in Levy, 2001b). McCormick also expanded into music video production, making videos for rock bands Sleater-Kinney ("Jumpers") in 2005 and the Shins in 2002 ("The Past and Pending") and 2007 ("Australia"); Jim Blashfield produced several music videos in the 1980s and 1990s, including Michael Jackson's "Leave Me Alone" (1989) and Tears for Fears' "Sowing the Seeds of Love" (1990).

Numerous Hollywood studios shot films in Oregon in the 1990s and early 2000s, such as *Free Willy* (Simon Wincer, 1993), *Mr. Holland's Opus* (Stephen Herek, 1995), *The Postman* (Kevin Costner, 1997), and *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002). However, the conditions for location shooting was shifting dramatically, impacting the Pacific Northwest perhaps more often than any location in the country. Film production activity in Vancouver, British Columbia, was reaching new proportions, with a favorable exchange rate and unmatched tax incentives (Gasher, 2002).

In 2001, the local film industry and state legislators began to discuss the introduction of incentives in Portland in order to assist the local film industry and the

accompanying 2,800 family-wage local jobs⁴¹ created by that industry (Thompson, 2001). Governor Ted Kulongoski signed into legislation the Oregon Production Investment Fund (OPIF) in 2003, which offered incentives to qualifying productions whose in-state expenditures exceeded \$750,000. These productions would receive a 20 percent cash rebate on Oregon-purchased goods and services and a 10 percent cash rebate on wages for work completed in Oregon. The state would make available \$5 million to fund the tax rebates. In 2005, Kulongoski built upon OPIF's incentives by signing Greenlight Oregon, which offered a cash rebate of up to 6.2 percent on wages in Oregon on productions spending over \$1 million in-state, which could be combined with the OPIF labor incentive. The central objective of Greenlight Oregon was to create family-wage jobs by enticing larger productions (both out-of-state and local) to shoot in Oregon. According to the OFVO (2009), these programs created a direct economic impact of \$92.1 million by 2009. In 2006, the city of Portland joined the movement to promote film industry activity by formally funding the Portland Mayor's Office of Film and Video, which was operated by a single employee.

As the Oregon film industry continued to generate interest and positive economic impact, some investors turned their attention towards the future potential of the industry. For instance, Nike founder Phil Knight invested \$5 million in Will Vinton Studios in 1998 to secure a minority stake in the company; shortly thereafter, Knight's son, Travis, was hired at the studio as an animator. In 2002, the studio faced difficult financial conditions, and Knight put up more funds to become a majority stakeholder. Vinton felt

⁴¹ According to the Oregon Employment Department (n.d.), a "family wage job" provides enough income to support an individual's basic needs and the basic needs of children and/or a spouse. In 2007, a worker needed to earn at least \$36,591 to be considered as a family wage job in Oregon. Others include health, retirement and unemployment benefits in the definition of a family wage job ("Readers Concerned," 2007).

that Knight's terms undervalued the company and appealed to Knight to alter the terms. Knight refused, and Vinton was consequently released from his post at the studio, as were many other long-time Vinton Studios employees in a corporate restructuring and belt-tightening move. Vinton filed a \$3.1 million lawsuit in 2003 against Knight and other board members on the premise of unwarranted dismissal (Manning and Turnquist, 2003). The case was thrown out, and Knight continued to run the legendary Portland studio. Rechristened Laika Animation in 2005, the studio continued to operate in Portland but hired an executive, formerly of Dreamworks and Disney, to work on a slate of animated features that included *The Corpse Bride* (Tim Burton, 2005) and *Coraline* (Henry Selick, 2008). Then, Travis Knight was promoted to CEO in March 2009, while the company experienced two rounds of layoffs, in 2008 and again in 2009, and *Coraline* director Henry Selick left the company. Vinton continued making films on his own, including *The Martial Artist* (2008), and became an Artist-in-Residence at the Art Institute of Portland.

The state legislature revisited OPIF in 2009, proposing to raise the state tax incentive burden from \$5 million to \$7.5 million. An intense lobbying effort was needed to pass Senate Bill 621, and a Film Industry Day was held in March 2009 to raise the visibility of the Oregon film industry and to generate support for the bill. Oregon, like most states in the country, was undergoing a budget crisis, and diverting additional money to the film industry was not an attractive option for many legislators. But the bill was eventually signed into law and has continued to attract film productions to Oregon.

Another film-related bill was under consideration in 2009, this time pertaining to indigenous filmmakers. Senate Bill 863, called i-OPIF or the Indigenous Oregon Production Investment Fund, would make incentives available to indigenous film

productions with budgets over \$75,000. The only controversial element of this bill was that it would be allocated five percent of the money from OPIF, which critics noted would “likely divert funding from projects with higher wages,” but the bill was still easily signed into law in June 2009 (Oregon Legislative Fiscal Office, 2009).

The approach to filmmaking in Portland has historically been one that emphasizes the cultivation of both a reliance on Hollywood studio productions and indigenous production. Numerous individuals and organizations spearheaded efforts to navigate this dual development beginning in the 1980s through the 2000s, securing government support through the Governor’s Office of Film & Television and the various incentive programs. Portland still faces challenges in sustaining a local industry, most often because of the lack of significant financial support from private investors. However, the city continues to enjoy a reputation as a regional filmmaking center. I turn now to another regional filmmaking center, Seattle, whose filmmaking community and industry have developed in many ways similar to Portland but with its own set of challenges.

The History of Film Production in Seattle: A Continuous Struggle

“There is no feature film industry in Seattle:
it’s just too tough for mortal man.”

--William Arnold, film critic for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 1984

Seattle had a nearly nonexistent film industry until the mid-1960s, but in the half-century since then, the city has struggled to establish and build a productive filmmaking community. Its national reputation as a movie-going city, with one of the highest per

capita movie-going audiences in the country, is at odds with its lack of substantial support for film production (Vinh, 2007). The following section details the history of film production in Seattle, from the early days when film exhibition dominated the local film industry landscape, to Hollywood's "discovery" of Seattle in the 1960s with the simultaneous locally-based development of resources, to the continued struggle in the 1980s through the 2000s to build infrastructure and networks to attract out-of-state productions and facilitate community building. The continuing strength of film appreciation and criticism in the city is also discussed as a contrast to the city's relatively weak film production history.

Seattle's Early Days

The beginning of moving picture exhibition in Seattle followed a path similar to that of Portland, with the first kinoscope in Seattle at the end of 1894 and projections of Corbitt boxing matches in 1897. In 1898, entrepreneur Dell Lampman charged admission to the city's first exhibition of a projected motion picture (Arnold, 1998). Seattle experienced a boom with the 1897 Klondike gold rush as thousands of people traveled through Seattle's port on their way to the Yukon Territory to join in the frenzy for quick wealth. Some of the first known film footage of Seattle was taken in 1897, capturing this frenzy, and was catalogued in Thomas Edison's "Northern Pacific Railway Series." Some of the 50-foot reels include "First Avenue Seattle, Washington, No. 8," "Steamship 'Willamette' Leaving for Klondike," and "Horses Loading for Klondike, No. 9."⁴²

⁴² These films are available for viewing through the Library of Congress and are also posted on YouTube.

In 1902, the first moving picture theater, Le Petit, opened at 222 Pike Street, and was followed by a rapid expansion of theater businesses that exhibited motion pictures. Seattle itself continued to rapidly expand, as its population grew from 80,671 in 1900 to 237,000 in 1910 and 315,312 in 1920 (Berner, 1991, p. 60). A third of the incoming population in the first decade of the century was immigrants, the majority from Canada, Europe and Japan. The city's population and economic growth was reflected in some massive construction projects such as the Denny Regrade, a multi-year city project begun in 1903 which leveled three of the city's many hills by blasting 16 million cubic yards of earth with water and sluicing it down to Elliott Bay (Morgan, 1982); early filmmakers shot footage of this project. Other early footage was shot of the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, which hosted three million people on the University of Washington campus over the course of four and a half months.

Like Portland, Seattle faced problems with vice and morality. Many of the city's saloons and prostitution houses were built below "the line," or south of Yesler Way, which marked the start of Skid Road; it was understood that police would overlook this area, so long as illicit activity stayed away from more respectable areas further uptown.⁴³ Movie theaters moved uptown, however, as saloon owners discovered problems with showing movies in their establishments: the saloons needed to be kept dark in order to see the moving pictures, which made it difficult to serve customers (Lagos, 2003, p. 107). As movie theaters moved into more respectable areas of uptown, public concern grew over their potential impact on the city's moral character. With 34 movie houses operating

⁴³ Skid Road got its name because the area used to be former skid roads for logs coming down to Henry Yesler's saw mill (Morgan, 1982, p. 9).

in 1911, the city instituted a motion picture censor board, which expanded its authority in 1915 and was reshaped into the Board of Theatre Supervisors in 1923 under City Ordinance 52969.⁴⁴

Seattle film historians typically herald *Tugboat Annie* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1933) as the first film produced in the city; parts of the movie were filmed on Lake Union (although the story took place in the imaginary city of “Secoma”). However, Hollywood film production had taken place in the state prior to this date; for example, Cecil B. DeMille filmed parts of *The Golden Bed* at Nisqually Glacier on Mt. Rainier in 1924, and Alfred Santell filmed *The Patent Leather Kid* at Fort Lewis (just south of Tacoma) in 1927. Only a handful of films were produced by Hollywood studios in Washington State during the next few decades, and homegrown film production was relatively minor. In the 1940s, only one Hollywood feature film, Paramount Pictures’ *You Came Along* (John Farrow, 1945), was filmed in Seattle. The following decade, there were no major films shot in Seattle, with only two Hollywood feature productions shot in the entire state (*The Track of the Cat* (William A. Wellman, 1954, starring Robert Mitchum) and *The Hanging Tree* (Delmer Daves, 1959, starring Gary Cooper)) and one Disney documentary short (*The Olympic Elk*, 1952).

There are few records of Seattle-based filmmakers during this period, and it appears that most of the local filmmaking activity from the 1920s to 1950s was produced

⁴⁴ The 1911 Board of Censors operated in an advisory capacity; its legal powers were expanded in 1915 and created more onerous penalties for violators of the Censor Board’s recommendations. The 1923 ordinance reinforced the censor board’s authority. Nine members were appointed to the Board by the Mayor, and it was required that one of these individuals be involved in motion picture production or distribution. These members were authorized to preview and censor films, and to inspect theaters to ensure censorship recommendations were being followed (Seattle Municipal Archives, 2004).

by newsreel camera operators, amateurs or industry organizations.⁴⁵ Charles R. Perryman was a motion picture cameraman who worked for Gaumont Newsreel and documented several historic occasions. In 1920, he accompanied the first flight over Mt. Rainier at 16,000 feet, and filmed the opening of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Coast Division electrification in Cle Elum, Washington, the same year. In 1922, while he was a cameraman for David O. Selznick, Perryman became “the hero of the first midwinter ascent of Mount Rainier... despite his lack of experience in mountain climbing and the fact that he was carrying more than fifty pounds of motion picture equipment” (Snow, 1922). Perryman later became a cameraman for MGM.

Another Seattle filmmaker was Iwao Matsushita, a Japanese citizen who immigrated to Seattle in 1919. Matsushita was an amateur filmmaker who was interned during World War Two, as was his wife (although they were held in separate locations). They reunited in 1945 and lived in Seattle, where Matsushita worked as a teacher and librarian at the University of Washington. In addition to filming everyday life in Seattle, Matsushita also produced a short film, *The House that Cats Built*, sometime in the 1930s or 1940s (Seattle Channel, 2007). The City of Seattle Department of Lighting sponsored a few short films, including *More Power to You*, from the late 1940s, produced by Charles Perryman, and *The Million Horsepower Skagit* (ca. 1940). The Todd Pacific Shipyards also produced a film, *Fighting Ships for Fighting Men* (1943), which touted the necessity and prowess of military ships built in the Seattle area.

⁴⁵ In 2007, the local cable channel, The Seattle Channel, began running various films produced in the 1920s through 1990s on its show, “History in Motion.”

Other efforts contributed to the development of industrial film production in Seattle. As a photographer for Boeing, Edward Johnston suggested that the company start a motion picture unit to produce films for training maintenance and operations crews, and during World War Two, this unit operated with three writers, four artists, and two cameramen. Soon afterwards, Johnston left Boeing and, with collaborator Vernon G. Witt and financier Boris Korry, started Korry Films, which specialized in commercials that screened before theatrical films (Memorial, 2010). Witt started another company, Criterion Films, in which Johnston participated. Criterion produced numerous films, including *Seattle, U.S.A.* (1951), which “highlights the city, showing buildings, historic landmarks, important industries, major parks, lakes, and recreational playgrounds” (“Seattle, U.S.A.,” 1951). It also produced a film for Frederick and Nelson, a regional department store, called *Invitation to Quality* (1953). Criterion’s main contract, however, was with the Longacres horse race track, operating the Longacres Film Patrol. This five-person camera group was responsible for filming each race, usually producing about eight films a day, five days a week. Each film was made available less than ten minutes after a given race’s finish. According to *The Seattle Times*, “The patrol’s main objective is to assure clean racing and riding, and the films pay additional dividends as training aids for jockeys and owners” (Powell, 1953).

It seems that the majority of filmmaking in Seattle during this era focused on practical or promotional uses, rather than emphasizing entertainment value. During the 1960s, however, Seattleites’ expectations of the value of motion pictures began to change as Hollywood “discovered” Seattle and some individuals became more interested in and aware of filmmaking as a possible vocation.

“The Cinderella of Movie Locations”: Hollywood Discovers Seattle

The 1960s heralded a new direction in Seattle’s filmmaking community. While there were only two major Hollywood productions shot within city limits, these productions enjoyed much more publicity that was directly linked to the city’s profile and drew the mainstream industry’s attention to the Pacific Northwest as a potential shooting location. In 1962, Seattle hosted a world’s fair called the Century 21 Exposition, which prompted Governor Albert D. Rosellini to pitch the idea to MGM of using the Fair as a backdrop in a movie. The studio produced *It Happened at the World’s Fair*, directed by Norman Taurog in 1962 and starring Elvis Presley (Duncan, 1992, p. 70). The film took advantage of very new and visible Seattle landmarks built especially for the World’s Fair – the Space Needle and the Monorail – thus promoting Seattle as a location.

The second film to be shot in Seattle in the 1960s, *The Slender Thread* (directed by Sidney Pollack and starring Sidney Poitier and Anne Bancroft) led the *Los Angeles Times* to declare:

Seattle, the Cinderella of movie locations, has finally been discovered...After years of waiting, Seattle has been made a star overnight. It’s hard to say why Hollywood overlooked this city for so long. It is reminiscent of San Francisco 40 years ago, situated on a bay and crisscrossed by bridges and channels. Anyway, Seattle is in the movies at last and things will never be quite the same. (“Hollywood Discovers Seattle,” 1965, p. N11).

The production pumped \$500,000 into the local economy and did indeed place the Pacific Northwest on the map for Hollywood studio productions in Seattle and the surrounding areas starting in 1970.

Around this time, the local Seattle filmmaking community was expanding, thanks to a more concerted effort to develop the local film industry and to attract Hollywood

productions to the area. The Seattle-based television station, KING, started a filmmaking branch called King Screen Productions in 1966, which specialized primarily in documentaries and was nominated for an Academy Award for *The Redwoods* (1967), a film commissioned by the Sierra Club and directed by Trevor Greenwood. Although King Screen Productions operated in Seattle, it did not tend to recruit from Seattle's talent pool, which it considered too limited. According to Gary Desharnais, King's promotion director, "What we have been most fortunate in attracting is a group of talented young professionals... We got them from all corners of the country – from the East, the Ivy League schools, from U.C.L.A. – and if filmmaking grows here as we expect it to, we will be getting our talent from Seattle, too" (quoted in Hinterberger, 1968, p. 24).

Meanwhile, local independent filmmakers and other film professionals were trying to build the reputation, visibility and productivity of film production in the region. Les Davis, president of the Seattle-based film processing laboratory, Alpha Cine Labs, founded the Motion Picture Seminar of the Northwest in 1969, which brought together local and national filmmaking professionals to discuss technologies, business strategies, production issues, among other topics. A handful of individuals, including Paul Dorpat, John Nonnemaker and Dave McDonald, among others, founded the Northwest Filmmakers Coop in 1969, specializing in production classes and low-tech equipment rental; the Coop also started its own film festival, the Northwest Filmmakers' Festival, and a newsletter called *Hand Held* (Hayes, 2002). Starting in 1968, aspiring filmmakers could also take classes at the University of Washington's School of Art, taught by avant-garde filmmaker Robert Sperry. Cornish College of the Arts also began its film

production classes in 1968, and Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma offered classes, as well. Animation classes began at the Evergreen State College in Olympia in the 1970s.

While many of these resources endured, some quickly disappeared. King Screen Productions folded in 1972, after only six years of operation, and the Northwest Filmmakers Coop closed around the same time (Hartl, 1972; Hartl, 1977). Independent filmmakers in the area were left with limited community resources with which to nurture their craft. Still, several filmmakers developed their careers locally and produced films such as *Didn't You Hear?* (Skip Sherwood, 1970), *Livin' on the Mud* (Sean Malone, 1972), and *Chickens: A Process* (Lorne Morris, 1975). Seattle's annual Bumbershoot music and arts festival also screened programs that featured films by Northwest filmmakers, including Karl Krogstad's *The Black and Decker Hedgetrimmer Murders* (1976), which also screened at the Motion Picture Seminar of the Northwest in 1977 (Hartl, 1976). Krogstad also acted in *Gas City* (1978), the feature film debut of filmmaker Jeff Meyer of nearby Renton. Meyer produced the film for \$20,000, which he financed "with the help of Bankamericard, Master Charge and Group Health" (Hartl, 1978).

Seattle Times film critic John Hartl commented on the film:

[*Gas City*] is in many ways the movie that Northwest filmmakers and buffs have been waiting for: an authentic, original film of and about the Northwest, independently created and produced by a young filmmaker who makes his home here. While far from flawless, it's the first "movie-movie" made here that succeeds on its own terms (Hartl, 1978).

Concurrent with indigenous film production development, the city and state governments looked to film productions as a potentially viable way of bringing economic activity into the area. Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman, who held office from 1969 to 1977, was known for supporting civil rights and urban renewal measures in Seattle during a

local economic recession caused primarily by massive layoffs at Boeing (Anderson, 1998).⁴⁶ Uhlman also avidly supported funding the arts, starting the Seattle Arts Commission in 1971 with a budget of \$35,000. The small but growing local filmmaking community began to work with this organization to gather financial resources for their projects. Uhlman also reportedly worked with a film industry liaison to attract a spate of Hollywood productions, including, among others, *Harry in Your Pocket* (Bruce Geller, 1973), *Cinderella Liberty* (Mark Rydell, 1973), *McQ* (John Sturges, 1974), and *The Parallax View* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974). Although Seattle had hosted Hollywood productions before, there was a sense that this region was “virgin territory,” suddenly discovered by Hollywood (Hartl, 1973). Another 25 or so productions filmed in the state during the decade. The state started a film office in 1974 under the auspices of the Department of Commerce and Economic Development. The Motion Picture Bureau’s annual budget ranged from \$30,000 to \$40,000 (one of the lowest in the country) and was operated by one individual, Hank Pearson (Tewkesbury, 1987). The Bureau even began publishing handbooks and directories for out-of-state producers, which highlighted available resources that made Washington an attractive location.⁴⁷ The Washington Film Council was also established as a private-sector organization aimed at supplementing the Bureau’s efforts and paltry budget.

Many of the region’s residents supported Hollywood productions in the area, even taking roles as extras in some of the films. Mayor Uhlman, for example, played a near-

⁴⁶ During this period, known as the “Boeing Bust,” Boeing reduced its Seattle-area workforce by half, or approximately 40,000 jobs.

⁴⁷ For example, the State of Washington Department of Commerce and Economic Development published the *Washington State Film Producers Handbook* for 1977 (State of Washington, 1977), and the *Motion Picture and Television Producers Directory* for 1978 (Porter, 1977).

victim of pickpocketing in *Harry in Your Pocket*, while four veteran police officers from the Seattle force played gangsters in *99 and 44/100% Dead* (John Frankenheimer, 1974). Numerous others played bit parts and walk-on roles in films, which complicated agreements between local union chapters and the studios. In a relatively early case of how studios capitalized on the advantages of runaway production, Seattle extras, many of whom were excited to be onscreen, agreed to “dirt-cheap wages” without considering the labor implications (Lacitis, 1973). It appears that actors, both extras and others hired from local theater groups, were some of the only local personnel hired for these productions. Although newspaper reports focused on the economic impact that these productions had on the city (*Cinderella Liberty* spent half a million dollars in Seattle during its production, and “other big spenders have been ‘McQ,’ \$375,000; ‘Harry in Your Pocket,’ \$125,000; and ‘99 and 44-100 Dead,’ \$125,000”), the productions brought their own above- and below-the-line crew members, thereby failing to contribute substantially to building the indigenous film production community (Lacitis, 1973, p. D14).

Meanwhile, a Seattle production company, the Gardner-Marlow-Maes Corporation, produced a documentary called *Threshold: The Blue Angels Experience* (1975) about the U.S. Navy flight demonstration team, with the narration written by *Dune* author Frank Herbert and narrated by Leslie Nielson. The film won an award at the Atlanta Film Festival and received national distribution. Another filmmaker, Bruce Wilson, wrote and directed a number of successful short films and then released what some called “Seattle’s first independent feature,” a thriller called *Doubles* (1978) (Arnold, 1984, p. A31). Wilson, whose company mostly focused on TV commercial production, worked with an all-Seattle cast and crew, as well as local financing, to

produce the \$100,000 film. Confidence slowly grew among Seattle-based actors and crew members that Seattle filmmakers could produce legitimate and professional projects. An example was actress Peggy Nielson, who moved to Los Angeles to work in filmmaking, returned to Seattle for personal reasons and was cast in a major part in Wilson's *Doubles*. "Seattle is developing into a more attractive place for actors to live and work," she said (Hartl, 1977).

During the 1980s, many more film productions, both from Hollywood studios and indigenous filmmakers, were shot in Washington. The case of *An Officer and a Gentleman* surfaced again and again in newspaper accounts as a textbook example of the positive economic impact that film production could make in a community. The Paramount Pictures film came to Port Townsend, a small town sixty miles and a ferry ride from Seattle, in 1981, bringing with it "80 actors and support personnel...for 3 ½ months of shooting...The production poured about \$1 million into the community from April through June" (Burchard, 1981) (see Table 5). Art Kulman, the head of the state's Motion Picture and Television Bureau from 1980 to 1986, estimated that indirect spending from the production generated at least another \$2 million. Kulman was criticized for ineffectiveness in promoting the industry, however, and was transferred to another state agency, replaced by his assistant, Christine Lewis, in 1986 (Hartl, 1986).

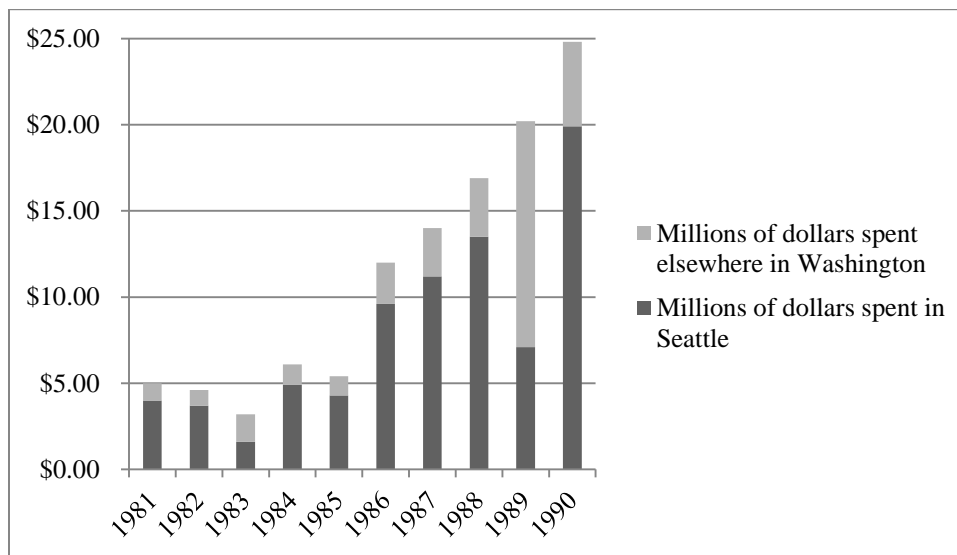
Table 5. In-state expenditures between April and June 1981 by Paramount Pictures while filming *An Officer and a Gentleman* in Port Townsend, Washington

<i>Line item</i>	<i>In-state expenditures</i>
Hotel rooms	\$170,000
Meal allowances, catered noon meals	\$145,000
Hired extras	\$125,000
Lumber, paint and local craft workers to build sets	\$100,000
Police, fire protection, security people and technical advisors	\$77,000
Location fees at Fort Worden State Park	\$35,000
Hot-truck lunches on location	\$30,000
Car and truck rentals	\$20,000
Actors' wardrobes	\$15,000
Vintage cars	\$13,000
Financing advance for Manresa Castle (for crew lodging)	\$10,000
Automotive maintenance	\$7,000
Doctor and nurse	\$2,700
Additional expenditures	\$250,000
<i>Approximate Total</i>	<i>\$1,000,000</i>

Source: Burchard, 1981.

During subsequent years, economic impact grew as studios shot more of their productions outside of Los Angeles and California to avoid high permitting fees, stricter union requirements, and red tape. Washington hosted many studio productions in the 1980s, which contributed to economic growth of the Washington film industry in the 1980s (see Chart 3). However, many productions that may have considered Seattle instead chose Vancouver, British Columbia, taking advantage of that city's rapidly growing filmmaking infrastructure and the favorable Canadian exchange rate. Many films set in Washington were actually filmed in B.C. (a practice that continues to this day).

Chart 3. Direct spending (in millions of dollars) by out-of-state production companies while filming in Seattle versus filming in the rest of Washington, 1981-1990



Source: Adapted from WFVA, 1991, p. 18

During the rest of the decade, more feature films and television shows were shot in Seattle and the surrounding areas. The 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and Expo '86 in Vancouver increased filmmaking in Washington; many studios moved their productions to Seattle (and other locations in the U.S.) in order to avoid the crowds and potentially stricter filming regulations caused by these major events. Thus, local filmmaking resources grew to accommodate and service this work. A nonprofit media organization, 911 Media Arts, was founded in 1985 as an offshoot of the contemporary arts center *and/or*. A major soundstage venture was completed in 1986 when Pacific Northwest Studios opened in Seattle's Fremont neighborhood, built by two producers from Los Angeles and financed by Pacific Northwest Bell. The studio complex, which boasted four soundstages, equipment rental, mobile dressing rooms, and food services, hosted Steven Spielberg's 1986 production of *Harry and the Hendersons* and multiple

other productions. It is likely that the cost of renting stage space was too much for local productions that lacked the financial backing of studio films, and so this venture must have primarily benefited out-of-state productions.⁴⁸ The studio itself only operated for two years, closing its doors in 1988 after citing a lack of business to sustain its overhead; the studio was forced into Chapter 7 bankruptcy after three creditors claimed \$52,000 in unpaid bills (“Bankruptcy Filings,” 1988).

Some indigenous feature filmmaking was happening during this time, although it seems that this work was limited. Some local features (both narrative and documentary) included *Restless Natives* (1985) produced by Seattleite Rick Stevenson and directed by Scotland-born Michael Hoffman, Bruce Wilson’s *Bombs Away* (1985), Gary Kent’s *L.A. Bad* (1986), and *Journey to Spirit Island* (László Pal, 1988). A large part of the indigenous production work, however, was television commercial production, which constituted the “meat and potatoes” of work in the state in the mid-1980s. Companies like Chevron, Procter & Gamble, Asahi Beer and NBC Sports commissioned commercials from Washington-based production companies (Iritani, 1986). The dearth of feature production led *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* film critic William Arnold to declare: “Despite all the annual seminars and workshops and predictions of an imminent and glorious Seattle feature film industry, there is no feature film industry in Seattle: it’s just too tough for mortal man” (Arnold, 1984, p. A31).

⁴⁸ Owner Joe Hixon reported that the largest stage rented for \$1,600 for a 12-hour day, while the smallest stage rented for \$500 per day (Carter, 1986).

Continued Struggle with Film Production

During the 1980s and the 1990s, the economic vitality of the Seattle area revived with the early transfer (in 1979) of the offices of soon-to-be software giant Microsoft from New Mexico to Bellevue, Washington, just east of Seattle. Other high-tech and internet-based companies like Amazon.com and Real Networks built their fortunes in the region, and an influx of financial capital began to flood the city. The 1990s also saw increased film production activity, both on the part of Hollywood studios and indigenous filmmakers. While major studios produced films and television series in the Seattle area, including *Singles* (Cameron Crowe, 1992), *Sleepless in Seattle* (Nora Ephron, 1993), CBS's *Northern Exposure* (1990-1995), and ABC's *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), many ventures focused on building local networks and resources. For instance, ShadowCatcher Entertainment was founded by producer-director Rick Stevenson, local businessman David Skinner, actor Tom Skerritt, and producer Scott Rosenfelt in 1993. This prompted the Washington Motion Picture Council, an industry promotion organization and successor to the Washington Film Council, to observe, "It is important for the industry's development that a bona fide, experienced producer makes a commitment to work from here" (Patel, 1993). ShadowCatcher produced *Smoke Signals*, a 1998 film based on Washington-based Sherman Alexie's short story and directed by Chris Eyre. Shown at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival and distributed by Miramax, this film was known as "the first nationally successful film produced out of Seattle" (Arnold, 1998). Alexie noted in a 1998 interview, "It's the ShadowCatcher mission to create a Seattle film community" (Hartl, 1998). ShadowCatcher produced seven more films in the 12 years since *Smoke Signals*, although only three (*The Book of Stars* (1999), *Outsourced* (2006) and *A Not So*

Still Life (2010)) were produced in Seattle. The company was restructured after the exit of Skerrit, Rosenfelt and Stevenson (Keogh, 2007). The other films were filmed and produced outside of Washington State, utilizing film crews in Louisiana, New York, New Jersey, and Utah.⁴⁹

Others participated in this ongoing expansion of Seattle filmmaking.

WigglyWorld Studios started out in 1995 as a collectively-run postproduction facility and evolved into the Northwest Film Forum, a nonprofit film arts organization that continues to offer education classes, equipment rental, postproduction facilities, and theatrical exhibition. Also in 1995, the Seattle Independent Film and Video Consortium began, building networks among various film organizations, production companies, and filmmakers. In addition, a newly formed Mayor's Film Office in the city of Seattle, housed in the Office of Economic Development, began to both nurture the local film industry and attract out-of-state productions.

The State Film and Video Office continued to operate at a low budget, however, and consequently, struggled to justify its operations. The office's biennial budget hovered at \$220,000 in 1994, designed to cover a three-person staff, promotional efforts, trade shows and other travel, and various other activities. The Illinois film office, by comparison, spent \$500,000 *annually* to support its eight-person staff; in part because of these efforts, Illinois secured nearly three times as much in-state production spending as did Washington (McInnis, 1994). Despite the low level of state funding, film productions

⁴⁹ *Getting to Know You* (Lisanne Skylar, 1999) was filmed in New Jersey. *The Skeleton Key* (Iain Softley, 2005) was filmed in Louisiana, likely taking advantage of that state's generous film incentive program. *Game 6* (Michael Hoffman, 2005) was filmed in New York and utilized production and post-production resources available in New York City. *American Pastime* (Desmond Nakano, 2007) was filmed in Utah and its post-production was primarily based in Los Angeles.

in Seattle, and Washington more generally, in the 1990s began to demonstrate a positive economic impact. Thus, government and taxpayer enthusiasm for supporting the industry slowly grew, especially in the form of tax incentives. The State Legislature passed a bill in 1995 to exempt production services (including, among other services, the rental or purchase of camera and lighting equipment) from state sales tax. In 1996, the director of the Illinois Film Office, Suzy Kellett, left her job to head the Washington State Film Office, and the following year, the state tax exemption expanded to include production vehicles. Despite the many studios and filmmakers drawn to British Columbia and other Canadian locations, film production in Washington State reached new heights in 2001 at \$230.6 million (ECONorthwest, 2003, p. 12).⁵⁰

This success would be short-lived, however, as production again declined by 70 percent during the next three years. The State Legislature tried to cut the film office's funding numerous times, with the state's Office of Financial Management noting, "We opposed funding it because we can find no indication that their efforts secured much movie business in Washington" (La Corte, 2005). Yet, the state still hoped to draw production to the area. In 2006, Washington passed the Motion Picture Competitiveness Fund, which awarded a 20 percent rebate to film productions that could demonstrate their favorable economic impact on the state. It also created a nonprofit board of directors to administer the fund, which became known as Washington Filmworks. Coupled with this bill was SB 6557, which reduced business and occupation taxes for production costs that were paid for in-state. In 2009, Governor Christine Gregoire signed SHB 2042 to raise

⁵⁰ Film and television production in British Columbia doubled between 1994 and 2004 to reach \$687 million, almost triple that of Washington (Yu, 2005). ECONorthwest's calculations in this report included commercial photography production spending, which amounted to an additional \$85.5 million. It has been omitted in my calculations here.

the tax incentive to 30 percent. That same year, the Washington State Film Office was folded into Washington Filmworks, which collaborates with the Seattle Office of Film + Music to “help Washington State reemerge as a premiere destination for motion picture production” (Washington Filmworks, 2010).

A Different Emphasis: Film Criticism and Appreciation in Seattle

Seattle’s film production activities have been sporadic and the industry has been slow to grow. Former Northwest Film Forum Executive Director Michael Seiwerath noted that while “Seattle is a really great place to make movies...it remains a really miserable place to make a *living* making movies” (Miller, 2005). In contrast, Seattle has developed a very rich history of film criticism and film appreciation, and has long been known for predicting a film’s national theatrical success or failure. Rumors held that Louis B. Mayer would ask, “How will it play in Seattle?” when assessing a film’s potential (Owen, 2000), and major newspapers around the country attested to the influence of Seattle audiences, calling Seattle a “movie town” (Gardner, 1973, p. 56). Longtime Seattle film critics John Hartl of the *Seattle Times* (critic from 1966 to 2001), William Arnold of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Richard T. Jameson of the *Seattle Weekly* and *Film Comment*, and Greg Olson, film curator for the Seattle Art Museum, began their careers together when they attended the University of Washington and enrolled in the university’s only film class, “The History and Aesthetics of the Motion Picture,” in 1967 (MacDonald, 2003).

Richard Jameson has made a particularly impressive contribution to film criticism originating from Seattle. He began his career in film as manager of the Edgemont Theatre

in nearby Edmonds, Washington, from 1967 to 1970. In 1970, along with Jim Selvidge, Robert Dale and others, Jameson founded the Seattle Film Society, which began screening films at the University of Washington and around the city; the Society also began publishing a newsletter called *Movietone News*, which film scholar Molly Haskell reportedly called “the best publication on film in the English language” (Parallax View, 2010). Jameson, the *Seattle Weekly*’s first film critic, was the first Seattle-based critic to be included in the National Society of Film Critics in 1980.

In 1986, the *Seattle Weekly* fired Jameson from his post as the paper’s film critic, citing Jameson’s lack of “willingness to submit to editing,” as well as the paper’s “desire to have more writers and viewpoints” represented in its film reviews (Arnold, 1986a, p. 26). This move riled much of the close-knit film community in Seattle, and the Seattle International Film Festival severed its advertising relationship with the *Weekly*. Another publication, *Pacific Northwest Magazine*, created a film critic position and hired Jameson shortly after he left the *Weekly* (Arnold, 1986b, p. 26). This position was short-lived, however, as Jameson left Seattle for New York in 1989, where he became editor of *Film Comment* for ten years. He returned to Seattle in 2000 and helped to form Parallax View, “a small film society whose goal was to champion the cause of film literacy, foster public discussion of the place of movies in society, and promote the serious, sometimes delirious cause of film as art” (Parallax View, 2010). This organization also started the Seattle Film Critics Award, which only lasted three years (2002-2004). Parallax View continues to thrive in an online forum, publishing reviews and commentary from a number of critics based in the Puget Sound.

Over the years, Seattle has also nurtured its love for cinema by building numerous theaters and hosting many film festivals. Northgate Mall, the first indoor shopping mall in the region and likely the fourth in the country, opened in April 1950, and the following year, the Northgate Theatre opened as the country's first movie theater housed in a mall. As early as the 1960s, the trade magazine *Variety* listed Seattle as the "largest per-capita movie-going audience" in the country (Arnold, 1998). Local businessman Randy Finley opened the Movie House in 1970 in a former dentist's office. This 93-seat theater quickly grew into a popular exhibition venue, and Finley expanded his theater holdings over the next several years to include 16 theaters that became the Seven Gables Theatres chain. His theaters included the Seven Gables, the Guild 45th, the Ridgemont, the Crest, and the Broadway in Seattle, the Lakewood in Tacoma, in addition to some theaters in Portland (Merlino, 2005).

Meanwhile, ten miles east of Seattle, volunteers from the Bellevue Arts & Crafts Fair started the Bellevue Film Festival in 1967, a showcase of independent and experimental films from around the country (Oppenheimer, 2001). Seattle's first black film festival opened in 1968, organized by the Central Area Motivation Project (CAMP), which was part of the Seattle Model Cities Program (Flom, 2001).⁵¹ Other niche festivals

⁵¹ Seattle participated in the federally-funded Model Cities Program in the late 1960s and early 1970s; the program was intended to encourage and assist urban centers in addressing social and economic problems and help them to improve quality of life in areas of arts and culture, education, health, employment, housing, and other areas (Marshall Kaplan, Gans and Kahn, 1969). Interestingly, the Seattle Model City Program (SMCP) initiated a project work program in 1969 that intended to "provide MN (minority) students with training, experience, and opportunities for creative expression through film and television mediums" (Seattle Model City Program, 1972). The program contracted with a local nonprofit film training organization, Oscar Productions, to target high school and college age minority students who wanted to enter the media and communication industry. A short publication on the program from 1972 indicates that the first two years of the five-year action plan had been implemented, completing various training films and television shows; almost half of the project's 27 students had either been placed in the industry or were accepted to college journalism programs.

started in the 1990s, including the Seattle Polish Film Festival (1992), the Irish Reels Film Festival (1996), the Seattle Gay and Lesbian Film Festival (1996), and others; the sheer number of festivals led *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* film critic William Arnold (1996) to call Seattle “Film Festival City.” It has continued to earn this moniker, as the city and surrounding areas play host to more than 40 annual film festivals and series.

While many of these festivals have achieved decent regional profiles, the most renowned and widely respected is the Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF), which was founded by Darryl Macdonald and Dan Ireland in 1976. The two men owned the Moore Theatre (known at the time as the Moore-Egyptian), a movie theater that screened repertory and foreign films, and the first home for SIFF. The event has since grown into the country’s largest and most well-attended festival, including over 400 films from 60 countries over the course of three and a half weeks. The festival attracts 150,000 attendees each year. *Variety* magazine ranks SIFF as one of the top “50 unmissable film festivals” around the globe and “one of America’s most important city festivals” (*Variety*, 2007). The 2010 festival was SIFF’s most successful yet, with 20 percent growth in box office receipts, 125 sold-out screenings, and first-time screenings in 3D and IMAX (SIFF, 2010). SIFF is run by Cinema Seattle, a non-profit organization started in 1990 that also hosts film series throughout the year.

Another significant film festival in Seattle is the Seattle True Independent Film Festival (STIFF), which was started in 2005 in response to independent filmmakers’ growing frustration with the inaccessibility of large-scale film festivals like SIFF, Sundance, and others. The founders of STIFF claim that while these festivals purport to celebrate independent filmmaking, they are more attracted to higher-profile studio

productions that often use festivals as a launching pad for a film's distribution. STIFF was modeled after the Slamdance Film Festival, an event that was started to counteract the exclusivity of Sundance. About a quarter of STIFF's films in previous years have been local productions. One of STIFF's founders highlights his festival's appeal: "STIFF a lot of times can be like going to school, and we're more like recess. We try to show movies that are good movies that are fun, but we try not to take it too seriously" (Rahner, 2007).

The history of Seattle's relationship with film production – and film criticism – demonstrates the challenges that cities can face in building a filmmaking community without financial resources. Many enterprises that planned facilities or productions have historically tended to underestimate the financial investment needed to work in Seattle, and have been surprised by their lack of success (for example, Pacific Northwest Studios' experience in the mid-1980s). Yet Seattle's appreciation of cinema and its reputation as a creative city contribute to continued efforts to build a successful indigenous film industry.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a indigenous film industry. Among the factors discussed were the problems of legitimizing local cast and crew members, as well as securing governmental and taxpayer support. The myths that surround the positive impact of the film industry – its potential for job creation, economic growth, tourism, and creativity – can be forceful and influential, as

well as highly appealing to state and local governments, especially in times of economic instability. However, the outcomes have often been questionable, as there are a multitude of factors that influence industry growth, not all of which can be controlled.

In Portland's case, emphasis on production by some motivated individuals helped to develop the city's film production community; Will Vinton and others spearheaded many efforts to generate government, civic and community support for filmmaking in the region. In Seattle, by contrast, the organizations or individuals with the strongest reputations, particularly since the 1960s, have been film critics rather than filmmakers. Only in the last 15 years has there been a shift in the leadership of Seattle's film production community, with organizations like the Northwest Film Forum building infrastructure for local filmmakers.

State and local governments are attracted to the potential infusion of money that Hollywood studios can offer; for example, a million dollars in a small community like Port Townsend, Washington made a significant impact with lasting effects of attracting tourists to visit locations featured in *An Officer and a Gentleman*. But the investments that local filmmakers, businesspeople and government officials make in the local film industry are more tenuous and much riskier, as these productions tend to have fewer, lower-paying jobs and less potential to make money back for investors. As a purely economic activity, many state and local governments find indigenous filmmaking to be less important to support than out-of-state productions; yet it must be remembered that the indigenous industry serves other vital purposes for a community beyond its economic impact.

Casual observance of regional film industries around the country indicates that expectations in most communities are above what is prudent in terms of a local film community's potential. The histories presented in this chapter attest to the prevalence of heightened expectations, which in turn can have significant implications for the health of the indigenous industry and its accompanying infrastructure. What these histories illustrate is that development of infrastructure and support for both local and out-of-state productions is necessary in order to build a sustainable industry and to retain film professionals. Even then, there are a myriad of challenges that continue to weigh upon the regional film industry, many of which are out of its control.

The next two chapters take up these issues in a discussion of the contemporary landscape of regional independent filmmaking in Portland and Seattle. Chapter VII analyzes the infrastructure that supports the sustainability of regional independent filmmaking, and Chapter VIII examines the challenges that restrict filmmaking in these two cities.

CHAPTER VII
SUPPORT FOR THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF REGIONAL FILM
IN PORTLAND AND SEATTLE

Introduction

Portland and Seattle are home to active and varied filmmaking communities that enjoy growth, local support and national recognition. These cities' film industries are rooted in lengthy histories of alternating support and challenges from a range of parties, from filmmakers themselves to government to the general public. Both cities boast numerous filmmaker organizations that have taken charge of nurturing the indigenous production community, providing professional development, networking opportunities, education and funding. With these support mechanisms, however, come a number of challenges that are at times contradictory and often complicate local filmmakers' abilities to produce and distribute their films. As well, the relationship of the regional film industry to the mainstream Hollywood industry simultaneously provides support and challenges to the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking.

This chapter details the infrastructure that facilitates and lends support to regional independent filmmaking in Seattle and Portland. "Infrastructure" is defined in this study as the systems, policies, resources, and practices that enable or restrict filmmaking activity, from financing and production to distribution and exhibition. I will discuss the various practices, processes, policies and systems that help filmmakers realize their visions and that help bring their films to audiences. As this chapter will show, some of

this infrastructure is unique to each city, although both cities share many infrastructural characteristics and tendencies. Following an introduction and overview about filmmaking in Portland and Seattle, this chapter will discuss integral components of that infrastructure, including key organizations, government agencies and policies, corollary community institutions, and distribution/exhibition. As well, there are intangible qualities unique to the Pacific Northwest that contribute to the development of the infrastructure, such as desirable quality of life, confluence of creative people, and characteristics of small communities. The focus in this chapter is on infrastructural components that have developed (or are developing currently) at the local level, as it is these components that can be used to maintain and sustain a regional filmmaking community. The discussion here is complementary to Chapter VIII, in which I will discuss the challenges to regional independent filmmaking experienced by the film communities in Portland and Seattle.

The Contemporary Portland and Seattle Filmmaking Communities

The current filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle are active in terms of studio productions shooting on location and somewhat active in terms of indigenous production. A number of organizations and initiatives are involved that network the filmmaking communities and that generate activity and infrastructure, and both cities produce a wide range of creative work, from feature narrative films and documentaries to animated shorts and commercials.

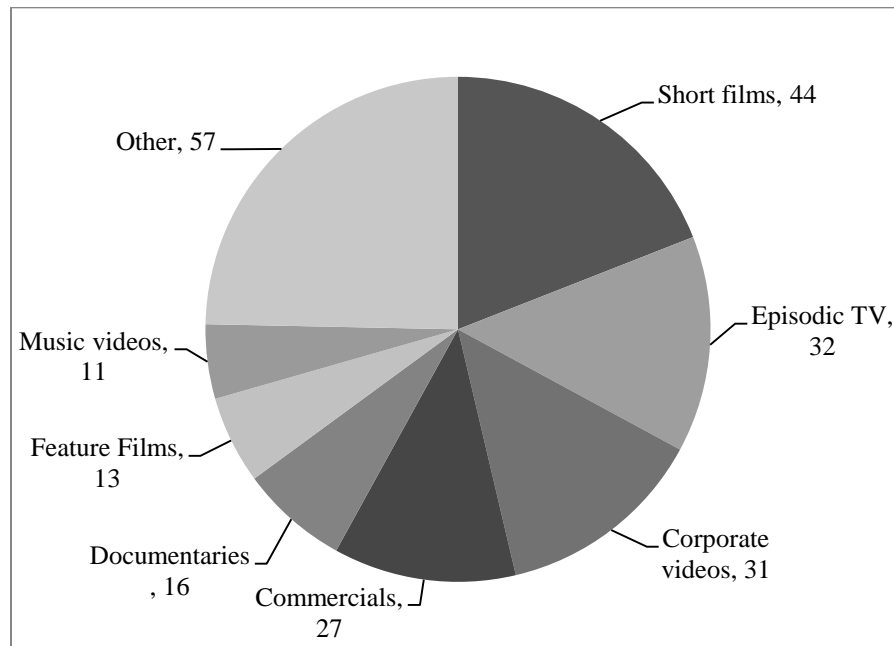
According to state-level labor statistics in 2010, there were 370 employers in the motion picture and video industries in Oregon and 768 employers in Washington (Oregon Employment Department, 2010; Washington State Employment Security Department,

2010). An economic assessment of the film and video industry in Oregon in 2007 estimated that there were approximately 6,325 employees (4,032 full-time equivalent paid employees and 2,293 self-employed full- and part-time workers) (ECONorthwest, 2008, p. 8). A similar assessment was conducted in Washington in 2003; there were 2,474 employees (1,412 full- and part-time workers and 1,062 self-employed workers) in film and video (ECONorthwest, 2003, p. 12).

In Oregon, the film industry in 2007 spent \$709.6 million directly, and contributed \$294.3 million in wages and other labor income (ECONorthwest, 2008, p. 2). There were 231 media projects filmed in Seattle in 2009, according to the City of Seattle Office of Film + Music (2010); 73 of these projects were feature, short or documentary films (Chart 4). The Washington film industry contributes \$207 million in direct output, which includes local business revenue, spending by out-of-state crew and cast members, in-house production, and freelancer wages; only 10 percent, or \$21 million, of that direct output was contributed by non-Washington productions, which indicates that the majority of film production spending originates in-state and thus, a vital industry in the state's economy.

The industries in both states have grown considerably in the last several years, as the Motion Picture Association of America (2010) estimates that film and television production created 8,200 direct jobs in Oregon and 11,290 direct jobs in Washington in 2008.

Chart 4: Number of media projects filmed in Seattle in 2009, as reported to the City of Seattle Office of Film + Music



Source: City of Seattle Office of Film + Music (2010)

The Scope of Filmmaking in Portland

According to *Source Oregon* (2010), a directory of media production in Oregon, Portland is home to more than 115 film and video production companies whose specialties range from animation and corporate/industrial to documentary and web/transmedia. There are a handful of sound stages and other production facilities, as well as a number of post-production houses. A variety of freelance workers are based in Portland, including cinematographers, line producers, directors, producers, editors and sound designers. They often work in multiple positions and in a variety of media and film formats, including features, shorts, music videos, web, television, and commercials. In addition to making their own short and feature length films, film workers are employed by corporate clients such as Nike, Hewlett Packard, Discovery Channel, National

Geographic, MTV, Harley Davidson, and Microsoft. Many have produced media for local companies, like Umpqua Bank, Portland General Electric and Pendleton Woolen Mills, while others focus on creating media for Oregon-based nonprofit organizations like the Benedictine Foundation of Oregon, Portland Symphonic Boys Choir, and the Audubon Society of Portland.

While Portland does not have any major film studios equivalent to those in Los Angeles, it does have a few well-known and prolific studios. Laika Studios (formerly Will Vinton Studios) produces a range of media content, including feature films, music videos, interactive content and commercials, and is “fueled by the vision of Nike co-founder Phil Knight,” who is a majority shareholder and father of Laika CEO Travis Knight (Laika, 2010). The studio produced the Oscar-nominated animated film *Coraline* (Henry Selick, 2009). Dark Horse Entertainment (DHE) is a division of Dark Horse Comics, a Portland-based company that is the third-largest comic book publisher in the United States. Started in 1992, DHE produces films based on comics, and signed a three-year production and distribution deal with Universal Pictures in 2008; *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (Guillermo del Toro, 2008) was the first film released under this deal (Gerding, 2008).

There are companies in Portland that provide equipment and support services such as lighting equipment, signs and backdrops, wardrobes, catering, legal assistance, payroll services, marketing and publicity services, financing, and distribution. The city is also home to a range of individuals who fill crew positions like grips, gaffers, script supervisors, actors, and location scouts. Many of these film workers acquired experience in film and media production outside of Oregon – primarily either in Los Angeles or New

York. Many attended high-profile film schools like the University of Southern California or New York University, and others have worked for major movie or television studios. For example, GOFT Executive Director Vince Porter formerly worked at Showtime Networks in Los Angeles before moving to Portland for personal reasons. Other individuals, like producer Gary Kout, continue to work in Los Angeles on a project-by-project basis but maintain their residence (and family life) in Oregon. Other film workers have traveled all over the world and, for some individuals, their residence in Portland does not determine where they work. For example, Emery Clay III, a freelance director of photography, producer, director and editor, has traveled to Vietnam, Central America, Afghanistan and Antarctica to work on various projects.

Several Portland filmmakers are nationally and internationally known, contributing to the reputation of Portland as a location for filmmaking. Gus Van Sant and Todd Haynes (*Far From Heaven*, 2002; *I'm Not There*, 2007) both reside in Portland and utilize Portland crew members for much of their work. Laika Studios' *Coraline* secured international distribution and was nominated for an Academy Award in 2010. Portland is also host to some larger-scale productions from major out-of-state studios, including the first installment of the *Twilight* series (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008), *Without a Paddle: Nature's Calling* (Ellory Elkayem, 2009), *The Road* (John Hillcoat, 2009), and *Extraordinary Measures* (Tom Vaughan, 2010). As well, the cable television channel TNT moved the production of its show *Leverage* to Portland for its second season, and has employed almost 400 local crew and cast members (Webber, 2010), while IFC began shooting its sketch comedy series, *Portlandia* (2010-).

Portland’s filmmaking community has collectively received hundreds of awards and other professional recognition, including national and regional Emmy Awards, Academy Awards, film festival appearances and awards (Table 6), awards from the Society of Professional Journalists, Clio Awards, and Telly Awards.

Table 6. Feature films conceived and produced in Oregon that appeared at major national and international film festivals in the mid- to late-2000s

<i>Film</i>	<i>Festival appearances</i>
Clear Cut: The Story of Philomath, Oregon (Peter Richardson, 2006)	Sundance Film Festival, 2006
Old Joy (Kelly Reichardt, 2006)	Sundance Film Festival, 2006 New Directors/New Films, 2006 Los Angeles Film Festival, 2006
My Name is Bruce (Bruce Campbell, 2007)	Cannes Film Market, 2007 American Film Market, 2007
Paranoid Park (Gus Van Sant, 2007)	Cannes Film Festival, 2007 Toronto International Film Festival, 2007 New York Film Festival, 2007
Wendy and Lucy (Kelly Reichardt, 2008)	Cannes Film Festival, 2008 Toronto International Film Festival, 2008 New York Film Festival, 2008 Northwest Film & Video Festival (Portland), 2008
Coraline (Henry Selick, 2009)	Portland International Film Festival, 2009
Meek’s Cutoff (Kelly Reichardt, 2010)	Venice Film Festival, 2010 Toronto International Film Festival, 2010 New York Film Festival, 2010 London Film Festival, 2010
Some Days are Better than Others (Matt McCormick, 2010)	SXSW Film Festival, 2010 Seattle International Film Festival, 2010
How to Die in Oregon (Peter Richardson, 2010)	Sundance Film Festival, 2011
Hot Coffee (Susan Saladoff, 2010)	Sundance Film Festival, 2011
We Were Here (David Weissman and Bill Weber, 2011)	Sundance Film Festival, 2011

Sources: Levy, 2010; Internet Movie Database.

The community has also received formal recognition through contributions that support the local film and media industry. The Governor’s Gold Award is presented to businesses

that represent “greatness in Oregonians”; Dark Horse Comics and sister company Dark Horse Entertainment received this award in 2010. Former Governor Ted Kulongoski also presented the Governor’s Film Advocate Award and the Innovation in the Media Arts Award on an annual basis during his tenure in office. The Governor’s Office of Film and Television has recognized individual contributions, awarding an Industry Leader Award in 2003 to filmmaker Rick Phillips for his video that supported state lobbying action in favor of tax incentives.

The Scope of Filmmaking in Seattle

Production companies located in the Seattle area specialize in animation, corporate/industrial films, commercials and infomercials, documentaries, and music videos, among other formats, according to the Washington Production Index, an online directory of film professionals in Washington State. There is a broad scope of crew, cast and support services that are available in the Seattle area, ranging from film processing labs, post-production houses, equipment rental, publicity services, studios and soundstages, talent, insurance companies, legal assistance, a myriad of crew (from art directors and production assistants to gaffers and sound mixers), photographers and accounting firms.

As in Portland, many of these are individuals who take on freelance projects for larger clients and often operate their own small-scale companies. Commercial work is common, and many film professionals contract with both national and local corporations and nonprofit organizations. Some of these clients include Microsoft, Alaska Airlines, the Seattle Mariners, the National Geographic Channel, the History Channel, T-Mobile, Visa,

the Seattle Monorail Project, the Experience Music Project, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, and Mercy Corps. Again, many of these individuals have relocated to Seattle from Los Angeles or New York and now work in a variety of locations – some work exclusively in Seattle, while others maintain a residence in Seattle but work in New York, Los Angeles, or other parts of the world; for example, director and producer James Longley has filmed in Iraq, Palestine and Pakistan. Seattle film workers have acquired professional experience from a variety of sources. While some only completed on-the-job training and apprenticeships, others attended Vancouver Film School, UCLA, or USC School of Cinema-Television, among other film schools.

Seattle filmmaking has gained more visibility in the mid- to late-2000s, as the city enjoyed a small-scale renaissance in indigenous filmmaking. Several local filmmakers gained national recognition with films that played at well-known film festivals (Table 7) and secured substantial distribution. Some of these films include *Evergreen* (Enid Zentelis, 2004), *Heart of the Game* (Ward Serrill, 2005), *Police Beat* (Robinson Devor, 2005), *Iraq in Fragments* (James Longley, 2006), *Outsourced* (John Jeffcoat, 2006), *Zoo* (Robinson Devor, 2007), *Humpday* (Lynn Shelton, 2009), and *The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle* (David Russo, 2009). Other works, including commercials, films, and television programs, have received Oscar nominations, Telly awards, Aurora awards, Women in Film awards, national Addy awards, and film festival awards, among others. In 2009, documentarian James Longley also received a MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant of \$500,000 to be awarded over five years. Seattle's alternative weekly newspaper, *The Stranger*, began handing out annual grants of \$5,000 in 2003 to Seattle individuals or organizations working in the arts. One of their categories honors work in

the film community; some of the past recipients of this award include David Russo (2004), Linas Phillips (2007), Lynn Shelton (2008), and Charles Mudede and Robinson Devor (2010).

Table 7. Feature films conceived and produced in Washington that appeared at major national and international film festivals in the mid- to late-2000s

<i>Film</i>	<i>Festival appearances</i>
Evergreen (Enid Zentelis, 2004)	Sundance Film Festival, 2004
Heart of the Game (Ward Serrill, 2005)	Seattle International Film Festival, 2005 Toronto International Film Festival, 2005 Cannes Film Market, 2006
Police Beat (Robinson Devor, 2005)	Sundance Film Festival, 2005 Seattle International Film Festival, 2005
Iraq in Fragments (James Longley, 2006)	Sundance Film Festival, 2006
Outsourced (John Jeffcoat, 2006)	Toronto International Film Festival, 2007 European Film Market, 2007 Cannes Film Festival, 2007 Seattle International Film Festival, 2007
Zoo (Robinson Devor, 2007)	Sundance Film Festival, 2007 European Film Market, 2007 South by Southwest Film Festival, 2007 Cannes Film Festival, 2007
Humpday (Lynn Shelton, 2009)	Sundance Film Festival, 2009 Los Angeles Film Festival, 2009 Cannes Film Festival, 2009 Seattle International Film Festival, 2009
The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle (David Russo, 2009)	Sundance Film Festival, 2009 European Film Market, 2009 South by Southwest Film Festival, 2009 Seattle International Film Festival, 2009
Bass Ackwards (Linas Phillips, 2010)	Sundance Film Festival, 2010 Seattle International Film Festival, 2010
The Catechism Cataclysm (Todd Rohal, 2011)	Sundance Film Festival, 2011
The Oregonian (Calvin Reeder, 2011)	Sundance Film Festival, 2011
The Off Hours (Megan Griffiths, 2011)	Sundance Film Festival, 2011

Source: Karras, 2011; Keblas and Etheridge, 2009; Internet Movie Database.com.

Shaping the Community: Key Infrastructure in Portland and Seattle

The infrastructure for regional independent filmmaking is primarily focused on fostering community and facilitating the development of professionalism in the field. Many of the organizations, policies and resources that enable these practices to flourish have a long history in the community, while others are relatively new. Key organizations and governmental initiatives help to create an environment in which the filmmaking community can produce films with fewer restrictions, more assistance and, at times, more funding. Film distribution and exhibition are two factors that continue to present challenges to filmmakers, although some solutions are starting to emerge; as discussed in Chapter V, new distribution models (especially digital distribution) are increasingly enhancing a film's potential for success.

The following is a discussion of the infrastructure for regional independent filmmaking in Portland and Seattle (and Oregon and Washington, more broadly). The discussion focuses first on key organizations and governmental intervention, followed by distribution and exhibition infrastructural arrangements. As well, this chapter addresses elements that contribute to the formation of the infrastructure, including the appeal of the Pacific Northwest as a place to live and work.

Key Organizations in Portland

Filmmaking professionals in Portland (and Oregon) are connected through several different organizations. Survey respondents who work primarily in Oregon are, on average, members of at least one film-related organization. The Oregon Media Production Association (OMPA) is probably the most widely supported with a large base

of members and visibility in Oregon. It helps local media producers through educational initiatives, political action, professional development, and networking. The OMPA also hosts seminars about film financing, distribution, and marketing, some of which have been hosted in partnership with another film organization, the Oregon Producers Alliance (2010), which strives to “cultivate a self-sustaining film industry through the advancement of outstanding independent productions.” The OMPA also provides educational scholarships and publishes *Source Oregon*, a comprehensive printed and online directory of film professionals who work in Oregon.

The primary function of the OMPA is to provide a way for filmmakers and other media producers statewide to connect with each other. According to Portland producer David Cress, the OMPA’s “primary purpose with filmmakers is that they become that collective body that represents us as these scattered individuals making films. [One of the things] they can do is help us get together and build a support group.” The OMPA functions as a central gathering organization for the state’s production community, which helps to foster a sense of community in Portland and statewide. This reputation travels outside of Oregon, as Seattle film financing consultant Elizabeth Heile notes: “It [the OMPA] may be three guys in their garage but it gives the impression of being larger.” In fact, the OMPA has two employees and a miniscule budget, relying on a multitude of volunteers to head its action committees that focus on governmental affairs, business development, membership, education and other issues. But the OMPA’s base of community support and respect has enabled it to become a cohesive body for the media production community in Oregon.

Utilizing this community support and respect, the OMPA also functions as a lobbying agent for media producers. Cress notes, “I think their main value to us as filmmakers is that they can affect public policy.” The organization pushed the Oregon Production Incentive Fund (OPIF) legislation in 2003 and ramped up its lobbying efforts in support of the legislation’s renewal in 2009. During this round, the organization hosted a training event to educate members about the legislation and need for cohesive lobbying; further mobilization of members occurred during an Industry Day in the state capital of Salem, during which film professionals made speeches and talked with state senators and representatives about the contributions of the Oregon filmmaking industry. The OMPA’s government affairs committee also wrote the proposed legislation for Indigenous Oregon Production Incentive Fund (i-OPIF) in 2009 because a lot of OMPA members felt that OPIF “didn’t do anything for Oregon producers,” says OMPA Executive Director Tom McFadden. “I heard this a number of times from different places.” This was, according to McFadden, “a stinging indictment to the [state] film office,” whose goal is to help and promote the Oregon filmmaking community. i-OPIF (Senate Bill 863) was passed in 2009 (i-OPIF is discussed further below).

Numerous other organizations support and nurture film production, education and appreciation in the city. One of the city’s oldest organizations, the Northwest Film Center (NWFC), has created a space for the filmmaking community to expand its scope and to connect with audiences. State film office Executive Director Vince Porter says, “I think historically the Northwest Film Center has always been a great place for filmmakers.” The NWFC offers educational programs, filmmaker grants and fiscal sponsorship, equipment rental, and film festivals, including the Portland International Film Festival,

which focuses on international films, and the Northwest Film and Video Festival, which focuses on independent Northwest works. Various arts-granting organizations contribute to the NWFC's funding, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Oregon Arts Commission, the Oregon Cultural Trust, the Regional Arts and Culture Council (a tri-county arts agency in the Portland metro area), along with several foundations. The NWFC, much like the OMPA, connects people in the community. The OMPA can connect people online and through periodic seminars and meetings, but the NWFC has a physical space where people can go. "It's a place to network and meet people," says NWFC Director Bill Foster. "That becomes the 'center' part [of Northwest Film Center]." Furthermore, the NWFC cultivates a sense of support. Foster says, "We're trying to be this cooperative. We're trying to create that environment that creates, that nurtures people saying, 'Yes, I can live in Portland, Oregon or wherever in the Pacific Northwest and my work can be recognized.'"

Another organization, Film Action Oregon, was originated by the governor's film office in the early 1990s and has grown into a nonprofit organization that provides education, partnerships with independent filmmakers, and an exhibition venue for independent films. One of its projects, the Film Project Partners program, assists select independent film projects with various aspects of the filmmaking process, including financing, equipment, distribution, and exhibition. It acts as the nonprofit sponsoring organization to enable tax-deductible donations to the film's budget. Several locally produced documentary and narrative shorts and feature films have benefited from this program, including Aaron Kirk Douglas' *Freedom State* (2006) and Jason Windsor's *Forge* (2009). In addition, Film Action Oregon runs a youth education program, Project

Youth Doc, a four-week intensive documentary production camp for teenagers. The organization also owns the Hollywood Theatre, a historic cinema in Portland, which screens independent films, and hosts local film festivals like POW-Fest (the Portland Oregon Women's Film Festival).

There are a number of other film-related organizations in Portland, including a newly established Portland chapter of Women in Film and the Oregon Producers Alliance. There are a number of unions and guilds that serve Portland, such as the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 488 Studio Mechanics, The American Federation of Television & Radio Artists (AFTRA), and the Teamsters Local 305, among others. Many of these unions share local membership with Seattle, including SAG and IATSE. As well, many film professionals are members of national unions, including the Directors Guild of America and the Writers Guild of America. Online presence has increased with the Oregon Media Network. Launched by local film professionals, this network is an online source for connecting individuals and organizations about upcoming events, screenings, job opportunities and other announcements. As of 2010, this website boasts over 3,500 members from all sectors of the film and media production industry. Also contributing to this strengthened community are film production education programs offered by the Art Institute of Portland, Portland State University, and Pacific Northwest College of Art.

Assisted by these smaller efforts, key Portland-based organizations like the OMPA, NWFC, and Film Action Oregon, as well as the Governor's Office of Film and Television (discussed below), are making the most meaningful contribution to the Portland filmmaking community. Portland producer and director of POW Fest Tara

Johnson-Medinger says, “I appreciate that some of these larger more established organizations are creating more of an awareness and attempting to work together to make a stronger film town.” The leadership of these organizations is generating momentum to shape Portland’s reputation as an active filmmaking community.

Key Organizations in Seattle

Like Portland, Seattle has several key organizations that help lead and unite the filmmaking community. Survey respondents who work primarily in Washington are, on average, members of at least two film-related organizations. One of Seattle’s flagship organizations for serving the filmmaking community is the Northwest Film Forum (NWFF). This organization offers classes, seminars and workshops, along with equipment and facility rental, networking functions, and exhibition space. In addition, it has implemented an innovative funding and production model called the Start-to-Finish grant. In this program, a filmmaker is selected to receive support from the NWFF in terms of production and post-production facilities and equipment, staff support, financing, and a nonprofit affiliation through which financiers can make non-taxable donations to the production. Start-to-Finish has assisted seven films as of 2010, including Matt Wilkins’ *Buffalo Bill’s Defunct* (2004), Robinson Devor’s *Police Beat* (2005), David Russo’s *The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle* (2009), and Dayna Hanson’s *Rainbow* (in production as of 2010).

The Start-to-Finish program has contributed to the dismantling of traditional production and distribution models, earning the Northwest Film Forum a reputation of innovation and leadership. Amy Dee, Executive Director of Washington Filmworks,

notes, “If you're looking at the [emerging] independent film model, the Northwest Film Forum has done an extraordinary job at positioning themselves to help them [independent filmmakers].” As a result, the NWFF has, over the course of its 15-year history, become one of the most established film-related institutions in Seattle. It has, in many ways, fostered a sense of community for Seattle filmmakers in an environment that is often perceived as being competitive and fractured. James Keblas, Director of the City of Seattle’s Office of Film + Music, says, “People are supporting one another and they’re working on each others’ scripts, and they share each other’s ideas, and they share each other’s crew...I think it really comes out of the Northwest Film Forum, as kind of a hub.” Charles Mudede, screenwriter for *Zoo* and *Police Beat*, calls the NWFF “the most mature of film institutions” in Seattle. “I’d rather support an institution than something amorphous,” he says, choosing to donate to the NWFF a \$2,500 filmmaker recognition award that he received in 2010.

The Independent Feature Project (IFP), a national professional development organization, started a Seattle chapter in 2002. This organization emphasizes educating filmmakers about the business of filmmaking, and offers networking opportunities and seminars to connect individuals working in the local industry. IFP/Seattle President Lacey Leavitt intends for the organization to sustain and nurture the Seattle film community as an industry amid the difficulties inherent in independent filmmaking:

The goal of the organization is to actually create a stable filmmaking community in Seattle and by that we mean trying to have a film community where people can actually live, can work in film and make that their living and not have to do it in the off-hours or in between jobs kind of thing that most of us do have to do.

The organization administers a program that is similar in design to the Northwest Film Forum's Start-to-Finish program and Film Action Oregon's Film Project Partners. IFP/Seattle selects one film annually to receive its Spotlight Award, which coordinates in-kind resources and donations from various production companies in the Pacific Northwest to assist an emerging filmmaker in the completion of his or her film. This project is intended to encourage local filmmakers to operate at a more professional level by "produc[ing] a comprehensive and compelling film package that includes a script, breakdown, budget and marketing strategy" (IFP/Seattle website, 2010). The award winner produces a short film shot on 35mm, which serves as a sort of calling card that showcases the filmmaker's abilities. IFP/Seattle also encourages connections with Hollywood by running the Northwest Production Summit in conjunction with the state and city film offices and the Seattle International Film Festival. The Summit also hosts a symposium that connects emerging independent filmmakers with industry professionals primarily from Los Angeles, and markets Washington as a production location to out-of-state projects.

There are a handful of other film organizations in Seattle that contribute to the filmmaking community, including 911 Media Arts, which offers classes, equipment and facilities rentals, and screenings and other programs, a Seattle chapter of Women in Film, and Cinema Seattle, which runs the Seattle International Film Festival and hosts screenings throughout the year. Regional offices of national unions and guilds include SAG, IATSE Local 488 Studio Mechanics, and AFTRA. As in Portland, film professionals here may also be members of national unions or guilds, such as the Directors Guild of America or the Writers Guild of America. There are only a few

professional film training programs in Seattle itself; some of the area's universities and colleges offer programs in some aspects of film production. These include the University of Washington's screenwriting certificate program, a two-year film and video communications program at Seattle Central Community College, and the Digital Filmmaking & Video Production bachelor's degree program at the Art Institute of Seattle. In addition, there are filmmaker education institutes such as the Seattle Film Institute and TheFilmSchool.

Organizations like the OMPA, the Northwest Film Center, the Northwest Film Forum, and IFP/Seattle, along with the myriad of other organizations, operate to support film production in the region. They help nurture a sense of community and common purpose among film workers, particularly in the professionalization of these regional industries. The membership and reach of these organizations continue to grow and many of their activities, like programming and production programs at the Northwest Film Forum, have gained attention from film professionals across the country. Turning a national eye to film production in the Pacific Northwest contributes to the momentum that many of these organizations have begun to experience. While much of the filmmaking activity would occur regardless of the shape of the regional infrastructure, some filmmaking – and resulting community support – might lose momentum without support from governmental agencies and policies. The next section details how the state intersects with and facilitates regional independent filmmaking.

Governmental Agencies and Policies

Filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest, much like other communities around the country, has long been recognized by state and local governments as a viable and positive industry that can contribute to the regional economy. Government policies are designed to help foster that industry, and although the policies are more often geared towards bringing larger productions from out-of-state (usually from Hollywood) – an issue to be discussed more fully in Chapter VIII – they do also help regional independent filmmakers with funding, networking, resources, and legitimacy.

In Oregon, the Governor's Office of Film and Television (GOFT; formerly the Oregon Film and Video Office) works to promote the film, television and multimedia industry by encouraging conditions that make the area conducive to film production and marketing Oregon as a prime production location and home to a skilled set of film professionals. For example, the film office administers the Oregon Production Incentive Fund (OPIF) and Greenlight Oregon. On productions with budgets of \$750,000 or more, OPIF provides a 20 percent rebate on spending in Oregon on goods and services related to the film production. As well, productions can receive a cash payment of up to 10 percent of wages paid to crew and cast. The Greenlight Oregon Labor Rebate provides cash payments of up to 6.2 percent of wages paid to Oregon cast and crew on productions that spend over \$1 million. While regional filmmakers are eligible for these programs, it is unlikely that most would operate at the budget level required to take part in these incentive programs. According to Portland producer Neil Kopp:

So far the incentives have really just considered the rare instances in which a local filmmaker can come up with a couple million dollars like Gus Van Sant. And

other than that, Hollywood studios come here with huge \$15-20 million movies and just absolutely drain the funds (quoted in Corti, p. 61).

Washington Filmworks (WFW) acts as the promotional agency for building the film industry in Washington by working with both out-of-state and indigenous productions. This organization is the successor to a formerly state-run Washington State Film Office, which was closed in 2009, and is a 501(c)6 organization (defined as a “business league” by the IRS) created by 2SSB6558 in 2006. WFW is charged with administering the Motion Picture Competitiveness Fund, Washington’s production incentives program, for which film productions are eligible to apply provided the film has over \$500,000 in in-state expenditures. Again, this budget requirement is too substantial for most films conceived, financed and produced locally, although, according to WFW Executive Director Amy Dee:

That \$500,000 threshold has supported filmmakers like Lynn Shelton [and her film, *Humpday* in 2009], like David Russo [with *The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle* in 2009]....If you are making a \$500,000 film and you are a local filmmaker, I’m giving you \$150,000 back.

Many also acknowledge the positive impact that large budget productions, which mostly come from Los Angeles, can have on the local filmmaking community. Portland producer David Cress, who has worked on both regional independent and Hollywood films, notes:

They [the incentive programs] benefit independent filmmakers as well. There is sort of an interdependent relationship between truly independent projects and Hollywood projects. Those Hollywood projects help bolster the infrastructure. The equipment that’s available. The training. The techniques that are used with that equipment. There’s a mix of locals and LA players. Local players get to watch LA players illustrating the latest techniques. And the latest equipment.

Local film professionals can get on-the-job training and access to top-quality equipment that might otherwise be inaccessible to them because of their prohibitive costs. The local community has recognized the impact of OPIF and Greenlight Oregon in creating family wage jobs for Oregon film professionals, and consequently rallied behind the programs' renewal during the 2009 legislative session. This activity further added to a sense of shared purpose within the community, as evidenced by Portland filmmaker Tara Johnson-Medinger's reaction:

The community really came together with the incentives that were recently passed and increased. That was [sic] commercial producers and independent filmmakers, people that were our crew. All were supporting that. Writing their legislators, going down to Salem [Oregon's state capital]. That was really exciting to see everyone come together.

As mentioned earlier, however, many individuals in the Portland and Seattle film communities feel that, in order to really make a positive impact, state and local governments must provide more direct support for the indigenous filmmaking community. These efforts are being led in part by nongovernmental organizations like the OMPA, as discussed above, but there is a growing sense that individuals at state and city agencies are beginning to recognize that film projects can and should originate locally. Director of Seattle's Office of Film + Music James Keblas hopes to apply his previous experience of building up Seattle's local music industry to do the same with the film community in that city:

I think that in order to grow the film industry in Seattle that we need to be looking internally and locally as much as returning to L.A. ... We didn't wait for the Rolling Stones to come to town [to build the local music industry]. We want the Rolling Stones to come to town but that doesn't mean anything. Or I should say it doesn't mean anything once they leave. To have that sustainability, you really need to invest in the people that are here now.

In Seattle's case, that investment comes in the form of promoting conditions that are helpful to independent filmmakers, such as the negotiation of cheaper permit fees for independent filmmakers and community-building initiatives like weekly email bulletins and happy hour networking meetings. As well, there is a commitment to "make [Seattle] a great place to make a living making films," according to Keblas, although formal efforts to do so have been less organized or formalized. Portland operates a similar – although less active – office. The sole employee of the Portland Mayor's Office of Film and Video helps both out-of-state and indigenous productions to navigate the layers of bureaucracy necessary to acquire permission for filming in public and private areas in the city.

As previously mentioned, the State of Oregon has created a program, drafted and lobbied for by the OMPA, that is directly geared towards the regional independent filmmaking community. i-OPIF, or the Indigenous-Oregon Production Incentive Fund, is designed to give a cash rebate to Oregon productions that are budgeted between \$75,000 and \$750,000. It uses five percent of the funds available for the OPIF program to reimburse spending by local filmmakers, or those who "own a television or film production company that has its principal place of business in this state" (State of Oregon, 2009). At its core, i-OPIF represents a shift in thinking about the potential and quality of Oregon-based filmmaking. "i-OPIF can be very helpful to legitimate low-budget and micro-budget filmmakers," notes Portland producer David Cress (quoted in Corti, 2009, p. 60). "Even though the amount that the State would contribute is very, very modest, that may be the difference between the make-or-break of a project's ability to be done." For another Portland producer, Neil Kopp, i-OPIF demonstrates a commitment to

the local community as a unique and valuable entity: “What it [i-OPIF] means to me is a long overdue coming to reality of what it really means to make films in Oregon, because this isn’t Hollywood and it’s important to be represented by our legislators locally as Northwest filmmakers” (quoted in Corti, 2009, p. 61). Furthermore, i-OPIF helps translate that commitment into production activity, as producer C.K. Lichenstein notes: “I think this is a chance for us to really become more of a sustainable environment for filmmakers and to have more indigenous filmmaking that’s going on year-round and not just when these big projects are up here” (quoted in Corti, p. 61).

The filmmaking communities in both Washington and Oregon actively lobby government officials at the local and state levels, particularly in light of the 2010 gubernatorial and state legislature elections. OPIF is scheduled to sunset on January 1, 2012, and much of the filmmaking community hopes that Governor John Kitzhaber (successor to Kulongoski) and the legislature will renew the program, demonstrating that they are as supportive of Oregon filmmaking as Governor Kulongoski had been. Several filmmakers in Seattle started a political action committee, FilmPAC, in 2010, which is designed to address these challenges, in part by “honor[ing] elected leaders who have a strong record of supporting film” (Bush, 2010). FilmPAC has the support of Washington Filmworks, the Northwest Film Forum, and other influential film organizations in the state.

Despite the shortage of specific programs directed towards regional independent filmmaking in Oregon and Washington, there is still a sense among the film community in the Pacific Northwest that state and city agencies are contributing to the community’s ability to connect and build a sustainable industry. Film publicist Lyla Foggia notes, “The

[Oregon] film office is kind of like the lead of what goes on. There's enough organized activity now that I think it's helping coalesce the talent." As well, the incentive programs have, according to WFW Executive Director Amy Dee, "challenged some of our local filmmakers to take it one step further. To step it up one notch," contributing to an overall growth in quality and dedication to filmmaking as a professional endeavor.

The state and local governments in Oregon and Washington have a vested interest in nurturing their local filmmaking communities, primarily for the economic contributions that are possible. State governments face increasing pressure to diversify their local economies, and they support media production (film, television, web, etc.) as an up-and-coming industry. If the regions can increase their film industries' professional standards in terms of ability, craft, and resources, they will be able to offer more incentives (both tangible and intangible) to major media producers (i.e., Hollywood studios), who will in turn bring more money to the region. Independent filmmakers are the unintended beneficiaries of many of these intentions although, as Chapter VIII will discuss, these intentions also come with their own costs.

While film production is the central activity that characterizes the scope of the film communities in Portland and Seattle, the success of this activity still hinges on film distribution and exhibition. The regional infrastructure for distribution in particular is less widely supported, as these segments of the filmmaking process are dominated by the mainstream Hollywood system. However, there are pockets of local distribution options that provide opportunities – both real and potential – for regional independent filmmakers to connect with audiences through a variety of platforms. As well, despite the increasing

concentration of theater ownership, a few examples continue to emerge to promote and screen local films.

Distribution Infrastructure

The most supportive and useful distribution system for independent filmmakers is one that values transparency, flexibility and fairness, as well as embraces new models of distribution that can achieve those values. Major Hollywood studios, owned by media conglomerates, control the film distribution landscape, and they institute a number of practices like vertical and horizontal integration and synergy to ensure that they maintain this dominance. These practices are designed to exploit films and filmmakers in order to make money for the parent corporations, with little attention to a transparent or fair process of distribution. Because the major studios dominate film distribution, there are few distribution options for regional independent filmmakers that allow independents to be able to compete with Hollywood films. Thus, film distribution at the local or regional level is not very well-supported in Portland or Seattle. Most filmmakers seek distribution with major studios' distribution arms, international distributors, niche distributors, broadcast or cable television, or online venues like Netflix, iTunes or Amazon; with the exception of Amazon, these options are based outside of the Pacific Northwest (primarily in Los Angeles or New York). In recent years, there have been a few distribution initiatives in the region that give regional independent filmmakers a more transparent option in terms of distribution. These include online distribution companies like IndieFlix, Film Baby and IndieBLITZ, and self-distribution models practiced by filmmakers like Kelley Baker and Mike Shiley.

Online distribution services, in which DVDs are either sold or rented, or content is streamed online for a fee, are becoming increasingly popular for independent filmmakers. Seattle filmmakers Scilla Andreen and Carlo Scandiuzzi were discouraged with the typical distribution options available for independent filmmakers, particularly because mainstream Hollywood studios dominated most of the market. The pair started their own online distribution company, IndieFlix, in 2005, which was, according to the company's blog, "founded on the principles of community, promotion, syndication and transparency" (IndieFlix, 2008). The company signs non-exclusive distribution agreements (meaning, the filmmakers are under no obligation to commit to distribute with IndieFlix) with filmmakers to provide four different services, which IndieFlix calls their "Bridge to Everywhere" project: it sells DVDs for \$9.95 through a mail-order service; it rents movies for \$4.95 or less via streaming capabilities; it provides subscription-based service to customers paying a monthly fee; and it distributes films to third-party vendors like Amazon.com and iTunes. Filmmakers receive 70 percent of net profits and IndieFlix retains the remaining 30 percent. The company was initially funded by Andreen and Scandiuzzi, but currently is funded by various investors. IndieFlix also now has various content deals with other outlets like iTunes, Amazon VOD, Tivo, Netflix, and Hulu. Many of these sites do not accept submissions by individual filmmakers, instead requiring that filmmakers work with sub-distributors with whom these outlets are familiar. IndieFlix acts as that sub-distributor to connect filmmakers with larger online distribution outlets.

IndieFlix's values of transparency and non-exclusivity are of great importance to independent filmmakers, particularly those who have been shut out or burned by major

distributors (who do not tend to emphasize the same values in their distribution agreements). According to Andreen, “IndieFlix is founded by filmmakers and it’s a filmmakers-first company. Everything we do is with the intention of elevating and empowering the interest of the filmmaker.” She continues:

The goal is to get it up there everywhere [on multiple platforms]. So filmmakers get their films out there, and keep their rights, and keep the lion’s share of the money. Our model is very different. We want the filmmakers to make a lot of money because then we can make money. Rather than the studio way where they want to make all the money and whatever’s left they give to the filmmaker. And oftentimes there’s nothing left (quoted in Caddell, 2008).

It is this contrasting and atypical distribution model that makes IndieFlix attractive to many independent filmmakers. Mike Williams, head of acquisitions and filmmaker relations at IndieFlix, notes that the company’s status as independent from the major companies enables it to really help independent filmmakers connect with audiences. “We always try to be as transparent as possible,” says Williams. “One of the cool things about IndieFlix is that we are not some big conglomerate. We are always really hands-on with filmmakers so they are free to call or email.” Filmmakers appreciate IndieFlix’s role as an accessible and transparent company through which to distribute films. Filmmaker Jon Moritsugu, formerly based in Seattle, notes:

They [IndieFlix] are a connection between people like me and bigger entities out there who are really hard to get in to, like iTunes, Netflix, etc. The other cool thing is that they keep 30 percent of the gross, 70 percent goes back to filmmakers. That’s like a pretty rare deal these days. I like that.

Film Baby, an online DVD sales company, used to operate with many of the same values as IndieFlix. Founded in Portland in 2005, the company was partnered with its music division, CD Baby, and provided independent filmmakers an outlet for selling DVDs outside the mainstream distribution system. Both Film Baby and CD Baby,

however, were acquired in 2008 by New Jersey-based company Audio Video Labs, which also owns Disc Makers, a CD and DVD manufacturing division. Film Baby continues to be popular, selling physical DVD copies or downloadable files of over 2,000 different movies, although it does not focus specifically on films produced in Oregon.

Former Film Baby employee Jeff Bugbee and former Film Baby chief operating officer Jamie Chvotkin left Film Baby after Audio Video Labs stepped in, and started the Portland-based online distribution service, IndieBLITZ, in 2009. While the new company does not cater only to Portland filmmakers, it does still contribute to the overall independent film infrastructure in Portland by adding another non-major studio distribution option, one that may be aware of and interested in works by Portland filmmakers. Much like IndieFlix, transparency is central to IndieBLITZ's business model, which is rooted in the founders' roles as filmmakers who have dealt with the dominant distribution system in the past. Bugbee says:

[We're] keeping it small and personal... Part of the reason why I'm so interested in distribution [is because I'm making my own film]. To kind of figure it out as a filmmaker for other filmmakers, to keep transparency in place and to really take on the big guys and try to figure out alternatives that rival just being able to support yourself professionally.

Although Bugbee and Chvotkin claim that their company is "small and personal," they are also working as a label for E1 Entertainment, the largest "independent" music, television and film distributor in the United States, which acts as an aggregator, or entry point, for partnerships with major retail outlets like Wal-Mart, Best Buy, and Target, among others. E1 is owned by Marwyn Investment Management LLP. According to a managing partner at Marwyn, the company "sees a unique opportunity to create value in global entertainment distribution and we have been actively seeking to enter this exciting

sector” (“Marwyn Investment,” 2007). IndieBLITZ’s bid to “take on the big guys” becomes somewhat less forceful in the wake of its partnership with E1.

While distribution companies are continually formed and reshaped, some filmmakers assert control over the distribution of their own films through active self-distribution. This activity’s contribution to the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking may not be as direct or obvious as formal organizations or funding. But self-distribution is a viable option in a distribution climate dominated by Hollywood studios can be adopted by other regional independent filmmakers looking for alternatives to mainstream distribution.

As mentioned previously, Portland filmmakers Kelley Baker and Mike Shiley are two examples of independent filmmakers who have traveled across the United States and beyond to connect with audiences. Baker travels six months out of the year, screening his films and promoting his film instruction services in cities across the U.S. and Europe. Baker likens himself to punk rock bands that go out on tour to promote themselves and sell merchandise like CDs, clothing and posters. “You always hear the whole ‘Oh, we make our films by any means necessary,’” Baker says. “And I always tell people, ‘That’s wrong. You should distribute your films by any means necessary.’” Making personal appearances, teaching workshops and connecting with audiences have enabled him to cultivate a loyal audience that works for him, helping to promote his films, speaking engagements and workshops when he comes through town; they also watch his movies, buy his books, and join his workshops. Baker says:

With some of these places, every time I go back, it gets bigger and bigger and I see a lot of the same faces and they’ll come up and say “Yeah, we were here for *Birddog* and we loved *Gas Café* and now you’ve got *Kicking Bird*”...I’m building

a fan base. That's what the studios don't understand...All they care about is getting their eight dollars, their ten dollars. Like a musician, like a punk band, I want you to come back.

Mike Shiley, a documentary filmmaker from Portland, has also taken his films on the road, connecting with audiences in nontheatrical or semi-theatrical venues, like colleges, performing arts centers and elsewhere. His films have attracted attention from distributors, but some of them, including *Inside Iraq: The Untold Stories* (2004), have been what distributors call unmarketable. Shiley says, "I've always gotten a lot of pushback from potential distributors saying that because the film is so balanced, people don't know how to market it. They can't market it as a liberal film or as a conservative film." However, Shiley found audiences at college campuses and activist organizations. "I didn't really care that they [potential distributors] didn't think the film would sell," he continues. "I knew the film would sell because I'm standing out onstage looking at 500 people that all paid \$10 to come see my film."

At the core of the self-distribution model is the issue of control – over content, revenue and, most importantly, copyright. Too many independent filmmakers have been burned by distributors who bury their films. "Movies have virtually disappeared off the face of the earth that way," says filmmaker Jon Moritsugu. "The filmmaker loses copyright and the distributor doesn't release the movie and the movie's gone." So Moritsugu advises filmmakers to retain copyright: "Whoever owns the copyright controls the commerce of the project...I think as an artist, you definitely have to be versed in these laws." Baker agrees, noting, "I control the rights to everything I do," from his films to his books to the DVDs of his instructional workshops.

As noted in Chapter V, there are increasing numbers of filmmakers who are taking charge of their own distribution, which is in many ways becoming easier thanks to the proliferation of digital distribution outlets. At the very least, more filmmakers are signing non-exclusive distribution deals, which in effect allow them to retain their rights and thus control over their films.

Many film professionals in the Pacific Northwest claim that the region – and Seattle in particular – has the potential to take the reins of these changes and design a distribution model that can really benefit independent filmmakers. With a rapidly changing distribution landscape, there is a multitude of outlets through which audiences watch films, and new models are constantly being tested, as described in Chapter V. High-tech companies in the region may, through their own technological capacity and infrastructure, be able to support the ideas that drive new distribution models, particularly those that deliver content online. Amy Dee of Washington Filmworks notes:

Because we are in Seattle and we do have access to so much technology and so many interesting distribution paradigms, we are perfectly positioned – because we have the talent... We have the technology and we have the infrastructure. So in terms of being a hotbed of opportunity... Seattle specifically and Washington in general are perfectly placed.

The Seattle area is home to Microsoft, RealNetworks, and Amazon.com, with regional offices for Google and Hulu; as well, numerous game companies, like Valve Software (which produces *Half-Life* and the Steam digital games distribution platform), Nintendo, and Screenlife Games (producer of *Scene-It*), are located in the Seattle area. These companies are working hard to lead the games industry in technological innovation, which has potential for the increasingly related film industry.

According to some independent film professionals, this potential for opportunity should be cultivated through networking across industries, especially those who are responsible for building the economic engine of the regional film industry, like Vince Porter of the Governor's Office of Film and Television in Oregon:

[We're] hoping that the answers might come here by filmmakers not only talking amongst themselves and hearing about success stories but also getting them to talk to other industries that might be able to give them answers. One example of that would be talking to the local tech community or software development companies and figuring out what they can be doing to help provide new platforms for distribution...How cool would it be if someone from Oregon figured that out?

James Keblas of the Seattle Office of Film + Music also sees the potential of the Pacific Northwest's role in developing new distribution models. Keblas notes:

In addition to creating connections just within the film community, we're also trying to create connections across sectors, so musicians in the music community knowing what the filmmakers are doing; and the filmmakers making sure that they know what the digital media folks are doing; and filmmakers making sure they know what music is doing. It's my belief that these three things are all happening together, and they're converging ever so slightly year after year. We have a lot of the assets here, on how the future looks like with these kinds of converging activities.

Of course, it must be noted that the *potential* for new distribution models is not the same as the *reality* of new distribution models, but the Pacific Northwest film community harbors optimism regarding its possible role in whatever the new order of film distribution might be.

Exhibition Infrastructure

Because the distribution landscape is changing to reflect the increasing potential of online film viewing, the influence and necessity of theatrical exhibition is not as integral to a film's distribution plan as it once was. But exhibition venues still connect

filmmakers with audiences. Locally-owned theaters may be especially interested in screening locally-produced films when they can with the intention of supporting the local filmmaking community. However, the bulk of theaters in both Portland and Seattle are owned by major chains like Regal Cinemas, AMC Theatres and Cinemark. Even those theaters that are friendly to independent films may be owned by national chains, like Landmark Theaters, and tend to screen major studio films (which are usually distributed by a studio's Indiewood division, like Focus Features or Sony Pictures Classics). Small repertory theaters and film centers are more often the venues for regional independent films, as are annual regional film festivals.

Venues in Portland friendly to independent cinema include the Hollywood Theatre (owned by Film Action Oregon), the Clinton Street Theater, Cinema 21, and the Northwest Film Center (NWFC). These venues generally take an active role in supporting local filmmakers through their programming and participation in film festivals. According to NWFC director Bill Foster:

We're interested in what goes on in the region, so we're more about that region, being a regionally focused thing....I don't know what percentage is [regional] of our exhibition program, but besides the Northwest [Film and Video] Festival, we show a lot of regional work, in a way that a lot of the organizations around the country don't.

One of these regionally-focused programs is Northwest Tracking, which screens works from around the Northwest, including Oregon, Washington, Montana, Alaska, Idaho and British Columbia. This program "offers testimony to the creativity and talent in our flourishing media arts community" (Northwest Film Center, 2010). Foster notes, "We try to operate more as an advocate, almost the way a commercial gallery might for a painter,

an advocate for filmmakers, trying to get their work shown, trying to help them get funding.”

Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB), the state’s public broadcasting station, also airs some independently and locally produced films on programs like *Oregon Lens*. In the early 1990s, OPB sustained criticism from regional filmmakers (like animator Joanna Priestley) because it did not air locally-produced films. Bill Foster, executive director of the Northwest Film Center, commented, “I think Oregon Public Broadcasting has the potential to be the most influential cultural force in the state” (quoted in Schulberg, 1993). Partly in response to these criticisms, former Vice President of Programming, Tom Doggett, spearheaded an effort in the 1990s to include more locally produced programming on OPB. Since the station has limited resources to produce programming in-house, it has aired finished films that were produced by independent Oregon filmmakers, such as Dan Viens’ *On the Wing* (2008).

Many of Seattle’s theaters periodically screen locally-produced films, such as the theaters in the Landmark Theater chain (Egyptian, Neptune, Harvard Exit, Seven Gables, etc.), but only a handful of theaters are independently owned and therefore flexible in booking local films. These include the Northwest Film Forum (NWFF), the Grand Illusion, and the Central Cinema. Of these, the NWFF is the strongest and most dedicated forum for regional independent filmmaking. Through its production-oriented programs, the NWFF has been a catalyst for local production, and the organization has achieved a national reputation for its strengths in programming top-notch independent films. Seattle screenwriter Charles Mudede notes, “They [the NWFF] gave Seattle a legitimate venue for independent filmmaking.” Furthermore, the NWFF is connected to similar theaters in

other cities because of its reputation and thus a screening at the NWFF “can get your name into larger circuits of distribution in the United States for indie films. That’s their biggest and most important achievement,” says Mudede.

As noted previously, the Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF) is the largest and most visible festival in the Pacific Northwest and among the largest in the country. It runs a program to showcase regional works called Northwest Connections, which includes approximately 30 short and feature length films. In 2009, Lynn Shelton’s *Humpday* was chosen as the festival’s Centerpiece Gala film, a high-profile event accompanied by a catered reception and fundraiser for Cinema Seattle, the parent organization for SIFF. Despite these efforts, SIFF still tends to program mainly non-regional films (and often mainstream Hollywood films), especially for its opening and closing night galas. Former Executive Director of NWFF Michael Seiwerath said in 2005, “I’d love for the Seattle International Film Festival to announce that in five years its opening night film will be a local film...I think that would be a huge thing for local filmmaking” (Steinbacher, 2005).

Seattle’s public television station, KCTS, aired a program, *About Us*, from 2004 to 2009 to showcase locally-produced independent films. It was replaced by *Reel NW*, which “airs intriguing films from, or about, our own community,” and aired the music documentary *Wheedle’s Groove* (Jennifer Maas, 2009) as its first film (KCTS, 2011). *Reel NW* is part of an initiative proposed by CEO Moss Bresnahan to “lead Channel 9 into the next era of local media” (Banel, 2010).

There are tangible elements that contribute to the regional filmmaking infrastructure, like financing entities, production facilities, distribution companies and exhibition venues. This chapter has thus far outlined these infrastructural components that facilitate and build the filmmaking community in Portland and Seattle. There are also aspects of the regional infrastructure that are less concrete but no less significant in the ways in which they contribute to the overall fabric of the filmmaking communities in these cities. These include perceptions and values pertaining to quality of life, creativity, and size.

Intangible Components of Infrastructure, or Why I Moved (Back) Here: The Appeal of the Pacific Northwest

Many Pacific Northwest film professionals have also worked at some point in their careers in the main American independent filmmaking centers of Los Angeles and New York. They have returned to Portland and Seattle, and others have always resided in these cities, because of certain personal and professional conditions that exist there. Filmmakers living in Portland and Seattle typically prefer to balance work and home life, placing more emphasis on family and community than is often possible in the dog-eat-dog pace in larger filmmaking centers like Hollywood. While there are certainly more professional film opportunities in Hollywood, many film workers favor a balanced life that is more the norm in Portland and Seattle. Film professionals living in the Pacific Northwest acknowledge that the area is a different filmmaking environment, with different priorities and resulting opportunities. Certainly, filmmakers centered in Portland and Seattle are likely going to be realistic about the types of filmmaking opportunities in

these locales. Otherwise, they would probably relocate to Los Angeles or New York, where there are more opportunities to work on top-level projects, make money or achieve fame. As NWFC director Bill Foster notes:

Some of them [local filmmakers] have aspirations to quote un-quote “grow up” and be Hollywood filmmakers, but in general, most of the people don’t care about that. They could care less. And if they really wanted to do that, they wouldn’t live here. In fact, I would advise them, if they really want to do that, don’t live here.

Despite this perception, both Seattle and Portland have been recognized in recent years as havens for creative, talented people, and are especially attractive to young people just starting out. Several studies (e.g., Florida, 2008; Cortright, 2004) have examined what people – and especially young people – look for in terms of places to live and how cities can retain that talent pool. According to Joseph Cortright (2004), talented people seek out more than just a solid work environment in which to live. “These people will choose locations to live based not solely on productive considerations, but on amenities and consumption opportunities, community, social and family considerations.” Seattle ranks as number 21 on a list of the top 25 cities for Gen Ys (people born between 1980 and 1989) to live (McConnon, 2009), and *Fast Company Magazine* listed Seattle as its City of the Year for 2009, an accolade based mainly on the perception of creativity in the city (Stein, 2009). Novelist Garth Stein writes:

This is a destination, a meeting place, for creative people. There’s something about this area. The weather...The sense of purpose of those who have settled here. Perhaps all of us who have found this city have, to some degree, aligned our priorities: Innovation is imperative; quality of life is crucial (Stein, 2009).

And despite a shaky economic outlook at the end of the 2000s, these cities continued to attract and retain creative talent. Ceramics artist Heidi Sowa, who worked on Laika Studios’ *Coraline*, moved to Portland in 2009 and plans to stay, noting, “It

seems a small enough but a big enough place... It's easy to meet people, and the art community is cohesive" (Associated Press, 2009). With creative talent settling in the Pacific Northwest, there are increased opportunities for the filmmaking community to blossom. Producer Tara Johnson-Medinger, who also runs POW-Fest, says, "I think there is a huge creative presence here in Portland and people are eager to do the work."

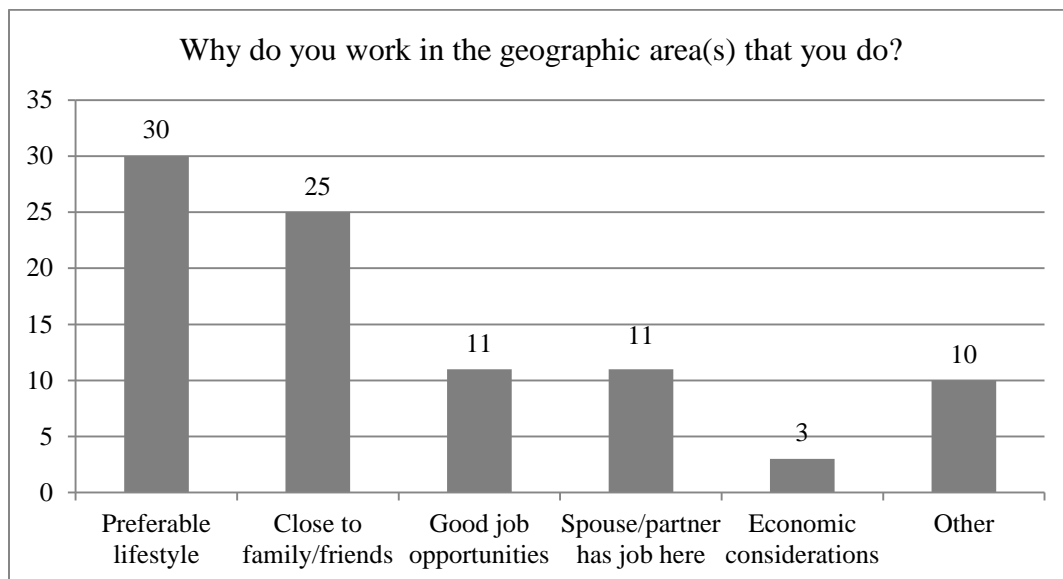
Animator Joanna Priestley concurs, "There are so many incredibly talented people here, it's really inspiring. It makes such a huge difference." Will Vinton reflects on his choice to maintain his animation studio's headquarters in Portland over the years:

I've thought a lot about what kind of art and what kind of company we've created. Would it have been as successful or more successful somewhere else? And I have to say I think it had the unique ability to be successful and autonomous and independent by virtue of it being in Portland. Portland has for many years had great artists. It draws people with an artistic sensibility. Because of a lot of little things going on. In terms of theater. In terms of literature... Part of it is climate, I think. It's just a place that feels like you're not really lost in it like a really huge city. But it still has cultural things and so on. So I think it appeals to artists.

This study's survey examined reasons why respondents choose to work in a specific geographic region (all but three respondents work primarily in Oregon or Washington). Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents chose "preferable lifestyle" as one of the primary reasons for working in one of these geographic areas, while "close to family/friends" ranks a close second as a motivating factor (Chart 5). Vince Porter of the Oregon film office moved to Oregon for the quality of life and family-oriented environment. "I have a family with two kids now and I wasn't so excited about the prospects of raising them in L.A.," he says. Others were equally as concerned about raising their families in Southern California, like Oregon producer Gary Kout: "I had one daughter [when we moved to Ashland, Oregon] who was at the age where I'd like to let

her go outside and play and I'd like to let her walk to her friend's house, but I can't [in Los Angeles]." Executive Director of POW-Fest Tara Johnson-Medinger felt similarly: "I'm from Oregon and my husband is from Oregon as well, and we really wanted to get back to Portland somehow ... We were both really feeling like we wanted to come home and be closer to family and start raising our own family."

Chart 5: From among survey respondents who work in Washington or Oregon, reasons why respondents work in the geographic area(s) that they do



Source: Author's survey

Some film professionals cite other differences between Los Angeles and the Pacific Northwest as the primary reasons why they have remained or settled in Portland or Seattle. Will Vinton notes:

Los Angeles is such an industry town. Everything is eat, sleep, breathe filmmaking. You didn't have any of that in a place like here in Portland. You have people who have interests in mountain biking, waterskiing, outdoors things, those types of things. Cultural things. Artistic things. People had other careers as artists. All of those things, I think, contributed back to the people we worked with.

One might wonder if a person's filmmaking career can be productive or successful enough without living in Los Angeles or New York. The filmmaking communities in regional locations like Portland or Seattle are not as deeply rooted as Hollywood, and regional locations do not tend to attract top-level projects. However, some film professionals who live here have already established their careers and can live anywhere. For instance, film publicist Lyla Foggia had a lengthy career based in Los Angeles, but now works on a freelance basis. "It just didn't make sense anymore to be down there [in Los Angeles]," she says. "Everything is so spread out, takes so long to get around. And, you know, it just gets to the point where you're like, 'What kind of life do you want to live?'" Similarly, producer David Cress, who frequently works on Gus Van Sant's productions, says, "There is an argument that I might be able to prosper more moving [to Los Angeles or New York]. Having some success making television commercials and music videos, I've worked a lot in Los Angeles. I worked in New York...I think that I have a unique appreciation for how great it is here [in Portland]."

Professionally, Seattle and Portland have a lot to offer that is appealing to film workers and indigenous film productions. Some cite the community feel to these cities, noting that these relatively small filmmaking communities offer easy networking opportunities. "Portland's such a small town. You meet somebody and suddenly you know ten other people," comments filmmaker and film instructor Colin O'Neill. Producer Brett Cranford, who is based in Los Angeles but frequently works in Oregon, says:

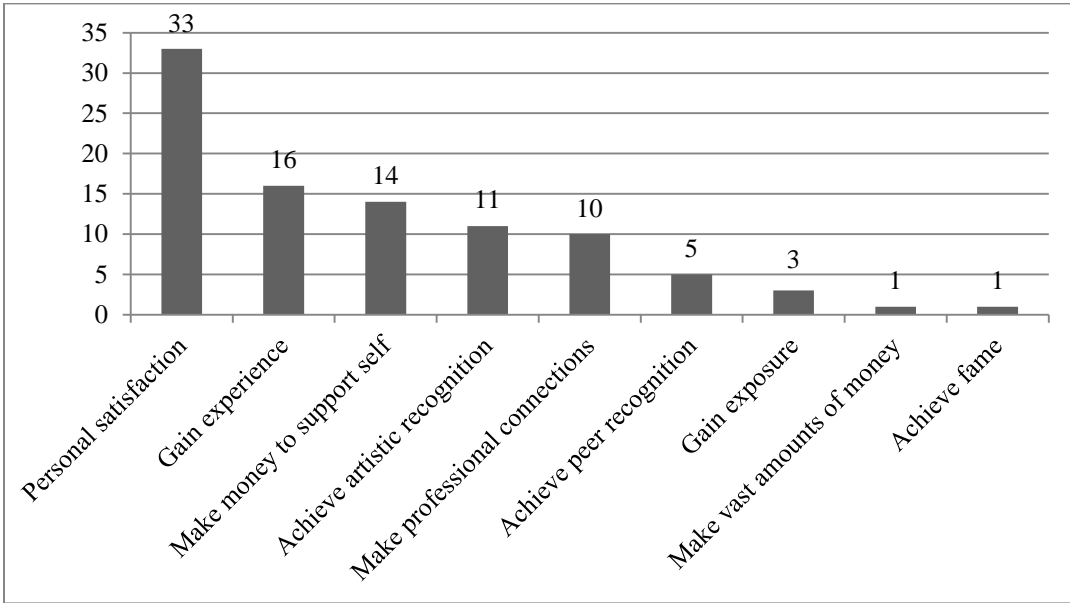
In Oregon, there are talented professionals here, but it's a relatively small community so you kind of know everybody involved in film. It's nice because there is a kind of a camaraderie amongst them that helps with the filming process because so many of us have worked together so many times that there's an efficiency that is caused by that.

The size of filmmaking communities in the Pacific Northwest also holds some caché for well-known filmmakers. Linas Phillips, director of Sundance Film Festival selection *Bass Ackwards* (2010), notes, “In Seattle, you’re a big fish in a small pond. In a great way. People just know who you are.”

The motivations for working in filmmaking in a regional location like Portland or Seattle are varied, but most are rooted in the desire to engage in something that fulfills a personal creative drive. Filmmaking is not just a job for many of these people. Over half of survey respondents noted that the majority of their filmmaking work is meant to accomplish personal or artistic goals, with a smaller proportion of their filmmaking work accomplishing financial goals. This indicates that most film workers surveyed here prefer the potential creative and artistic fulfillment offered by filmmaking work, while financial fulfillment is secondary (or perhaps less realistic in the regional independent filmmaking context).

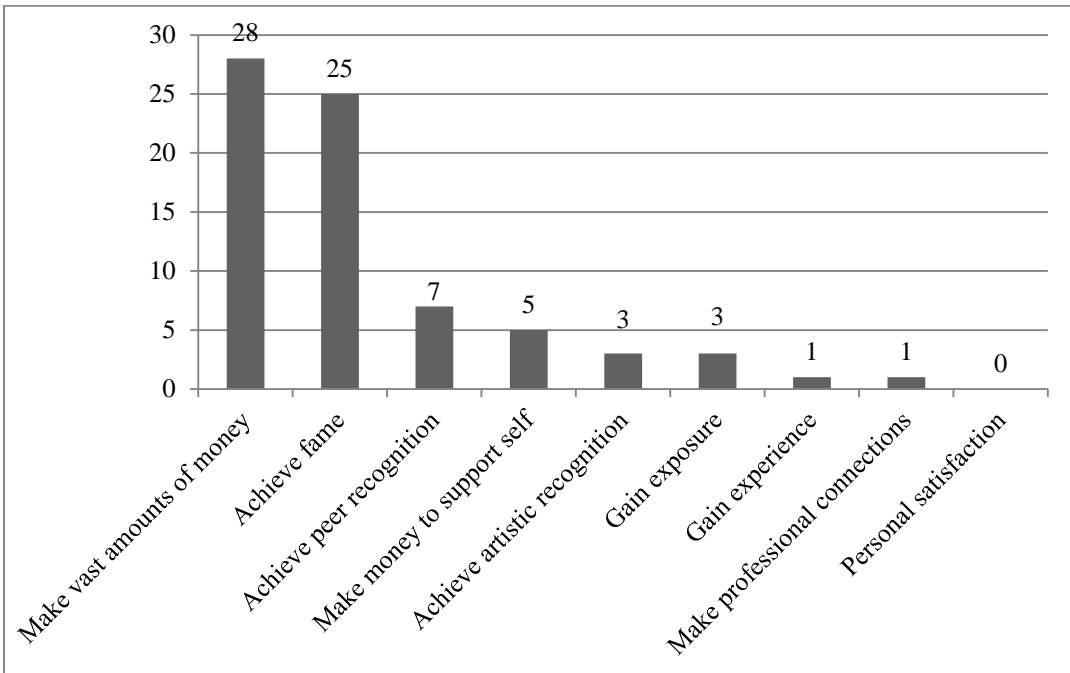
Eighty percent of survey respondents cited “personal satisfaction” as the top priority for filmmaking over and above other categories (Chart 6). Nearly a third of respondents cited artistic recognition as another top priority, while 35 percent hoped to have a productive enough career to be able to support themselves on film work alone. Not surprisingly, the lowest priorities for these film workers were those motivations that often run contrary to artistic and creative goals. Here, survey respondents cited “make vast amounts of money” and “achieve fame” as the lowest priorities in their work (Chart 7).

Chart 6: Film workers' motivations for filmmaking: Motivations of top priority for those who work primarily in Washington or Oregon



Source: Author's survey

Chart 7: Film workers' motivations for filmmaking: Motivations of low or no priority for those who work primarily in Washington or Oregon (Source: Author's survey)



Source: Author's survey

Most film professionals based in Portland or Seattle have made a conscious choice to reside here. For the most part, they recognize that the filmmaking community and its priorities are different from those in independent filmmaking centers like Los Angeles or New York, and have, to a certain extent, adjusted their expectations accordingly. Their enthusiasm for their work, coupled with their dedication to the region, has contributed to the development of an infrastructure that supports regional independent filmmaking.

Conclusion

The filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle have grown in size and reputation over the past decade or more. A range of services, plus education and networking opportunities, have facilitated this growth. These include key organizations like the Oregon Media Production Association and the Northwest Film Center in Portland, and the Northwest Film Forum and the Independent Feature Project in Seattle. As well, governmental involvement through film incentive programs, administered by the Oregon Governor's Office of Film and Television and Washington Filmworks, has attracted financial and technological resources from out-of-state, which in turn benefit indigenous filmmakers. These organizations mainly function to support film production, while film distribution continues to be a difficult area for most regional independent filmmakers. There are, however, some locally-administered alternatives to mainstream, conventional film distribution, such as online distribution platforms like IndieFlix and IndieBLITZ. Some filmmakers have turned to self-distribution to connect with audiences. Reliable exhibition venues for independent films are relatively scarce in a chain-

dominated landscape, with only a handful of theaters in each city open to screening independent films that often do not draw much revenue, although public television offers a venue for regional independent film exhibition.

The infrastructure for regional independent filmmaking is typically based on objectives of community, networking and facilitating professionalism. As the discussion in this chapter has made clear, the infrastructure in Portland and Seattle has helped the filmmaking communities of these cities to achieve those goals. However, independent filmmakers still find it difficult to make films. While the infrastructure offers components that support filmmaking, there are also challenges, a number of which conflict directly and indirectly with the support structures. The next chapter is an analysis of some of the most pressing challenges experienced by regional independent filmmakers, focusing especially on Portland and Seattle.

CHAPTER VIII
CHALLENGES IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF REGIONAL FILM
IN PORTLAND AND SEATTLE

Introduction

Much like any segment of the arts and culture community, the regional independent film industry faces numerous challenges in its ability to produce and distribute work. These issues become apparent as we begin to analyze the systems, practices, policies and perceptions of the regional film community. Many of these obstacles are easily recognizable, but other challenges are so embedded in the infrastructure that they have become naturalized and therefore often go unrecognized by those who are constrained by them. These challenges can be internally or externally produced, and can have direct or indirect impacts. The most salient obstacles for regional independent filmmaking are likely to have direct impacts, and they originate both internally and externally. Some tangible challenges, like funding or access to equipment, can be addressed and resolved, but it must be noted that there are also intangible challenges to independent filmmaking. These challenges are often more difficult to overcome because they may be myths and expectations about the nature of independent filmmaking that are perpetuated and ingrained.

This chapter analyzes the various challenges that regional independent filmmaking faces. Many of these obstacles are common to any regional independent community, while others are specific to Portland or Seattle. These challenges include:

financing, distribution, myths about independent filmmaking, the business of filmmaking, professional and amateur filmmakers, film labor, policies, and interpersonal and interorganizational challenges.

Financing

Independent filmmakers were asked in this study's survey about the challenges that independent filmmakers face. The issue of financing was cited as the most pressing problem, as evidenced by these survey responses: "sufficient funding"; "dwindling funding sources"; "\$\$\$ shortage"; "raising funds is very tough"; and so on. As noted in Chapter V, the obstacles to obtaining funding for independent films are numerous and the kinds of support that were available to filmmakers in the 1990s and early 2000s have dried up in the wake of the economic recession that began in 2007. Most hedge fund investors and venture capitalists are gone, as are most of the Indiewood divisions of major studios that were once friendly towards independent filmmakers looking for partnerships. Even those entities with cash to invest are hesitant to align with a director or producer who does not have a solid reputation.

No matter the state of the economy, independent film financing is a difficult proposition in the Pacific Northwest. There are few regionally-based sources that have money for more than a modest contribution and, according to Susan Haley, the former marketing director of the GOFT and now owner of an independent film payroll services agency, those who do have money to invest "rarely have any knowledge of film." This situation creates its own set of problems. Robin Oppenheimer, the former Executive Director of 911 Media Arts in Seattle, notes that a huge challenge to filmmaking is the

lack of “experienced investors that know how to invest, because unfortunately there’s a cycle of naïve investors getting burned, and then the next group of filmmakers goes to those people, and they go, ‘Forget it.’” Marty Oppenheimer, owner of Oppenheimer Cine Rentals, concurs:

As far as investors go, most of the investors that we see in films up here are not film-savvy investors. They’re doctors and dentists and lawyers and they’re simply not film-savvy investors and therefore they really don’t have the ability to judge what they’re getting into... What these so-called investors usually do not understand is the background of the industry. Ninety percent of the films they might invest in, you will never see your money back. Why would you invest in a film that way?

Yet filmmaking continues to be an appealing investment opportunity for some people. Some investors want to support artistic work, while others want to associate with the perceived glamor of the industry. Seattle is slightly better off than Portland in terms of independent film financing options, with eight Fortune 500 companies in 2010 and many other software companies that are interested in what the independent film industry is doing. As well, many of these companies (especially Microsoft) have created millionaires, who may be looking to invest in creative projects. “I think you would probably be better off being a regional filmmaker in a place like Seattle,” notes producer David Cress. “In Seattle, where you find that there is [sic] many many more times the capital base, it’s probably easier” to secure funding. Seattle screenwriter and film critic Charles Mudede notes that private equity is nearly the only option for independent film financing, as bank loans and other organizational funding have disappeared. And with only a handful of investors, there is much overlap from project to project, as noted by Seattle film financing consultant Elizabeth Heile. “Look at the footer on movie posters –

they're all the same funders. It would be nice for investors to only get called once a year to invest.”

While Seattle filmmakers often tap money from Microsofties and other investors, Portland is home to only two Fortune 500 companies: Nike, the sports apparel company, and Precision Castparts, which manufactures metal components for aerospace, power generation and industrial markets. Portland therefore presumably offers fewer potential rich investors. According to Cress, who has worked on numerous relatively well-funded films with Gus Van Sant, corporate consolidation in the 1990s eliminated many of the potential funding partners for filmmaking, which has continued to ripple through the Portland film community:

That had a real negative impact. I think that will continue to have an impact on filmmaking. And some of the things like philanthropy. It [Portland] is not a rich place, it's not a rich state. Finding people with excess capital that are willing to invest in films is very hard here. Plus there's not a culture of investment.

Independent filmmakers in Seattle and Portland also cite difficulty in finding film funding from other sources that are intended to be more sustainable. One survey respondent criticizes “the lack of grant support (compared to other countries) especially in production stages,” while another disapproves of “organizations that promise to help fund projects and then the hoops required to receive [funding] are nearly impossible.”

The funding infrastructure that is currently in place for regional independent filmmaking is ill-equipped to sustain and nurture the filmmaking community, as granting agencies are small and tend to be quite bureaucratic, while regionally-based individuals with money to invest in films are typically unfamiliar with the nature of film financing, therefore creating a tenuous environment for a sustainable funding model.

Distribution

While independent filmmakers cite financing as a primary challenge to film production, they also cite distribution as a near-insurmountable obstacle in the filmmaking process. The relationship between the filmmaker and the distributor is the most power-heavy relationship in filmmaking. As discussed previously, film distribution in the U.S. is heavily controlled by Hollywood studios that possess an oligopolistic hold on this phase of the filmmaking process. The conventional model of film financing (upon which many filmmakers still rely) is to secure money from distributors in pre-sales, negative pickups, or other distribution-related financing. As producer David Cress says, “It used to be the film model was to make your film, or even before making your film, maybe sell some rights to a company, to foreign markets. They would give you the money to make the film. Or complete the film.” That model also meant transferring control to the distributor, who would then decide how much effort to put into marketing a film, booking it into theaters, releasing it on home video, sending it overseas, and so on, based on its projected revenue generation.

Independent filmmakers are the weakest players in this relationship, as they have little clout, reputation, or money with which to work. With a troubled economy at the end of the 2000s, studios streamlined operations and tightened their bottom lines. “We saw them [the major studios] close all the independent distribution angles,” says David Cress. “Paramount Vantage went out of business. Warner Brothers’ specialty went out of business.” Seattle filmmaker Ward Serrill echoes many other filmmakers interviewed or surveyed for this project when he says, “We’ve still got this difficulty of the need for distribution. And there are only five companies that handle 95 percent of the distribution

of the film world. That's the problem." It is felt that major Hollywood distributors – who one survey respondent calls “predatory” and another calls “exploitative” – have the upper hand in choosing films to distribute. IndieBLITZ co-founder Jeff Bugbee notes, “There’s definitely a lot more competition, so getting the attention of especially the bigger distributors – it’s basically impossible, let alone getting an advance if you have a finished film. That’s really what it comes down to.” The major studios have the advantage in theatrical distribution, which is, according to film distribution veteran Ira Deutchman, “not going away because people still want to see a film with other people.” Most independent filmmakers must take one of two paths: they can either accept the distributor’s terms, or they can self-distribute. And the distributor’s terms will likely not be made explicit until the film is finished. Marty Oppenheimer, owner of Oppenheimer Cine Rentals in Seattle, says:

On any of these low budget films, distributors have no real interest until there’s a finished film. And then they may massage it but until you have a film for me, you’re not going to get anywhere...I’ve listened to people say “I’ve been to so-and-so distributor and they’re really interested in the film.” ... If you’ve finished the film, they’ll look at it and make a decision at that point. There’s no commitment anywhere else along the way.

Even a production company with a track record can face manipulative distributors, as evidenced by the case of *Outsourced* (John Jeffcoat, 2006), a film produced in Seattle by ShadowCatcher Entertainment. ShadowCatcher is a production company based in Seattle with an office in New York City, and is run by local executive producer David Skinner and producer Tom Gorai. The company’s other producer is based in Nevada and Los Angeles, and has extensive experience in the motion picture and television industries. As discussed in Chapter VI, the company produced Sherman

Alexie's *Smoke Signals* in 1998, which was distributed by Miramax. Miramax expressed interest in distributing *Outsourced* but the terms were, as Skinner put it, "insulting"

(Arnold, 2007). He continues:

The deal allowed for a theatrical release in one city only: Seattle. We would have to put up all the P and A (prints and advertising) and then recoup our investment on a 10 percent return, after which we would split any future profits 50-50. The studio had a lucrative cable deal in place, but we wouldn't see any of those profits. Meanwhile, they would invest nothing in the ad campaign. We would have to raise that capital ourselves (quoted in Arnold, 2007).

ShadowCatcher opted to begin self-distributing the film, although the company still followed a conventional distribution plan. It raised private equity money to finance distribution; hired connected publicists in major cities around the country to assist in the film's marketing; booked the film into chain theaters; and sold rights to the film for overseas, cable and television through independent sales agents. While Skinner intended to break the mold in terms of being beholden to major distributors, he was still working within the dominant system that requires money and connections.⁵²

The bottlenecks created by major studios' dominance of film distribution have generated discontent among regional independent filmmakers who are angered by the limitations of the dominant distribution system. Even when a distribution deal materializes, the terms still favor the distributor. With the help of a producer's representative and sales agent, Ward Serrill signed a distribution deal with Miramax for his film, *The Heart of the Game*, in 2005. But Serrill warns:

Don't think you're getting distribution, because basically you're in a pool of sharks. I wish I could say otherwise ... And what they care most about is money. That's why they're interested in your film – to make money. There are very few

⁵² *Outsourced* was also turned into a primetime broadcast television show of the same name, airing its first episode on NBC in September 2010.

people who are doing it just for the art's sake once you get into the business of film.

Myths about Independent Film

Independent filmmakers are vulnerable to being exploited and manipulated in distribution deals in large part because of misconceptions and unrealistic expectations about distribution. One of the most powerful challenges to regional independent filmmaking is one of the least tangible – namely, the myths about independent film that are perpetuated in the media, among filmmakers, by audiences, and by the established mainstream industry. There are several misconceptions that film professionals cite as being major obstacles to their ability to work. Many of these myths are rooted in “the way things used to be” (like independent film distribution) and serve to benefit those who continue to wield the most power in the film industry – the mainstream Hollywood studios. These misconceptions include the myth of the independent film Cinderella and the definition of “independent film.”

Myth of the Independent Film Cinderella

A popular narrative about independent filmmakers is the rags-to-riches Cinderella story. An unknown and emerging filmmaker produces an ultra-low budget film, which gets accepted into the most notorious independent film festival, the Sundance Film Festival. Late into the night, a number of high-profile distributors fight over rights to the film, and finally one is declared the winner with a cash offer to the filmmaker of a few million dollars. The filmmaker is suddenly transformed into a celebrity, having become a millionaire after pouring his (usually, this narrative has a male lead) heart and soul and

credit card spending limit into an off-beat and quirky independent film. The filmmaker is then swept off to Hollywood to accept any number of offers to direct studio pictures.

This narrative echoes the concept of the American Dream, a term first coined by John Truslow Adams (1931) in his book, *The Epic of America*. The American Dream is the conviction that anyone can overcome boundaries imposed by class, race, gender, socioeconomics and culture to achieve their wildest dreams. As Adams puts it, the American Dream is “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man” (p. 415). Cullen (2003) notes that this is a forceful myth in the American psyche and has long defined people’s decisions and actions, which are further reinforced by mainstream media and advertising and “enshrined as our national motto” (p. 5). The Dream (American, Coast, Cinderella or whatever its appellation) is problematic because it can serve as “an opiate that lulls people into ignoring the structural barriers that prevent collective as well as personal advancement” (Cullen, 2003, p. 6).

Furthermore, Cullen offers a re-envisioning of the American Dream, what he terms “the dream of the Coast,” or sudden upward mobility springing out of instant celebrity and riches. Schudson writes, “The dream of the Coast grows out of the gold rush, the gambling epitomized by Las Vegas, the cult of personality (rather than character) that Cullen identifies with Hollywood” (p. 567). In independent filmmaking, this dream or myth has developed and has grown stronger over the past 20 years. The legacy started with Steven Soderbergh, whose *sex, lies and videotape* appeared at the 1989 Sundance Film Festival, and continued with *The Blair Witch Project*, which was purchased by Artisan Entertainment in 1999 for \$1.1 million. Other influential and well-known examples of unknown filmmakers producing films and securing distribution deals

from studios include Robert Rodriguez and *El Mariachi*, Kevin Smith and *Clerks*, and Quentin Tarantino and *Reservoir Dogs*. Part of the narrative includes assurances for the filmmaker that the final step of filmmaking – marketing and distribution – will be taken care of, leaving the filmmaker to produce his or her next film. For instance, Portland-area filmmaker Tom Bertling hopes that someday Bob Weinstein (formerly of Miramax and presently of Weinstein Brothers) will come knocking on his door asking to distribute his film because “after Bob purchases the film, he’d be handling most of the marketing/distributing aspect of the film, freeing me up time to start on my next project immediately since I’d also have the cash to do so from the sale of the film.”

Many in the independent film community point out that this dream is unrealistic.

As former director of Seattle’s 911 Media Arts Robin Oppenheimer says:

They [many independent filmmakers] live in this isolated bubble... They still live in the ’80s idea of independent filmmaking, where oh, you make a little film, you put it in the festival circuit, you get attention, you get into Sundance, and you got it made. That’s such a myth... those are powerful stories.

Portland filmmaker Kelley Baker agrees. “Too many filmmakers... [are] waiting to get a big check. And everything’s going to be great. And we’ll get into the Sundance Film Festival, which is a joke and a lie, and everything will be great.” The festival’s reputation and success stories have inadvertently raised filmmakers’ hopes for their films, and Washington Filmworks Executive Director Amy Dee cautions against bringing these unrealistic expectations to any festival. “It shouldn’t be that [your] goal is that [your] film will sell,” Dee advises filmmakers, “because it’s not that realistic anymore. You don’t see the frenzies like *Blair Witch* anymore.” Dee recommends establishing more realistic

outcomes from attending Sundance or other film festivals, like “finding an agent, pitching your project, [and] finding studio execs.”

The myth of the Cinderella filmmaker is perpetuated in the press because the rags-to-riches story is poignant and can be inspiring, both for the general public and for the filmmaking community. Media arts centers began highlighting stories about their own members in the 1980s, as a way to draw attention to their work. “We told those success stories and the mainstream press picked up on them,” says Robin Oppenheimer. She continues:

And it happened, the one in ten thousand people... That’s their story. And that’s always the Cinderella story that everyone wants to believe is going to happen to them... People love those myths, and they want to really believe that they’ve got that magical [element]... People think that if they’ve got enough talent, and people see their work, they’re going to become the next Susan Boyle [a contestant on the reality television show *Britain’s Got Talent* in 2009]. Not necessarily true.

Myth of “Independent Film”

As discussed in Chapter IV, the definition of “independent film” is subject to interpretation depending on who is using the phrase and how they are using it. The lack of clarity over what constitutes an independent film, particularly for financiers, distributors and exhibitors, creates challenges for truly independent filmmakers. One survey respondent notes:

So many so-called indie films that are released aren’t really that at all. They are made with a million dollars or more under the umbrella of larger studios, who are taking risky projects and holding them at arm’s length. There needs to be more of a focus on the truly indie films and getting them out to the public.

Another respondent says, “The film festivals that were designed to help independent filmmakers are now over run by studios and celebrity. This makes it virtually impossible for a real independent with no connections to bring a film to light. It’s very upsetting.”

As previously discussed, independent films are often pushed to the side or forced out of the traditional venues for spotlighting independent films, like film festivals. Meanwhile, filmmakers are offered advice about making a film marketable in order to be competitive with films with bigger budgets and stars. As publicist Lyla Foggia points out, “You [independent filmmakers] are actually competing also with studio pictures... [so] you need to basically look like a big film.” Seattle-based film financing consultant Elizabeth Heile recommends, “If a film has shortcomings, you need to get other things that are marketable.” Here, the question of marketing and business savvy comes into play, as filmmakers in regional communities may not approach the business of filmmaking with the same values and objectives as Hollywood (discussed below). In addition, studio films posing as independent films are cluttering the marketplace, making it difficult for independent films to succeed.

In order to compete with Hollywood’s “independent” films, some people recommend that filmmakers need to become more professional and hone their skills in the business of filmmaking, as discussed in the next section.

The Business of Filmmaking

The business of film is subject to multiple interpretations that conflict when some filmmakers focus on the artistry and creativity of filmmaking, and others emphasize the business aspect. In light of the changes in the contemporary distribution landscape, some

argue that filmmakers should become more versed in business practices. Film publicist Lyla Foggia says, “I’ve never met a filmmaker who didn’t just want to make movies,” but the reality of contemporary independent filmmaking is such that filmmakers, in Foggia’s opinion, need to be competent in developing business plans and marketing, as well. “It’s a Darwinian world now,” says Foggia. She continues:

It really is survival of the fittest. I should say of the marketing savviest. And filmmakers, some of them are really not happy about this...I find that many of them are still thinking that all they have to do is sell the picture and they’ll just work on the next [film]....And it’s a big awakening.

This awakening is indicative of the incongruity among the perceptions of filmmakers in the regional independent filmmaking context. Some, as Foggia suggests, just want to make movies. They do not want to bother with business plans and marketing. Furthermore, they may not plan for costs that are not directly involved with production.

Producer Brett Cranford says:

I think a lot of the time where films run into problems is blowing all their funding on the production itself and not reserving money for postproduction....A lot of times I think filmmakers ... are so focused on making the film itself that they forget that they need funding for post-production and for marketing of that picture.

But other independent film professionals, particularly those who are working to create a sustainable film *industry* in Portland or Seattle, emphasize the need for independent filmmakers to become true professionals by anticipating the full life of their films, from financing to production to distribution. It is argued that this will enable people to make money from filmmaking. Washington Filmworks Executive Director Amy Dee says, “[Filmmaking] is a business. It shouldn’t necessarily be just about a passion project. You can make a passion project, but how are you going to get it out into

the market and how are you going to make money doing it?” The executive director of SAG’s Seattle branch, Dena Beatty, agrees that filmmakers need to be encouraged and educated about being professional:

I think we have to get the message out to everybody in the industry that to be professional, if you're an employer, you have to pay people. You have to go through making a business plan. You have to think about how you make it profitable, just like you would with any other company. Having a marketing plan, having a budget, figuring out how you're going to get the kind of talent, whatever talent that may be to do the job and what kind of talent can you afford?

For GOFT Executive Director Vince Porter, this means “paying the crew, even if it’s minimum wage, using best practices in filmmaking, like they’re doing proper insurance, they are running their employees through payroll, they have the proper company set up.”

Independent filmmaking in Portland and Seattle faces challenges in achieving ideal business practices because of numerous factors. Many film professionals have previously worked in major independent filmmaking centers like Los Angeles or New York, and when they relocate or return to Portland or Seattle, they bring certain expectations of how the film industry should operate and how films should perform, based on their experiences in Hollywood or elsewhere. But, as Lacey Leavitt, President of IFP/Seattle, says, “The tricky thing about independent film is that a lot of times you can’t escape the fact that it is art *and* commerce.” For independent filmmakers, their work does not sit comfortably or neatly in the profit-driven atmosphere of Hollywood, but most do hope to make at least a small amount of money from their films.

People have different motivations for being involved in filmmaking, which result in varying expectations and definitions of a film’s success. “Some people can make films with their credit card or really cheaply rented equipment, and just make the films and be

really happy to show them to whatever little theaters will show them. That's fine," says Leavitt. She continues:

I do feel like you have a responsibility to [others] if you're going to raise \$3 million. You should be raising it because you think you can get it back or you believe that the film is going to capitalize on something that hasn't been said before that people are responding to... I mean frankly so many people have seen all their money just go away and not come back. We've lost a ton of investors in the last several years.

The implication here is that when filmmakers do not care about the business aspect of filmmaking, they may be less attentive to others who have invested financially or creatively in a project. This raises another challenge that regional independent filmmaking faces, which involves the tensions between professional and amateur filmmakers.

Professional versus Amateur Filmmakers

Innovation in filmmaking technology, coupled with the reduction in cost for acquiring and using this technology, has created an overcrowded field of film production and distribution. An abundance of independent films, widely ranging in quality, makes it difficult for a filmmaker to stand out and connect with his or her audience. As well, there can be intense competition for quality resources in a regional independent film community, whose talent pool and financial base are limited. Many filmmakers feel that the problem is exacerbated when the marketplace has a mix of professional and amateur work, all competing for the same financing, distribution, and audiences.

Many film professionals agree that the proliferation of cheap and easy-to-use technology has increased the diversity of voices and that this trend has been, generally

speaking, a positive development. However, these professionals go on to state that audiences, financiers, distributors, and critics find it difficult or are unable to filter through amateur work to find and support professional work. “The worst thing that ever happened to programming at the Seattle International Film Festival was that anybody could buy a DVX 100 [camera],” says Washington Filmworks executive director Amy Dee. “Just because you own a camera, or can own a camera, or can borrow one, does not make you a filmmaker.” Oregon-based producer Gary Kout agrees: “I think the proliferation of available equipment is bad for independent film. I really do. It just waters it down. Again just because you can doesn’t mean you should.” With so many more people shooting independent films because of affordable equipment, as filmmaker Tom Bertling notes, “Mediocre content rules the day.”

Professional film workers are the most outspoken with regards to amateurs making films. They argue that professionals are trying to make a living at this work, while amateurs are indulging in a hobby (even though some amateurs also may be trying to break into professional filmmaking). SAG Seattle’s Dena Beatty works to maintain conditions that promote sustainable employment for her guild’s members, but finds the marketplace cluttered with non-professionals: “We see more and more people making content and expecting, they want the best talent that they can get, whether it’s crew or actors and they want everything given to them for free, and that’s just not professional, that’s not filmmaking. That’s a hobby.” She continues:

If you’re doing it as a hobby, get out of our way. Just admit that it’s a hobby and keep it to that. Don’t try to come to take the jobs from the professionals and go out and get little bits of money that could go to real, bona fide projects. Because there’s a limited amount of funds and people have a limited amount of time, and when you have non-professionals constantly trying to take the same dollars as

people and the amount of time from the professionals as people who are trying to make a real product, it gets frustrating.

With this proliferation of content, financiers and distributors gain more leverage in deciding which films are supported. As Kout notes: “I think [overproduction] has watered down the market to the detriment of the filmmaker has completely served the purposes of the distributor.” This has impacted how filmmakers work, including their interactions with financiers and distributors, as well as with their cast and crew members.

Film Labor

The issue of labor is intimately tied to the problem of financing, and is a perennially challenging problem in the world of independent film. Independent films, which typically operate on low budgets and salary deferrals, are renowned for relying on volunteer or severely underpaid cast and crew members. This tendency complicates the sustainability of the regional filmmaking community, because film professionals are unable to make their living working on films alone. As well, younger filmmakers are in many ways better equipped to succeed because they are eager and have the energy (and perhaps the naiveté) to produce more for less, which ultimately benefits financiers and distributors. But, for many filmmakers, this raises the question of quality and resulting compromises. The next sections detail some of the specific challenges pertaining to film labor, including fair wages, young filmmakers, and creative control.

Fair Wages?

One of the perpetual conditions of working in independent film is to work for no pay for much of the time. In addition, there are countless stories in the independent film world about cast and crew members deferring their pay until (or if) a film makes a profit. Others tell stories of producers who run out of money and are unable to pay cast and crew members the wages that had been promised. Producer Tara Johnson-Medinger says, “I see so many independents when they start up and they shoot for five days and they have to shut down because they don’t have enough money to do it.” Many independent filmmakers operate at such a precarious financial level most of the time that they not only fail to pay their crew but themselves as well. As one survey respondent noted, it is “difficult financially to be able to make films and stay afloat.”

SAG Seattle’s Dena Beatty finds that some of the biggest challenges for her members involve the expectation on the part of filmmakers that cast and crew members will work for little or no pay, which works against SAG’s goal of creating and sustaining a professional and fair working environment for its members. Beatty says:

So many filmmakers want people to work for free. And they don’t follow the law. Really, it’s not legal for somebody to hire somebody for a for-profit project and expect them to work for free. They need to pay minimum wages and that’s a frustration for me, for labored industries, for film offices, for everybody that’s professional in the industry.

This is the crux of the labor issue for independent filmmaking, because while most filmmakers want to pay their crew members, independent film financing is such that everyone tries to cut corners. Producers and directors cite challenges in “finding dedicated cast and crew who will work for free,” as one survey respondent noted. They offer other forms of compensation, as evidenced by postings on the Northwest Film

Forum Callboard, an online service in Seattle on which filmmakers can post announcements for open crew and cast positions. For example, Crikey Films posted a call for a set carpenter to construct a graveyard for a short film production: “While we can’t offer any monetary compensation,” the ad reads, “you will have great material for your reel, and an opportunity to collaborate with a talented, creative, and fun crew.” Other ads promise “Lunch allowance and credits in [the] film,” “Compensation is food, film credit, and our unending gratitude,” and “No pay but food/credit/copy and points if the film gets distribution.”

With few well-paying gigs available for film workers in Seattle and Portland, plenty of crew members, both above-the-line and below-the-line, and cast members must work for little or no pay if they want to work at all. Marty Oppenheimer says, “You get people who are desperate to move in and move up,” and therefore they take jobs on a volunteer basis. As such, reinforcing good employment practices is doubly challenging in this environment. As one survey respondent noted:

Everyone wants you to work for free or to work for wages that end up being below minimum wage. A big challenge is that a lot of people think that filmmaking is easy, and they undervalue the hard work that goes into making a quality film. There are also so few 9-5 jobs in the industry, stability of income is a big challenge for any filmmaker.

One of the recurring challenges creating unfair wage conditions is the lack of financing and budgeting. Numerous survey respondents in Portland and Seattle find it challenging to “get paid fair wages for work done” and “have enough money to survive,” because, as producer C.K. Lichenstein says, there are “too many people trying to do too much for nothing.” Faced with little to no outside financing, filmmakers cut their budgets but often do not scale back the production. Dena Beatty says that she encounters

filmmakers who were planning on doing a huge budget film for at least a few million and now they're trying to do it for under \$100,000. And that's obviously a challenge for me because...I represent professional actors who want to get paid and can't volunteer to just work for free on a feature-length film. It's challenging.

One of the services provided by Tara Johnson-Medinger's company, Sour Apple Productions, is to assess a film's budget. She once received a business plan that budgeted a film at \$50,000. "I looked at the script and what was required of it," she says. "I said if you want to do this for 50 grand, I don't want to be associated with it because we're going to kill ourselves and I don't want to make films like that." She ended up raising the recommended budget to \$1.5 million, in large part because of the wages required for each position. "It was certainly surprising for [the filmmaker]," Johnson-Medinger recalls, "and she was thankful to give [her film's budget] more of an accurate picture."

This process of education is key to developing a more sustainable model, according to various people in the Portland and Seattle filmmaking communities. As Dena Beatty recommends, "We have to get the message out to everybody in the industry that to be professional, if you're an employer, you have to pay people...People have to stop working for free and people have to stop expecting to get everything for free." Film workers who are starting out and trying to get professional experience are often the most amenable to free work, which complicates filmmaking for older, more experienced filmmakers, as will be discussed in the next section.

Young and Hungry and Eager?

Documentary filmmaker Beth Harrington has been working in film and television since 1977 producing award-winning work for public television. She also produced a

documentary, *Welcome to the Club – The Women of Rockabilly* (2001), which was nominated for a Grammy award in 2003. She has been working on another documentary, *The Winding Stream*, since the mid-2000s, which is a historical look at country music; the documentary features the last on-camera interview with the late Johnny Cash. She has found it difficult to secure enough funding to complete post-production on this film, in part because she is unwilling to compromise her filmmaking in ways that many financiers and distributors have come to expect. She says:

[Financiers and distributors think] that we're all young and hungry and eager and I've done young and hungry and eager and I don't want to be young and hungry and eager anymore. I want my professional experience to be valued. I want people to think, "Oh yeah, she's worth it because she is a great storyteller and she makes a great film."

These young and hungry and eager filmmakers often come out of some 600 film production and film studies programs at universities and colleges around the country (Van Ness, 2005). According to the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Foundation (2006), media studies (television, film and/or digital media) programs have experienced substantial growth, with approximately 230,000 students applying to these programs every year. Some universities like UCLA and NYU have well-established film programs, although the availability of digital equipment has allowed other programs to develop. According to Tim Edgar and Karin Kelly (2007), in their book *Film School Confidential*, digital technology "is inexpensive enough that even the most underfunded public school can afford to buy enough to go around" to students in their programs (p. 3). This inexpensive equipment also means that filmmakers do not need to go to school at all in order to make films, as consumer equipment has improved considerably over the last decade or two.

In the mid- to late-2000s, film and media production schools enjoyed increased visibility, as “the ability to make films has become a marketable skill” (Edgar and Kelly, 2007, p. 3). In 2005, *The New York Times* highlighted the employment value of a cinema studies degree, equating it to an MBA: “It is not altogether surprising that film school – promoted as a shot at an entertainment industry job – is beginning to attract those who believe that cinema isn’t so much a profession as the professional language of the future” (Van Ness, 2005). However, employment prospects for film school graduates are limited, as *Film School Confidential’s* Edgar and Kelly (2007) note, thanks to an overcrowded marketplace:

There are more graduates each year than there are jobs. You can’t expect to direct, nor to get any other high-level job, for some time. You may find yourself assisting a low-level development executive at a low-level production company. You may find yourself doing humiliating work for sixteen hours a day. Or you may find yourself completely unemployed. This is where your strength and determination are tested....Keep brainstorming ideas and hatching plans...If you keep working at it, you will make it (p. 300).

Many agree with Harrington’s assessment that professional experience does not seem to count as much in the face of an overcrowded marketplace filled with hungry filmmakers. The authors of *Film School Confidential* assert, “Hollywood hires twenty-something writers and directors for their cheapest films because they will do the work for very little pay” (p. 20). But the myth that *all* independent filmmakers are young and hungry damages the prospects for filmmakers like Beth Harrington. Robin Oppenheimer says that part of the myth is that:

You’re always this young, new thing, and you can’t always be the young, new thing. And how do you survive when you’re not the young, new thing anymore? ... Because it’s also about aging and not being able to maintain this living-on-people’s-couches lifestyle that young people can do.

Coupled with the notion that independent filmmakers are young and have unlimited energy is the notion that an individual filmmaker can make an entire film on his or her own. There are many filmmakers who do in fact produce a film without help from anyone, but the reality, according to Harrington and others, is that filmmaking is a collaborative endeavor. “I think it’s great that the independent filmmakers can just go off and make their own films,” she says. “I don’t think most people are good enough at everything to pull it off and make great films.” But when financiers and distributors get wind of singular filmmakers producing smart projects (such as Jonathan Caouette, who wrote, produced and directed his film, *Tarnation* (2003) for \$218.32),⁵³ they may come to expect more streamlined budgets and fewer, lower salaries from everyone. As a result, they look for what Harrington calls “one-man bands.” She says:

And if you’re young and eager and you have another job that pays your rent, then you might be able to pull it off. But it makes it very difficult to make the argument enough because inevitably the people, the decision makers at these companies, so few of them really know how to make films that they think you can just keep cutting important key players in the process and still be okay. And I see it all the time.

Quality suffers in the process, Harrington says. “I’m a pedestrian cameraperson. I like to work with really good camera people. Why would you want me to shoot it?” More experienced filmmakers have learned, most often through trial and error, that it is essential to make the smartest – rather than the cheapest – production choices, which ultimately leads to a better film. But oftentimes, compromises in quality are not just a result of inexperience. Rather, many filmmakers are backed into making compromises over the creative control of their films, as discussed next.

⁵³ The documentary ended up costing \$400,000 after refining the film under the guidance of various executive producers and editors, including Gus Van Sant (Sanchez, 2004).

Creative Control

Financier and distributor control can lead to compromises in quality for filmmakers. “Final cut” means that a director has the final say on creative decisions and will deliver the film that he or she wants it to be; ideally the distributor cannot ask for changes. However, as Kelley Baker notes, a major distributor can cut marketing expenses to the point that the film will fail. “So even if a filmmaker says they have ‘final cut,’” he says, “they still have to play by the studio/distributors’ rules.” He continues:

Anyone who puts up money for your movie has all these strings. So you can be known as an independent director and you can have this reputation, but when push comes to shove, you’re going to do what they [the financiers] tell you to do. And you’re going to justify it however you want... When a lot more money starts getting thrown around, suddenly compromises you make don’t seem so bad.

Because distributors at the national level are more adept in releasing the kinds of films that make money, many independent filmmakers may be more prone to taking their advice. For instance, Seattle filmmaker Ward Serrill produced a documentary, *The Heart of the Game*, which followed a girl’s high school basketball team from Seattle, centering on one African American girl’s story in particular. Serrill’s film was picked up for distribution by Miramax, which asked for a number of changes in the film. “We were willing to do anything we needed to do to make the film a better film,” Serrill says. The film was shown to a market test audience, and it was determined that the original narration of the film contributed to an overall sense that the film was, as Serrill recalls, “Seattle nice,” or the “tendency of films in this area come out that are real, almost bleeding heart, liberalism. You get a sense that everything is nice and doesn’t want to offend anybody. It’s polite.” Rapper Chris “Ludacris” Bridges was enlisted as the new narrator, adding an “edgy” element to the film, and at least 10 minutes or more were cut

from the film. “There are people who said once Miramax got involved, [the film] got a little too slick,” Serrill says. “That was a cliché. I had the resources to do a lot of fine tuning in postproduction. I made it look and sound a lot better.” He continues:

I wrestled and fought for creative control, and was able to hang on to that. I was irritated about a lot of the comments and things that they [Miramax] wanted [to] change, but I basically successfully defended against those. Every frame in the film is what I wanted in there. I'm completely happy with the final product.

Despite positive reviews from a number of national critics, *The Heart of the Game* was ultimately snubbed for an Oscar nomination for Best Documentary because, as Serrill puts it, “It was totally screwed over in the whole Academy campaign [to get an Oscar nomination]. The marketing was messed up. Miramax did a really poor job of that.” With Miramax having regularly led the pack in Oscar nominations for several years (for example, its films received 24 nominations in 1998 and 40 nominations in 2002), the omission of *The Heart of the Game* from Oscar consideration was a blow for Serrill. As Serrill notes, as his film grew bigger, the dynamics of his working relationships changed. “Once you do break out of a local envelope, it more and more becomes about money, and it more and more becomes about control, other people wanting control.” Serrill claims to have retained creative control, but one wonders if his film’s theatrical success suffered because he was unwilling to fully relinquish his project to Miramax.

As discussed in Chapter VII, some state government policies help to remedy difficult filmmaking conditions for independent filmmakers, such as Oregon’s i-OPIF incentives program. However, state policies do not always translate to easier working

conditions. Instead, they often add to, rather than reduce, the challenges that regional independent film communities face, as is discussed in the next section.

State Policies

As previously discussed, governmental policies that directly impact regional filmmaking typically occur at the state or city level in the form of incentives and permitting. One of the sharpest criticisms of state-level film incentive policies is that they are directed at large-budget – and usually Hollywood studio – film productions rather than locally-produced independent films. These incentive programs, according to the state film organizations that administer the incentives, are not intended to exclude regional independent films from reaping the benefits of a 30 percent rebate from the State of Washington or a 16 percent cash payment on wages paid to Oregon-based labor. However, the minimum budget level required to collect these benefits – \$500,000 in Washington and \$750,000 in Oregon – is generally higher than the level at which most independent films operate.

Oregon attempted to rectify this imbalance by passing the Indigenous Oregon Production Investment Fund (i-OPIF) program in 2009. As discussed in Chapter VII, i-OPIF is an incentive program geared towards low-budget films (between \$75,000 and \$750,000), and, in large part, intended to encourage independent filmmakers to pay at least minimum wages to cast and crew members, and to implement best practices for business and accounting procedures. The logic here is that independent filmmakers will learn and adhere to best practices in order to professionalize the indigenous industry. However, the GOFT was hesitant to support i-OPIF in 2009, as it would peel away five

percent of funds available for larger productions (budgets over \$750,000) through OPIF. As noted in Corti's (2009) study of i-OPIF, "the main reason for the Film Office's choice not to engage in an active advocacy of i-OPIF is the lack of data proving that productions below \$750,000 could benefit the economy" (p. 74). While i-OPIF champions claimed that more indigenous production support would create more jobs (albeit minimum wage jobs), the GOFT claimed that, because i-OPIF was structured to take five percent from OPIF's funding, the number of OPIF-supported productions would (potentially) be reduced, thus also reducing the number of high-paying jobs available to Oregon-based film workers. But the support of the indigenous industry continues to be contingent upon the presence and availability of major out-of-state productions that bring new revenue to the state; in other words, the prosperity and sustainability of the indigenous filmmaking community is a long-term vision. GOFT Executive Director Vince Porter says, "I'm all for raising the cap of OPIF and including i-OPIF...[and hopefully that can] *someday* result in generating a better reputation for the local storytellers here in the state" (quoted in Corti, p. 75, my emphasis).

The state offices that administer incentives programs are most concerned with the film industry's potential to contribute to the state's overall economic well-being. This can happen in the form of job creation, tax contributions, spending in the community, and bringing out-of-state money into the state. These criteria help justify the allocation of money to support the film industry, as evidenced by repeated arguments by former Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski for the continuation of the Oregon Production Investment Fund (OPIF): "The fund is worthy of the Legislature's continued support. Doing so will mean more jobs, more economic activity and more opportunities to

showcase Oregon to people all over the world who see our state's beauty through film and television" (Kulongoski, 2009). This emphasis on the economic benefit of the film industry may create unrealistic expectations as to the film industry's return on investment. Furthermore, the value of filmmaking is reduced to its monetary value, obscuring the significant and important cultural contribution that the diverse number of voices in regional independent filmmaking can give to media production. As difficult economic conditions continue to strain state and city budgets in 2010, economic justifications become even more central logic to defending governmental support of the film industry, and arts and culture organizations are further trimmed for their perceived lack of substantial economic contribution (for example, the Washington State Arts Commission's general operating budget in the 2009-2011 biennium was reduced by 26 percent). While James Keblas, Executive Director of the City of Seattle Office of Film + Music, believes in the unique quality of Seattle filmmakers, he says that his job is economically-oriented, first and foremost:

My job is to make it a great place to make a living making film. So it's about jobs and wages in business and revenue. I don't get too much into the qualitative pieces of it. It's really more about counting folks that can make a living doing this. And that's everything from vendors to above the line, below the line, crew casting, all those support industry, that go along with it. That's our ultimate goal and bottom line.

Even i-OPIF contains provisions that allow the GOFT to ensure that support for independent films serves a dual purpose. For example, in the event that the film office receives more applications for i-OPIF funding than it can distribute, it will employ various guidelines to prioritize films. Some of these involve relative experience of producers and directors, amount of production money to be spent in-state, number of film

workers to be hired, and so on. There is also a provision that the film may or may not receive funding based on “other benefits to Oregon, including but not limited to promotional value, long-term financial benefits, contribution to development of Oregon’s crew and talent base or production industry infrastructure” (Oregon Senate, p. 4). Again, film production is reduced to its economic value to the state.

Another shortcoming of government-sponsored policies is their omission of funding or support for independent film marketing and distribution. As discussed earlier, distribution is a core challenge with which all independent filmmakers struggle. With changing structures of distribution (and accompanying marketing), the need to take charge of one’s own film marketing is becoming increasingly imperative. But many filmmakers fail to include marketing and distribution in their projected budgets, and therefore these areas suffer greatly in terms of financing and other support. This discussion continues to revolve around investing in production rather than what to do with these films once they are finished. “Instead of incentivizing production,” comments a respondent to a blog post by New York-based producer Ted Hope, “why not focus on government support of non-profit theatrical distribution... We are not at a point where the problem is creation of work” (Gus, 2010). Funding models do exist for supporting independent film marketing and distribution, such as the MEDIA program in the European Union, which focuses a large part of its funding structure on marketing and distribution of audiovisual projects. Independent filmmaking in the U.S. is ripe for adaptation to this type of program.

The objectives of film incentive programs are primarily economic in nature, as they emphasize the economic value of a film over its cultural value. But state governments would do well to recognize the significant and important cultural contribution that the diverse number of voices in regional independent filmmaking can provide. Without full and committed support for the entire filmmaking process – from financing to production to distribution – the regional independent filmmaking community is left with mediocre production resources and few distribution options, which limits its ability to contribute to the fabric of American cultural production.

Interpersonal/Interorganizational Challenges

The practice of filmmaking in a regional location, rather than in a filmmaking center like Los Angeles, brings its own set of challenges. Seattle and Portland, much like other regional locations around the country, face challenges of leadership, infrastructural and interpersonal coherence, and outsider misconceptions, all of which detract from each city's overall success in sustaining filmmaking communities.

A recurring theme in people's opinions about the state of the Seattle and Portland film communities is the need for leadership. Some have commented that both cities lack individual leaders that really champion the local film scene and raise its profile. While Portland is home to two well-known and highly respected filmmakers – Gus Van Sant and Todd Haynes – neither has really taken up the Portland filmmaking community as a cause. Van Sant, for example, is relatively reclusive, choosing to focus on his filmmaking rather than take an active role in developing and promoting the local film community (although his films are regularly produced in the area). There are even fewer prominent

individuals in Seattle who have taken an active role; as IFP/Seattle President Lacey Leavitt notes, “It seems like a lot of people who have been living here, who have been really instrumental in this resurgence of film and filmmaking [in Seattle] the last couple of years are on the cusp of moving or have already decided that they’re moving to Los Angeles.”

Yet a few strong individual leaders are precisely what the filmmaking communities in Portland and Seattle need, according to many film workers. Producer David Cress says, “I think that the success of regional companies, the success of filmmaking in the region, it’s kind of personality driven.” Several refer to the film community in Austin, Texas, as the model for a successful regional film industry. Colin O’Neill, a film instructor at the Art Institute of Portland, says, “You look at people like Robert Rodriguez who made a bunch of action films [in Austin] because he liked it, and it basically exploded the Austin film scene ... You almost need someone to make a big impact to get attention [for the Portland film community].” C.K. Lichenstein, a producer based in Portland, thinks that a few prominent individuals can help build the area’s reputation and bring investment dollars, which would in turn positively impact the local community:

The most important thing is creating a sustainable indigenous industry [...], fostering that sort of environment so that we can become like the next Austin, where we have a couple of really strong filmmakers. Filmmakers when they’re here for a while they want to stay here...I think that will help get us to the right level for local small productions and influence those filmmakers once they’re still here, so that they’ll want to stay and keep doing bigger projects (quoted in Corti, 2009, p. 68).

Producer David Cress takes it one step further, speculating that Portland can follow Austin’s example of emulating the major studios: “I think our best model is the

Austin model where we actually create a small, thriving mini Hollywood” (quoted in Corti, 2009, p. 67).

Another factor that could contribute to sustaining indigenous filmmaking communities is a sense of collective action and infrastructural and interpersonal coherence. These are characteristics that many find lacking in the regional context, as small-scale filmmaking communities run the risk of being fragmented and disorganized. Seattle in particular has experienced this condition – film financing consultant Elizabeth Heile says that the filmmaking community in Seattle is “not very coherent” – and this perception is even held by people outside the Seattle community. Bill Foster, Executive Director of the Northwest Film Center in Portland, notes: “I think Seattle is very fractured. I think this goes back decades. The art folks don’t talk to the documentary folks. They don’t talk to the narrative folks. Organizations don’t cooperate. They’re very competitive with each other.” A survey respondent from Seattle says, “In Seattle, there is a challenge getting filmmakers to collaborate. No man is an island, but people out here act like that’s the case.”

Without key organizations to bring people together for networking events, education or professional development, film workers have fewer avenues to connect with each other and strengthen the community. As a result, there is overlap and lack of cohesion, as one survey respondent notes: “[One of the challenges is] helping each other. We are all in different silos and don’t often come together to help each other. [This] creates a lot of inefficiency.” Tara Johnson-Medinger, Executive Director of Portland’s POW Fest, says that she immediately noticed how services of organizations like the OMPA, GOFT and others overlapped unnecessarily:

I realized that they were all sort of doing their own thing but nobody was ever really like interacting. For me that was a little confusing, because there was so much redundancy here. What's up? Why are we doing our own thing in such a small town?

While organizations in Portland have, to a certain extent, streamlined their overlapping operations, Seattle's organizations have made fewer inroads into becoming more efficient, and indeed there have been even more groups starting up, according to Elizabeth Heile: "There are a number of little upstarts in the filmmaking community here." But Heile thinks that these organizations are not given much credibility by the more established film community, leading to further potential for fragmentation.

Another issue that is difficult to overcome is that many non-local filmmakers (namely those from Hollywood) consider Portland and Seattle to be a sort of backwoods that lacks professional crew members and proper equipment.⁵⁴ Colin O'Neill says:

Specific to Portland, it's really hard to get taken seriously... There's a stigma about us being in the north woods or something. So you see all these people who come here to make movies and they laugh about it all the time, and they're like "Oh my God, we're all the way up here in the sticks."

Producer David Cress laments the lack of certain kinds of equipment and other resources: "There's kind of a mythology that Portland is a great place to make film... There's fewer resources. The good news about Los Angeles is that it's kind of a company town. So basically anything you want is at arm's length... We don't have that [in Portland]."

O'Neill defends this lack of equipment, however; when out-of-state filmmakers say that "they can't even get a 200,000 watt generator," he says, "No, I guess not, but if we had one, nobody would use it."

⁵⁴ One Los Angeles-based filmmaker interviewed for another study has a low opinion of film workers in regional locations, calling them "mediocre"; she considers these people to be so unskilled that, as she says, "You need to tell someone where to put a key light."

Yet, as O'Neill notes, making a film in "the sticks" means that a film has to be that much better in order to be taken seriously. "People [from Hollywood] often ...put you along with the home video types who just make a movie on the weekends with your buddies, so you have to show them your work and then it has to be even better than someone making a crappy movie in Los Angeles." Independent filmmakers working in regional locations, in a sense, have even more obstacles than their counterparts working in Los Angeles and New York, simply because they are *not* working in Los Angeles or New York.

Conclusion

The challenges discussed in this chapter paint a fairly grim picture for the health of regional independent filmmaking in Seattle and Portland, as these challenges depict an uphill battle to achieve sustainability in these communities. Financing and distribution present the greatest and most embedded challenges, which create and exacerbate a host of other issues, including the perpetuation of myths, working conditions, expectations on the part of financiers and distributors, and state policies. Further impacting the difficulties is the continued dominance of the mainstream Hollywood studio system, particularly in the area of distribution.

It is hard to overcome the perpetuation of and adherence to the conventional system of filmmaking, particularly when so many of the film professionals in regional communities are veterans of the Hollywood film and television industries; consequently, they often bring certain expectations about the rules of the industry. Many of these expectations, such as fair wages and professional productions, are positive additions. But

others, such as conceptualizing films in marketing terms from the outset and traditional theatrical distribution, are problematic aspects that do not translate well (and are perhaps unwelcome applications) to independent filmmaking. Efforts to change the industry are taking place, but many independent filmmakers expect that the most innovative practices and equipment will ultimately come out of Hollywood and benefit the studios over and above anyone else. Some believe that the innovations will trickle down to independent filmmakers, who will then adapt them to suit their own purposes. But it is also felt that innovations do not have to originate with Hollywood.

Indeed, many independent filmmakers are slowly shifting some of their practices to benefit themselves rather than the major studios, such as retaining copyright of their films or engaging in self-distribution. Some of the most unconventional and groundbreaking practices can be initiated by regional filmmakers who arguably have more flexibility to experiment. But there is still the need to overcome the naturalized mainstream film industry structures that have historically created conditions that favor studios over independents.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Thousands of people work on independent films in the United States every year, giving their time, resources and energy to labors of love in what was very early on called “the heartbreaking nickel and dime movie business” (Scott, 1937). Only a small proportion of these films find an audience beyond family and friends. Yet filmmakers continue making independent films in areas across the country. Despite a number of overwhelming obstacles that challenge and hinder independent film production at the regional level – from Hollywood’s dominance to often misdirected governmental support to infighting and hostile competition among individual filmmakers – film communities still survive and, in some cases, thrive. This is clear indication that some reward exists that transcends potential financial gain.

Using political economy of communication as a theoretical framework, this study examined the landscape of regional independent film industries, focusing on Portland and Seattle, two cities in the Pacific Northwest. This study has revealed how, in these communities, there are complex infrastructures impacting independent filmmaking, from production to distribution to exhibition. These infrastructures are simultaneously supportive and restrictive, and must be navigated constantly by independent filmmakers.

This chapter discusses the significance of this study, as well as its contribution to communication studies (and specifically, political economy of communication) and film

industry studies. Suggestions for further research are provided, as well as recommendations that may strengthen regional independent film communities. This chapter concludes with brief comments on the future of regional independent filmmaking.

Significant Findings of the Study

This study sheds light on the contexts and dynamics of regional independent filmmaking, a task not often undertaken in academic research. Specifically, this study examined the following questions:

1. How has the term “independent film” historically been defined, and how is it understood today?
2. What is the historical development of regional filmmaking in the Pacific Northwest, namely Portland and Seattle?
3. What supports the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking?
4. What are challenges in the infrastructure of regional independent filmmaking?
5. What are the relationships between regional filmmaking communities and Hollywood, and between regional filmmaking communities themselves?

By understanding the historical context in which independent filmmaking happens, as proposed by the first two research questions, we can understand the contemporary conditions and infrastructures of regional independent filmmaking in Portland and Seattle. The third and fourth questions examine the landscape of regional independent filmmaking as it exists in two communities. The fifth question draws attention to the dynamics between regional filmmaking communities, and between those communities and Hollywood. The following section will highlight how this study has answered these research questions.

This study found that there are a multitude of contradictions pertaining to labor, financing and distribution in the structure and operation of the film industry as a whole. Those contradictions are particularly intense for independent filmmakers, which create a range of opportunities and challenges that often simultaneously conflict with each other. For example, state government tax incentives attract mainstream Hollywood studio productions to Washington, which in turn provide professional training opportunities and pay wages and benefits. These opportunities allow independent filmmakers to hone their skills, connect with other film professionals, and make enough money to support themselves and to (possibly) finance their own projects. But by working on mainstream studio productions, independent film professionals are contributing to an infrastructure that may suffocate their own opportunities. They are making films that directly compete with – and, even more frequently, overshadow – their own films. In many cases, they are sometimes supplying cheaper labor to mainstream studios and inadvertently condoning practices that they often decry.

This study found that labor practices in filmmaking are often unfair, no matter the size of organization. The nature of and motivation for particular labor practices differs widely, however. Major corporations are beholden to shareholders, which drives business decisions and strategies. As a result, major studios decide, for example, to move productions out of Hollywood to take advantage of lucrative tax incentives in other American states and abroad. Temporary and freelance workers increasingly define the employment profile of the film industry, with workers relying on union contracts to safeguard minimal gains in benefits and other employment guarantees. Small-scale industry is also guilty of unfair labor practices, although its motivations stem from issues

of bare survival over profit generation. Small organizations are more heavily reliant on low-wage employees or even volunteers, and they have a harder time providing meaningful compensation or benefits.

There are varied interests and motivations within the regional film communities of Seattle and Portland, and these interests and motivations also contradict each other. Some independent film workers desperately want a professional industry that is respected and validated by the mainstream film industry, while other film workers want to develop a self-sustaining film community that does not interact much with the mainstream Hollywood studios. Others still just want to make their films for intimate gatherings – or just for themselves, preferring to remain detached from the rest of the filmmaking community. It seems that many of the individuals with the strongest and most loud-spoken opinions on the need to professionalize the regional industry are those in support positions: publicists, state and local film officials, writers, union representatives, and so on. These individuals are dependent upon primarily creative people (writers, producers, directors) who will develop projects that require their services.

One of the central problems challenging independent filmmakers is the lack of agreement on a definition of “independent film”; in fact, many refuse to define it at all, calling it a useless term. This study has shown that it is important to understand the nature of the term “independent film” because, despite its vagueness, it continues to be used to identify certain qualities of both the filmmaking process and resulting content. The study also found that, historically, the term “independent film” has been defined in a myriad of ways, reflecting economic, social, and cultural trends. It has nearly always signified an alternative – in practices, financing, aesthetic, and spirit – to the mainstream

film industry. “Independents” can describe those just starting out in filmmaking, making films as calling cards for future work in studios; those making personal films when they are not working on major studio projects; or those who work for the Indiewood divisions of major studios. In short, “independent” can be used to describe just about anybody working in filmmaking, as long as their paycheck does not come directly from one of the six major Hollywood studios.

This lack of consensus on what defines independent complicates the process of regional independent filmmaking, adding to the myths and misconceptions about the challenges faced by these filmmakers. This study has shown that it is important to arrive at a definition of independent film that can serve as a benchmark from which to understand how films are made. Thus, independent filmmaking is defined in this study as a film (at any stage of production or distribution) wherein the filmmaker has full creative and distribution control, investors have no involvement with the film outside of providing financing, and the filmmaker undergoes substantial risk to produce and distribute the film.

Independent filmmaking shares many characteristics with mainstream Hollywood studio filmmaking, but it is more susceptible to changes in technology and fluctuations in the economy. This vulnerability can be both positive and negative. Independent filmmakers have been dramatically affected, for example, by the economic recession that started in 2007, particularly in terms of funding. These individuals and their corollary organizations or companies are generally not able to weather massive disruption like their mainstream Hollywood studio counterparts. The small-scale organizations and companies are not typically diversified, nor are they horizontally or vertically integrated. They tend

to have one core business and are invested wholly in that area. Minor changes or disruptions have the potential to detract – in terms of finances, resources, labor and so on – from a small company’s careful planning.

But it must be stated that these small-sized organizations are often more adaptable than their studio counterparts. They may be forced to accommodate changes in technology, for example, because if they avoid or delay change, they may not survive. Structural and operational decisions can be made more quickly because these organizations’ structures are more simplified. The unpredictability of independent film financing sources that has defined the second half of the 2000s, for example, has carved out spaces for experimentation and innovation, spurring independents to develop new models of financing. As well, they have developed new models of distribution and exhibition. A great deal of this innovation is happening in regional locations, where filmmakers are more distanced – geographically and also often professionally – from Hollywood studio practices and systems. As a result, regional film communities are crucial sites in the evolution of the American film industry.

The history of this evolution is at once unique and common to every film community across the country. By tracing the historical development of filmmaking in Portland and Seattle, this study identified trends and factors that have contributed to the rise and decline of regional film production activity over the past century. In Portland, indigenous filmmaking has made fairly prominent potential economic and cultural contributions and, thus, has received some degree of support over the years from government, business and civic initiatives. Seattle’s homegrown filmmaking community, on the other hand, has historically struggled, in part because of an emphasis on well-

respected film criticism over film production. Only since the turn of the 21st century has filmmaking in Seattle become more recognized as a key contributor to the local culture and economy. Both cities (and their respective states) have hosted Hollywood productions on location, which have contributed substantially to developing locally-based infrastructure in the form of financing, skilled crew members, and professional connections. But these contributions are complicated by inherent contradictions that they produce. Mainstream Hollywood studios often work to extract maximize benefits from many of the communities in which they are involved, meeting their own needs without much regard for the lasting impact on those communities. Studio productions are able to move productions to other states (or countries), and these filmmaking communities compete for this business.

A few key individuals were instrumental in advocating and promoting a homegrown film industry in these states, a trend that Portland experienced much more often than Seattle experienced. Oregon film commissioner Warren Merrill used his personal charisma and business savvy to draw Hollywood productions to Oregon in the late 1960s and 1970s, increasing the state's visibility as an attractive location, thanks to its diverse locations and increasingly qualified crew members. Animator Will Vinton and others were particularly active in Portland from the 1980s into the 1990s, bringing local filmmaking to the attention of city and state government. Fewer individuals in Seattle promoted the local filmmaking community, as the city's most influential individuals were drawn to film criticism, particularly of art house films. One result has been that Seattle's film-going audience is relatively sophisticated and discerning, with a reputation for deep

film appreciation and avid movie attendance. But another result has been a historical lack of encouragement and confidence in the local film production community in Seattle.

Both filmmaking communities have notable networks of support, including professional and educational organizations, film festivals, government initiatives, and a few locally-operated distributors. As well, Portland and Seattle are fortunate in their ability to attract individuals looking for a high quality of life in terms of opportunities for creativity, work-life balance, and geographic desirability. Furthermore, the Pacific Northwest is appealing because of its proximity to and shared time zone with Los Angeles, which enables many film professionals to maintain a dual career in both indigenous independent film production and Hollywood productions (film and/or television).

Challenges to the local film industries are often overwhelming, and are shared by most regional film communities around the country (and, indeed, around the world). A lack of access to financing and distribution – the traditional nexuses of power in the film industry – often limit independent filmmaking. The conventional independent film financing and distribution models tend to favor large studios (such as, for example, negative pickup deals or international presales), but financing and distribution models are slowly changing. Independent filmmakers, with the most notable assistance of digital technologies like the Internet, are able to test methods like crowd funding and digital distribution.

It must be stated that most independent filmmakers participate in a capitalist system in which commodities are bought and sold. Although many criticize the motivations and priorities of mainstream Hollywood studios, and the resulting impact that

contributes to cheapened labor and mediocre content, independents continue to operate within the overall capitalist system of buying and selling films (and themselves as filmmakers). And even though new models of production, distribution and exhibition are being tested and adopted, most of these still replicate the capitalist structures in which the American film industry (indeed, most segments of American industry) operates. Despite their challenges in participating in the film industry due to issues of financing, distribution, labor, and so on, independent filmmakers continue to participate in this film industry as it is currently structured, rarely reflecting on the causes for disparities in access, success and power.

For this study, it is possible to conclude that there are no easy answers to improving the predicament of the independent filmmaker. Contradictions and competing motivations complicate the situation, as do challenges are presented by lack of financing, distribution, myths, and so on. This study has emphasized that it is necessary to examine and understand these motivations and contradictions in order to improve the circumstances and infrastructure that support regional independent filmmaking.

Contributions of the Study

This study makes a number of valuable contributions to both critical media studies and film industry studies literature, highlighting areas that have been historically absent or minimized. Building on (and, in part, departing from) the work of critical scholars who have analyzed and interrogated the nature of the mainstream Hollywood film industry, this study turns the focus to regional independent filmmaking and the experiences of average independent film workers. This segment of the American film

industry, found in each of the 50 states, is hugely prolific and represents an understudied area that deserves examination and understanding. This study sheds light on the everyday circumstances of independent filmmaking, not just the exceptional experiences that result in celebrity personalities – and future Hollywood directors – like Kevin Smith or Steven Soderbergh. This study validates the average independent film worker by dismantling the powerful myths that have defined independent filmmaking for the last two decades. By giving voice to the average independent film professional's experience, we are able to expand the analysis of the political economy of the film industry.

This study also reopens the academic discussion of regional filmmaking that has been on hiatus since the mid-1980s. As demonstrated in the histories of Portland and Seattle in Chapter VI, film professionals have worked in locations outside Los Angeles since the early years of cinema, and they have developed regional film communities to support their endeavors. Los Angeles' position as the country's filmmaking headquarters, while certainly not erased, is perhaps less essential to the profession of filmmaking. Many independent film workers find themselves able to make their living in locations like Portland, Seattle, Albuquerque and Shreveport. It is important to recognize this geographic shift, as it has implications for the makeup and dynamics of the film industry.

This study of regional independent filmmaking also provides a framework with which to understand media industries at the regional level. By investigating the political economic dimensions of a small-scale media industry, this study allows for interrogation of how local organizations interact with each other and with the larger media industry. The questions that tend to characterize political economic studies of media conglomerates – those concerning power, ownership, industry structure, agency, and so on (e.g., Mosco,

1996) – are applicable to small-scale regional industry, as well. But they must be evaluated and tailored in ways that acknowledge differences between regional and larger-scale media organizations. Successful enterprises, companies and individuals at the regional level can be interpreted as positive developments for the fabric of American cultural production, as they indicate the ascendancy and increasing prevalence of diverse cultural voices and, hence, more representative cultural expression.

Many political economic studies focus much more specifically on the role and impact of large media corporations at the national and international levels, examining various questions of access, labor, relationships to government and each other, and so on (e.g., Herman and McChesney, 1997; Wasko, 2001; Miller et al., 2005). This study adapts these types of questions to analyze a microcosm of a national media industry: filmmaking at the regional level and the different actors involved therein. Using the framework of questions around labor, access, ownership, and power, this study explores the infrastructure of a small-scale media industry, where creative and financial decisions originate, the relationships among various parties and the dynamics of power.

A major component of this regional industry framework is the integration of in-depth interviews and a survey. While these methodological tools are not unheard of in political economy of communication, document analysis tends to be the more oft-used method. The prevalence of document analysis in political economic studies is often a matter of necessity, whereby it can be difficult to gain access to various individuals and groups associated with major media corporations. For instance, executives may be unreachable and other workers may have signed confidentiality agreements. Major media corporations tend to be highly protective of themselves and their image, and thus may be

wary of academic criticism. As a result, many researchers rely on documents, such as annual reports, SEC filings and trade papers, to understand the inner-workings of these publicly-held corporations (e.g., Wasko, 2001; Kunz, 2007).

At the regional level, by contrast, media companies are generally privately-held and may not produce the kinds of information-rich documents that publicly-held corporations produce for their shareholders. Interviews are crucial in order to uncover the nature of relationships among various actors at the regional level. Furthermore, regionally-based companies may be more open to inquiry from scholars. Interviewees in this study, for example, were open with information, willing to share in part as a way to better understand their own position within the industry and in part as a mode of self-promotion.

The survey is an infrequent tool in political economic studies, but it was extremely useful in this study in order to gauge some general trends about the nature and dynamics of a regional media industry. This survey can allow for more people to participate in the study than time and resources may allow. Furthermore, because of the relative anonymity of survey participants, the survey can allow respondents to be candid with their opinions in a way that in-person interviews may not readily allow.

Political economic studies of media industries deal with questions of success and profit, often interpreting these as negative actions. These companies are generally beholden to their shareholders, thereby making corporate decisions that reflect those priorities. Achieving profit for shareholders often translates into compromises at the expense of their workers, their audiences, and their ethical values. But when we consider questions of success and profit at the regional level, we are often met with different

perceptions. This study enables us to consider how success and profit can be interpreted in small-scale industries. As this study has shown, regional media companies tend to hold different sets of values than their transnational corporate counterparts. IndieFlix's commitment to transparency, non-exclusivity, fairness and flexibility is evidence of this trend. Furthermore, success and profit are more often returned to the community when achieved by regionally-based companies. They are used to create opportunities for others, further helping the community. For example, if regional independent filmmakers work with a larger budget, they will often use extra money to pay better wages and/or benefits. With years of experience and successful business under its belt, Will Vinton Studios kept its headquarters in Portland and ran an apprenticeship program in order to grow the local cache of animators. When evaluating success and profit at the regional level, it is helpful to consider how they are used, and if they are used to exploit workers, suppress voices and diversity, increase division among different groups, and so on.

The concept of the national film industry, increasingly examined in light of industrial and cultural globalization, arises when we consider the nature of the American film industry and, in particular, regional independent filmmaking. This study recognizes that American filmmaking is more than just Hollywood, which complicates how we might define a national film industry. As noted in Chapter II, Hollywood is less a geographic place and more of an industrial and cultural concept because of financing sources, talent pool, market dominance, and so on. But the prevalence of regional American independent filmmaking, which is typically very much tied to place (mainly for practical reasons related to budget), demonstrates that the national film industry in the U.S. is alive and well. Furthermore, a push to build and sustain the local film industry in

places like Portland and Seattle indicates that globalizing forces may not be as potent for independents as they are for Hollywood and its corresponding multinational media conglomerates. Rather, film communities re-embed themselves in the local, the regional, and the national, challenging notions of the direction of American and, indeed, global culture.

Suggestions for Further Research

Because regional independent filmmaking has been generally overlooked by scholars since the mid-1980s, there are a multitude of areas that demand investigation. The lessons that emerge through an analysis of the filmmaking experiences of Portland and Seattle can be extended to other regional independent film communities. More case studies of specific regional film communities could add to our understanding of the experiences of average independent filmmakers, as well as their interactions with each other and with Hollywood studios. What are the characteristics shared by all regional independent filmmaking communities, and how are they different? We might also extend this comparison to film industries in other countries, which also compete against Hollywood for resources, audiences and artistic and cultural recognition. How can we compare the struggles and successes of film industries in other countries to those of regional film communities in the U.S.?

This study did not examine the content of the films produced by independent filmmakers in the Pacific Northwest, but this area might add much to understanding the contributions of regional film communities to American cultural production. How do films in different regional contexts differ in terms of cultural expression, aesthetics, story,

and execution? As well, understanding moviegoing audiences in these locations are key to recognizing these films' value and significance. Where do audiences view these films, and how are these films received?

A third area of study worthy of exploration is that of film policy in the U.S. Government intervention through tax incentive packages has only been briefly examined, and increased attention to this activity would add much to an understanding of the role of film policy. As well, what lessons can we draw from film policies in other countries? Can a program like MEDIA 2007, the European Union's support program for indigenous audiovisual production and distribution, be adapted for American independent filmmakers?

Regional independent filmmaking is vastly understudied in the American context and thus is replete with entry points for further investigation to more sufficiently understand the experiences of American cultural production, industry and expression.

Recommendations for Strengthening Regional Independent Film Communities

It can be argued that regional independent filmmaking is integral to the fabric of American cultural production, providing alternatives to the mainstream Hollywood system of filmmaking. As demonstrated in this study, regional independent film communities are vital spaces for valuable cultural and economic contributions, and should be nurtured to encourage their sustainability. While individual communities like Portland and Seattle are active in advocating their own survival and success, more can be done at the local/regional and national levels to ensure an infrastructure that withstands

the fluctuations of economic, social, political, cultural and technological conditions that hit independent filmmakers the hardest.

Recommendations for National Level

There is currently no national advocacy organization representing the national independent filmmaking community. As discussed in Chapter V, the Independent Film and Television Alliance (IFTA) represents large American and international non-studio (and even studio-affiliated) producers and distributors. Membership fees for this organization are prohibitive for the average independent filmmaker. The organization that most closely represents a national membership is the Independent Feature Project (IFP); however, with chapters in only six cities (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Phoenix and Minneapolis), IFP is geared towards the specific needs and interests of each chapter's members, which can differ drastically from city to city and which may not encompass the needs and interests of members outside these few areas. IFP in its present state cannot adequately represent the range of independent filmmakers and their respective projects.

The one organization that had provided independent filmmakers with representation, tools, education and other benefits, the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF), closed in 2006. The closure of the AIVF was unfortunate, as its resources and membership base were valuable contributions to the sustainability and support of independent filmmaking. The national independent filmmaking community needs a cohesive organization to advocate and promote the interests of film professionals across the country. It must recognize the realities of regional independent filmmaking,

paying close attention to the various conditions and contexts in which regional independent film communities operate. While the IFP and IFTA both conduct some advocacy work, their motivations are, much of the time, at odds with actual needs of regional filmmakers who have made conscious choices to work outside the mainstream film industry. Independent filmmakers lack a national voice and agenda that promotes their viewpoints regarding, for example, media consolidation and conglomeration and net neutrality. As well, there are few tools and resources that are available to independent filmmakers to demonstrate *how* to support and elevate the position of independent film within their own communities, save for a few distinct and helpful documents posted under “Toolkits for Filmmakers” on the former AIVF website (now dedicated to the publication *The Independent*, the only surviving component of the AIVF). The resurrection of the AIVF – or a new organization with a similar structure – is needed as an advocate for independent film.

Recommendations for Local/Regional Level

Seattle and Portland both demonstrate momentum and perseverance in building and sustaining their local filmmaking communities, so it is worth considering opportunities and activities that might expand and strengthen their respective regional independent film infrastructures. These activities and strategies, outlined in Table 8, are best pursued by those who are most invested in the local filmmaking community (i.e., film professionals), but they also require continued participation and support from other organizations, including local and state governments and support organizations like local media and exhibition venues.

Table 8: Recommended activities to strengthen regional independent film communities

<i>Actor/Initiator</i>	<i>Recommended Activity/Strategy</i>
National Level	
Film professionals, film organizations	Creation (or enhancement) of national advocacy organization to share best practices, resources, strategies
Local/Regional Level	
Film professionals, film organizations	Increased activity and participation in initiatives, lobbying, etc. Community reinvestment
Regional film communities	Increased collaboration between filmmaking communities
State and local government	Funding for production expenses Funding for in-state distribution and marketing expenses
Local support from community and organizations	More prominent and consistent press coverage of local films and filmmakers; increased public television programming for local films; more festival programs for local films

Source: Author.

As noted in Chapter VIII, interviewees in Portland and Seattle repeatedly hoped that a few key individuals would champion the cause of independent filmmaking in their communities similar to Austin’s Robert Rodriguez and Richard Linklater. This effort could certainly impact the available infrastructure and support that each city currently possesses. However, by continuing to expect that someone else will take up the reins, the filmmaking communities are losing valuable opportunities to grow and strengthen. Every individual working in these cities should continue to reinvest in the community, not just for personal and immediate gain, but for the good of the community. Many individuals are doing just that; efforts led by the OMPA are coalescing into strategic and meaningful activities that encompass regional business, civic and government spheres. Seattle’s filmmaking community is beginning to recognize the value of strategic activities, for

example, by creating a political action committee that worked to galvanize participation in the 2010 elections. This study demonstrates that infrastructural support and positive attention are best secured by individuals who are invested in the film community. Increased activity and participation by more regional film professionals would strengthen these efforts.

Increased participation and activity across filmmaking communities would strengthen the voices in each community. Seattle and Portland are surprisingly isolated from each other, as few regional independent collaborations cross state lines (save for Vancouver, Washington, which is usually counted as part of the Portland metro area). But the resources and infrastructures of each community could greatly benefit each other, with film professionals sharing best practices for production and distribution strategies.

Government policies towards local filmmaking communities tend to focus on incentivizing major productions that bring fresh money into the state, supplementing the local film industry with new (albeit temporary) jobs, training, and resources. Oregon introduced i-OPIF in 2009, which created tax rebates for indigenous productions budgeted between \$75,000 and \$750,000, and 13 productions were awarded i-OPIF funding in 2009 and 2010 (Porter, 2010). Washington does not have a similar program, instead only incentivizing productions budgeted at \$500,000 and over. While two indigenous independent productions qualified for the incentive in 2009 (*Humpday* and *The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle*), most regional independent productions do not operate at such an expansive budget. Increased government support for production of low-budget indigenous productions would contribute to the sustainability of regional filmmaking.

State and local governments do not offer any funding or other mechanisms for distribution and marketing expenses. According to Vince Porter, Executive Director of Oregon's Governor's Office of Film and Television, "Marketing and distribution expenses do not qualify for OPIF or i-OPIF. But it is an interesting issue since those two areas are now the greatest challenges to film projects." There is certainly recognition that filmmakers need assistance with marketing and distribution, but it is difficult for state governments to find available funds for expenses that might be spent outside the state. However, independent films are often distributed first within their local communities but still require funding for promotions, advertising, and even four-walling theaters. State governments should offer distribution and marketing funds to be used at the regional level, which would further contribute to sustaining and supporting local businesses.

Some of the businesses that support regional independent filmmaking include the local media (print, television, radio and internet), movie theaters, and film festivals. Over the past two decades (or more), there has been increased media consolidation, resulting in fewer locally-owned and operated businesses and, consequently, fewer incentives and opportunities to include locally produced media in coverage and programming. There are still, however, numerous opportunities for local media and local businesses to support regional independent filmmaking that would thus serve to elevate the stature of those productions in the local community. While there have been concerted efforts by many organizations to support indigenous filmmaking, including initiatives by Oregon Public Broadcasting and Seattle's KCTS public television station to showcase locally-made independent films, or *The Stranger's* commitment to writing about local filmmaking in Seattle, efforts to contribute to raising the profile of local filmmaking should continue.

This might include more prominent and consistent coverage of local films and filmmakers, increased exhibition opportunities on local television, and more dedicated programs for indigenous filmmaking at local film festivals (including, as former Northwest Film Forum Executive Director Michael Seiwerath hoped, a Seattle-produced film opening the Seattle International Film Festival).

Certainly, as discussed earlier, many challenges to regional independent filmmaking are not easily resolved, such as the continued dominance of the Hollywood studio system over, most notably, distribution, as well as independents' perpetual lack of funding. The recommendations made above are incremental, serving to address some of the more immediate challenges and limitations for independent filmmakers. As well, they can help create a sustainable foundation for meeting long-term challenges and nurturing an environment that supports regional independent filmmaking. These recommendations do not automatically create financially and critically successful films, however, and the onus is still upon filmmakers to produce quality work that is worthy of support. But the infrastructures in place, and the mechanisms and strategies suggested here, would contribute to increasing the diversity of voices in American cultural production.

While this study presents recommendations for strengthening the independent film infrastructure, it must be recognized that every filmmaker has his or her own expectations and method of evaluating success. The recommendations in this study might help the circumstances of some independent filmmakers and help to raise the profile and importance of independent film. But it must be said that these recommendations may not

apply to all circumstances of regional independent filmmaking, which vary so widely from community to community and individual to individual.

Conclusion: The Future of Regional Independent Filmmaking

The regional filmmaking landscape is one of small-scale industry, characterized by primarily small businesses, limited profits, close-knit partnerships, and community input. More importantly, these communities are home to passionate individuals who are dedicated to their filmmaking and to expanding the opportunities therein.

The immediate and long-range future of regional independent filmmaking communities are similar, in that these communities will continue to operate, alternately flourishing and waning as individuals and organizations come and go from a given location. These communities will likely remain small-scale industries, supporting themselves but not likely to extend much beyond their city or, in some cases, state borders. The nature of the regional independent filmmaking community is that it is just that: regional. It is likely going to remain focused on producing media at the regional level, mainly because one of the most forceful reasons for sustaining and growing the regional independent filmmaking community are to stimulate the local economy through job creation.

The filmmaking communities are likely to continue integrating other types of media into production and distribution, most notably the Internet, but also television (broadcast and cable), books (such as comic books or graphic novels), and videogames. The trend of transmedia, or the production of content that is adapted and expanded across multiple media platforms, will likely grow, as it is appealing to both independent

filmmakers and major Hollywood studios. Transmedia allows independent filmmakers (or, perhaps more accurately, media producers) to translate their ideas into various platforms so that they might attract the attention of a range of audiences, financiers, and distributors. Major media corporations are also attracted to the concept of transmedia because it allows for a single property to be exploited across multiple platforms to not only capitalize on synergistic media content, but also to create deeper storytelling with which more audiences may be willing to engage (and pay for).

Seattle and Portland in particular are poised to take advantage of these trends, based on the prevalence of technology companies in the region. However, the motivations for taking advantage of these trends are likely to become increasingly complex if and when independents work with major companies, such as Microsoft or RealNetworks (both based in the Seattle area). These major corporations are beholden to shareholders and are therefore more attentive to revenue generation than independent filmmakers are likely to be.

Regional independent filmmaking will continue to contribute substantially to the fabric of American cultural production, and it will likely become more widely recognized as individuals and organizations in regional locations gain more attention and broader audiences. However, the growth of a given regional location's national reputation (or that of regional independent filmmaking as a whole) will probably be contingent upon its ability to produce financially successful films. While film professionals interviewed for this study overwhelmingly defined success in terms of personal and professional accomplishment rather than monetary gain, audience and industry recognition are unfortunately more often driven by a film's financial success. As noted, motivations for

regional independent filmmakers can be quite different from the motivations and imperatives of their Hollywood studio counterparts. Examining these motivations, as this study has done, helps us understand how and why regional independent filmmaking communities exist.

At the most basic level, filmmakers want to produce films and share them with audiences. Perhaps the distinction between mainstream Hollywood and independent filmmakers is less important when working at the individual level. “A lot of indie people are studio people, and a lot of studio people are former indie people,” says filmmaker Jon Moritsugu. “Underground, mainstream, alternative – at a certain level it just blurs. I want to make a movie and I want to get the right people to support me. I’m trying hard not to discriminate against what type of people support me.” Individual excitement and enthusiasm for filmmaking is widespread. The infrastructures within which individuals work can aggravate challenges, but they can also intensify successes. Filmmaking infrastructures, both independent and mainstream Hollywood, need to reflect the enthusiasm held by filmmakers, creating and sustaining systems, policies, and strategies that allow space for more diverse cultural voices to emerge.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFTRA	American Federation of Television and Radio Artists
AIVF	Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers
GOFT	Governor's Office of Film and Television, Oregon (formerly OFVO)
IATSE	International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees
IFP	Independent Feature Project
IFTA	Independent Film & Television Alliance
i-OPIF	Indigenous Oregon Production Investment Fund
MPAA	Motion Picture Association of America
NWFC	Northwest Film Center (formerly NWFSC)
NWFF	Northwest Film Forum (Seattle)
NWFSC	Northwest Film Study Center (now NWFC)
OFVO	Oregon Film and Video Office (now GOFT)
OMPA	Oregon Media Production Association
OPIF	Oregon Production Investment Fund
POW-Fest	Portland Oregon Women's Film Festival
SAG	Screen Actors Guild
SIFF	Seattle International Film Festival

APPENDIX B

MAPS



Source: Planetware Maps, 2010.

Map of West Coast of the United States



Approximate Mileage Between Cities

	Vancouver	Seattle	Portland	L.A.
Vancouver	--	140	315	1275
Seattle	140	--	175	1135
Portland	315	175	--	960
L.A.	1275	1135	960	--

APPENDIX C

NAICS DEFINITIONS

51	Information (economic sector)
512	Motion Picture and Sound Recording Industries (subsector)
5121	Motion Picture and Video Industries (industry group)
51211	Motion Picture and Video Production (NAICS industry)
512110	Motion Picture and Video Production (national industry)
	Animated cartoon production
	Animated cartoon production and distribution
	Commercials, television, production
	Film studios producing films
	Films, motion picture production
	Films, motion picture production and distribution
	Instructional video production
	Motion picture and video production
	Motion picture and video production and distribution
	Motion picture production
	Motion picture production and distribution
	Motion picture studios, producing motion pictures
	Movie production and distribution
	Music video production
	Music video production and distribution
	Program producing, television
	Television commercial production
	Television show production
	Video production
	Video production and distribution
512120	Motion Picture and Video Distribution
	Animated cartoon distribution
	Film distribution agencies
	Film distribution, motion picture and video
	Film libraries, commercial distribution
	Motion picture distribution exclusive of production
	Motion picture film distributors
	Motion picture film libraries
	Tape distribution for television
	Television show syndicators

512131	Movie Theaters (Except Drive-in) Cinemas Film festivals exhibitors Motion picture exhibition Motion picture exhibitors for airlines Motion picture exhibitors, itinerant Motion picture theaters, indoor Movie theaters (except drive-in)
512132	Movie Theaters, Drive-in Drive-in motion picture theaters
512199	Other Motion Picture and Video Industries Booking agencies, motion picture Booking agencies, motion picture or video productions Film libraries, motion picture or video, stock footage Film processing laboratories, motion picture Laboratory services, motion picture Libraries, motion picture stock footage film Libraries, videotape, stock footage Motion picture booking agencies Motion picture film laboratories Motion picture film libraries, stock footage Motion picture film reproduction for theatrical distribution Motion picture laboratories Reproduction of motion picture films for theatrical distribution Stock footage film libraries Videotape libraries, stock footage
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (economic sector)
711	Performing Arts, Spectator Sports, and Related Industries (subsector)
7115	Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers (industry group)
71151	Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers (NAICS industry)
711510	Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers (national industry) Actors, independent Actresses, independent Animated cartoon artists, independent Announcers, independent radio and television Cameramen, independent (freelance) Cinematographers, independent Composers, independent Costume designers, independent theatrical Directors (i.e., film, motion picture, music, theatrical), independent

Directors, independent motion picture
Film actors, independent
Film producers, independent
Lighting technicians, theatrical, independent
Motion picture directors, independent
Motion picture producers, independent
Producers, independent
Scenery designers, independent theatrical
Screenplay writers, independent
Script writers, independent
Set designers, independent theatrical
Special effect technicians, independent
Stage set (e.g., concert, motion picture, television) erecting and
dismantling, independent
Television producers, independent

Source: U.S. Census Bureau North American Industry Classification System website
(<http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/>)

APPENDIX D

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

1. Welcome!

You are invited to participate in a research study that examines the current status of independent filmmaking in the U.S., and in Washington and Oregon in particular. This survey will contribute to a doctoral dissertation conducted by Mary Erickson, from the University of Oregon School of Journalism & Communication. This research will help me understand how and why art and culture, through the medium of film, are transformed into products for sale.

If you choose to participate, please complete this survey, which should take approximately 20-25 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, simply exit from this website. Responses will be anonymous and your name will not appear anywhere on the survey, unless you agree to be contacted for an in-depth interview. Completing the questionnaire constitutes your consent to participate.

Please print this screen for your records. If you have any questions regarding the research, contact:

Mary Erickson
School of Journalism & Communication
1275 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1275

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office for Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Oregon, (541) 346-2510. This office oversees the review of the research to protect your rights and is not involved with this study.

Thank you again for your help.

2. Geographic Location

1. In terms of filmmaking, where do you primarily work?

- Washington
- Oregon
- Elsewhere

3. Filmmaker Background: Washington

1. Approximately when did you start working in the film industry?

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

2. Have you received any kind of formal professional film education?

- Some film school
- Degree from film school
- Certificate program
- Training courses
- No formal professional education
- Other (please describe)

3. Geographically speaking, where have you primarily worked in the last 12 months? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seattle/King County | <input type="checkbox"/> Los Angeles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Snohomish County | <input type="checkbox"/> New York City |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pierce County | <input type="checkbox"/> Vancouver, BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thurston County | <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in U.S. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in Washington | <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in Canada |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oregon | <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in world |

4. Why do you work in the geographic area(s) that you do?

- Good job opportunities
- Close to family/friends
- Preferable lifestyle
- Economic considerations
- Spouse/partner has job here
- Other (please describe)

5. Does your primary income derive from filmmaking work?

- Yes
- No

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

6. Do you supplement your filmmaking income with other work?

- Yes
 No

7. If you supplement your filmmaking income with other income, where does it come from? Check all that apply.

- Consulting
 Teaching
 Job(s) that are not film-related
 Partner/Spouse support
 Savings
 Investments
 Other (please describe)

8. Are you a member of any local film-related organizations? If yes, which one(s)?

- 911 Media Arts
 Cinema Seattle
 Not a member
 Washington Film Works
 Women in Film/Seattle
 Independent Feature Project/Seattle
 Northwest Film Forum

Other (please describe)

4. Filmmaker Background: Oregon

1. Approximately when did you start working in the film industry?

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

2. Have you received any kind of formal professional film education?

- Some film school
- Degree from film school
- Certificate program
- Training courses
- No formal professional education
- Other (please describe)

3. Geographically speaking, where have you primarily worked in the last 12 months? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Portland metro area (including Multnomah, Washington, and/or Clackamas County) | <input type="checkbox"/> Washington |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vancouver, WA area | <input type="checkbox"/> Los Angeles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marion County (Salem, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> New York City |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Linn and/or Benton County (Albany, Corvallis, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Vancouver, BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lane County (Eugene, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in U.S. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deschutes County (Bend, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in Canada |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jackson County (Ashland, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in world |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elsewhere in Oregon | |

4. Why do you work in the geographic area(s) that you do?

- Good job opportunities
- Close to family/friends
- Preferable lifestyle
- Economic considerations
- Spouse/partner has job here
- Other (please describe)

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

5. Does your primary income derive from filmmaking work?

Yes

No

6. Do you supplement your filmmaking income with other work?

Yes

No

7. If you supplement your filmmaking income with other income, where does it come from? Check all that apply.

Consulting

Teaching

Job(s) that are not film-related

Partner/Spouse support

Savings

Investments

Other (please describe)

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

8. Are you a member of any local film-related organizations? If yes, which one(s)?

- Northwest Film Center
- Film Oregon Alliance
- Film Action Oregon
- NW Documentary
- Cinema Project
- Oregon Media Production Association (OMPA)
- Mid-Oregon Production Arts Network (MOPAN)
- Southern Oregon Film & Video Association (SOFVA)
- Central Oregon Film & Video Association
- Not a member
- Other (please describe)

5. Filmmaker Background: Other Location

1. Approximately when did you start working in the film industry?

2. Have you received any kind of formal professional film education?

- Some film school
- Degree from film school
- Certificate program
- Training courses
- No formal professional education
- Other (please describe)

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

3. Geographically speaking, where have you primarily worked in the last 12 months? Check all that apply.

- Los Angeles
- New York City
- Vancouver, BC
- Elsewhere in U.S.
- Elsewhere in Canada
- Elsewhere in world

4. Why do you work in the geographic area(s) that you do?

- Good job opportunities
- Close to family/friends
- Preferable lifestyle
- Economic considerations
- Spouse/partner has job here
- Other (please describe)

5. Does your primary income derive from filmmaking work?

- Yes
- No

6. Do you supplement your filmmaking income with other work?

- Yes
- No

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

7. If you supplement your filmmaking income with other income, where does it come from? Check all that apply.

- Consulting
- Teaching
- Job(s) that are not film-related
- Partner/Spouse support
- Savings
- Investments
- Other (please describe)

6. Your Filmmaking in the Past Year

The following questions pertain to films that you typically work on. Please focus mainly on the films that you've worked on in the past year.

1. What job title(s) do you normally use to describe what you do in filmmaking? Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Line Producer | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Producer | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrician |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writer | <input type="checkbox"/> Actor | <input type="checkbox"/> Script Supervisor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Cinematographer | <input type="checkbox"/> Grip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Producer | <input type="checkbox"/> Sound-related (sound mixer, sound recorder, boom operator) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Executive Producer | <input type="checkbox"/> Art Department-related (art director, graphic artist, storyboard artist, etc.) | |

- Other (please describe)

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

2. What type(s) of productions do you normally work on? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feature live-action films | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate/Industrial films |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Short live-action films | <input type="checkbox"/> Documentaries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feature animated films | <input type="checkbox"/> Music videos |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Short animated films | <input type="checkbox"/> Television programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercials | <input type="checkbox"/> Web-based / other interactive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) | |

3. About how many months in the last 12 months did you spend working in some capacity with a film production?

- Less than 1 month
- 1-2 months
- 3-5 months
- 6 months or more

4. How do you typically determine whom you will work with on upcoming projects? Check all that apply.

- I work alone
- I only work with people that I have worked with in the past.
- I prefer to work with people that I have worked with in the past, but bring in new cast/crew as necessary
- I send out calls for cast/crew
- I answer general calls for cast/crew
- I ask friends to help me out
- Other (please specify)

7. Your Filmmaking in the Past Year: Film Financing

The following questions pertain to films that you typically work on. Please focus mainly on the films that you've worked on in the past year.

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

1. How are the films typically financed that you work on? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Credit cards | <input type="checkbox"/> Grants (federal, state, nonprofit/institutional) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Savings | <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-sales (video, cable, overseas, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Donations or investments from family/friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Negative pickup |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Investors | <input type="checkbox"/> In-kind |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limited Liability Company | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate sponsorship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bank loans | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please describe) | |
-

2. What types of individuals or organizations do you usually approach for film financing? Check all that apply.

- Granting organizations (NEH, NEA, state arts councils, institutions)
- Corporations
- Banks
- Individual investors
- Family and/or friends
- No one
- Other

3. Has corporate sponsorship been sought for one or more films that you've worked on?

- No
- Yes; please describe

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

4. What has been the primary reason for seeking corporate sponsorship?

- Money (cash for production, etc.)
- In-kind support
- Promotional purposes
- Legitimacy
- Other (please describe)

5. If corporate sponsorship has been sought, what types of companies are solicited?

- Local companies
- Regional companies
- National and/or international companies

6. Has there been product placement in one or more of the films you've worked on?

- Yes
- No

7. If product placement has been used in one or more of the films that you've worked on, how did it change the film?

- There has been no product placement
- There was product placement, but the film didn't change at all
- The writing had minor changes
- The writing had substantial changes
- Other (please describe)
- The plot had minor changes
- The plot had substantial changes
- Original cinematography/filming plans were altered only slightly
- Original cinematography/filming plans were altered substantially

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

8. What are your views on product placement in independent films?

- Filmmakers who incorporate product placement are selling out
- It's a necessary evil
- It's a good way to get money for the film
- There's no problem with it at all
- Other (please describe)

8. Your Filmmaking in the Past Year: Film Distribution

The following questions pertain to films that you typically work on. Please focus mainly on the films that you've worked on in the past year.

1. What types of organizations have distributed films on which you've worked? Check all that apply.

- Major studio (Universal, Warner Brothers, etc.)
- Specialty studio owned by major studio (Fox Searchlight, Miramax, etc.)
- Other distribution company (Kino, Zeitgeist, etc.)
- Online distribution company (Netflix, Film Baby, Amazon, etc.)
- Nonprofit organization
- Self-distribution
- Other
- None

2. Have you submitted a film to a film festival before? If yes, which ones?

- No
- Yes; which ones?

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

3. Has a film that you've worked on been accepted to a film festival?

- No
- Yes; which ones and when?

9. Your Filmmaking in the Past Year: Film Publicity and Promotion

The following questions pertain to films that you typically work on. Please focus mainly on the films that you've worked on in the past year.

1. Who typically handles publicity and promotion for the productions that you work on?

- Yourself
- Publicist
- Distributor
- Exhibition facilities
- No one

2. What kinds of marketing materials are typically produced for the films that you work on?

- Online: Website, blog, podcast
- Advertising: newspaper, TV, internet, other
- Publicity (interviews, feature stories, etc.)
- Posters
- Trailers
- Merchandise (soundtrack, clothing, other)
- Other (please describe)

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

3. How useful do you feel these marketing materials are in promoting the films that you work on?

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	N/A
Online: Website, blog, podcast	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Advertising: newspaper, TV, internet, other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Publicity (interviews, feature stories, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Posters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trailers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Merchandise (soundtrack, clothing, other)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What media outlets have written about or reported on the films on which you've worked in the past year? Please name which ones.

Local general newspaper

Local alternative or specialty publication

Local TV station

Local radio station

National general newspaper

National specialty publication

National TV/radio station

Online publication or broadcast

10. Your Most Recent Filmmaking Experience

Thinking about the most recent film you've worked on, please answer the following questions.

1. Was a website developed for the most recent film that you worked on?

- Yes
- No

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

2. If yes, what kinds of features did this website have? Check all that apply.

- Synopsis of film, bios or interviews with cast/crew, etc.
- Blog by director or other member of production
- Interactive games, downloadable screensavers, ringtones, etc.
- List of screening dates and locations
- Links to ticket sales
- Links to merchandise sales
- Other (please describe)

3. Did the design and/or content of the website change for this film over the course of the film's lifespan?

- Yes
- No

4. If yes, when during the filmmaking process did the website change?

- During production phase
- During post-production phase
- During distribution phase
- During exhibition phase
- Website did not change

5. If yes, how did the website change? Please describe.

11. Your Most Recent Filmmaking Experience

Thinking about the most recent film you've worked on, please answer the following questions.

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

1. Did the film's other marketing materials (trailer, ads, posters, etc.) change over the course of the film's lifespan?

- Yes
 No

2. If yes, when during the filmmaking process did these materials change?

- During production phase
 During post-production phase
 During distribution phase
 During exhibition phase
 Materials did not change

3. If yes, how did these materials change? Please describe.

4. Did other elements of the film change from the production phase to the distribution phase? These might include writing/plot, sound, editing, etc. Please describe.

- No
 Yes (please describe)

12. Filmmaking Goals

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

1. What are your motivations for filmmaking?

	Top priority	High priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Not priority at all
Make enough money to support myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Make vast amounts of money	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gain experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Achieve artistic recognition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Make professional connections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gain exposure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Achieve peer recognition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Achieve fame	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Roughly what percentage of your filmmaking work is done for financial goals?

- 0%
- 1-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%

3. Roughly what percentage of your filmmaking work is done for personal or artistic goals?

- 0%
- 1-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%

Independent Filmmaking in Washington and Oregon

4. Roughly what percentage of your filmmaking work is done for a major film or television studio?

- 0%
- 1-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%

5. Roughly what percentage of your filmmaking work is done for an independent filmmaking company?

- 0%
- 1-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%

13. Perceptions about Filmmaking

1. What are some challenges faced by independent filmmakers these days?

2. How do you define success in filmmaking?

3. How do you define independent filmmaking?

14. Demographic Information

1. Are you male, female or other?

- Male
- Female
- Other

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2. What is your age?

- Under 20 years old
- 20-29 years old
- 30-39 years old
- 40-49 years old
- 50-59 years old
- 60-69 years old
- 70 years old or older

3. What is the highest level of education you have received?

- Some high school
- High school
- Some college
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD, etc.)

4. What is your total annual income?

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000-\$19,999
- \$20,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$79,999
- \$80,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$149,999
- Over \$150,000

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5. Are you willing to be contacted for an in-depth interview?

No

Yes; please provide email address and phone number

Thank you very much for your time. Your answers are much appreciated!

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Describe your career in filmmaking. Where did you start? Where have you worked?

Why are you involved with filmmaking (in whatever capacity)? What is your filmmaking philosophy?

Why do you work in Portland (or Seattle)?

What is your opinion of the filmmaking community in Portland and Oregon (or Seattle and Washington)? What do you think about its support systems, organizations, etc.?

Describe your relationship to the Hollywood film industry.

In regards to the films with which you've been involved: how have they been marketed? What sorts of strategies have been used? Which have been successful? Which have failed?

How do you characterize success in terms of filmmaking?

How do you define "independent film"?

What do you see as the future of independent film in the United States?

Do you have other comments or remarks that you'd like to add?

Can you suggest other individuals with whom I should speak about my research topic?

APPENDIX F

NOTABLE PRODUCTIONS FILMED IN OREGON

Selected productions are listed here. Oregon-based producers are noted with an asterisk (*). For a complete list, see the Oregon Governor's Office of Film and Television website. Source: <http://oregonfilm.org/history/>

2010s

The Weather Outside*, 2010
Cell Count*, 2010
Portlandia (TV Series), 2010
House of Last Things*, 2010
The Wait*, 2010
Little Blue Pill*, 2010
Leverage Season 3 (TV series), 2010
Wake Before I Die*, 2010

2000s

Meek's Cutoff, 2009
Leverage Season 2 (TV series), 2009
Extraordinary Measures, 2009
Coraline, 2009
Everyman's War, 2008
Twilight, 2008
Not Dead Yet*, 2008
Without a Paddle: Nature's Calling, 2008
Calvin Marshall, 2007
Management, 2007
Selfless*, 2007
Street, 2007
Untraceable, 2007
Wendy & Lucy, 2007
Cathedral Park*, 2006
The Feast of Love, 2006
The Music Within, 2006
Paranoid Park*, 2006
My Name is Bruce*, 2006
Kate's Smile, 2005
Spiral, 2005
Drama Queens, 2005
The Sasquatch Dumpling Gang, 2005
Conversations With God, 2005
Path of Evil*, 2005
Damaged Goods*, 2004
Nearing Grace, 2004
Behind the Mask*, 2004
Yesterday's Dreams*, 2004

Monday Night Gig*, 2004
Ring II, 2004
Sisters*, 2004
The Good Lot*, 2004
Losers Lounge*, 2003
Harvest of Fear*, 2003
Mean Creek, 2003
Twilight Conspiracy, 2003
Thumbsucker, 2003
The Skin Horse, 2002
Sacred Science, 2002
Elephant, 2002
The Ring, 2002
The Hunted, 2001
Bandits, 2000
Down And Out With The Dolls, 2000
Eban and Charley, 2000
Therese: The Story of a Soul*, 2000
Gary & Mike (Animated TV Series)*, 2000
The Sexy Chef*, 2000

1990s

The PJs (Animated TV Series)*, 1999
Bongwater, 1998
No Alibi, 1998
Anoosh of the Airways*, 1997
Zero Effect, 1997
Total Reality, 1997
The Postman, 1997
Reggie's Prayer*, 1996
Nowhere Man, 1996
Foxfire, 1995
Nowhere Man (TV series), 1995
Tinkercrank*, 1994
Mr. Holland's Opus, 1994
Imaginary Crimes, 1993
The River Wild, 1993
Even Cowgirls Get The Blues*, 1992
Free Willy, 1992
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III, 1992

Dr. Giggles, 1992
From Oregon With Love, 1992 (Fuji-TV)
A Claymation Easter Special* (TV program),
1992
Body of Evidence, 1992
Devils Keep*, 1992
Claire of the Moon*, 1991
Wild Child*, 1991
Point Break, 1991
Love & Dynamite, 1990
My Own Private Idaho*, 1990
From Oregon With Love III, 1990 (Fuji-TV
series)
Kindergarten Cop, 1990

1980s

The California Raisin Show* (TV program),
1989
Come See the Paradise, 1989
From Oregon With Love (Fuji-TV series), 1989
Fatal Revenge* (TV program), 1988
The Watcher* (TV program), 1988
Drugstore Cowboy*, 1988
Breaking In, 1988
From Oregon With Love (Fuji-TV series), 1988
A Claymation Christmas Special* (TV
program), 1987
Permanent Record, 1987
Benji the Hunted, 1986
Shadow Play*, 1986
From Oregon With Love (Fuji-TV series), 1986
Mala Noche*, 1985
Short Circuit, 1985
Stand By Me, 1985
From Oregon With Love (Fuji-TV series), 1984
Adventures of Mark Twain*, 1984
Station to Station*, 1984
Goonies, 1984
American Taboo*, 1984
The Courier of Death* (TV series), 1983
Unhinged*, 1982
California Mix, 1981
How to Beat the High Cost of Living, 1980
Paydirt*, 1980
Personal Best, 1980

1970s

Animal House, 1978
Fire (TV series), 1978
The Shining, 1977
One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, 1975
Rooster Cogburn, 1974
Death of a Sideshow* (TV series), 1972
The Circle*, 1972

Kansas City Bomber, 1972
Lost Horizon, 1972
Napoleon and Samantha, 1972
American Wilderness, 1971
Drive, He Said, 1970
The Great Northfield MN Raid, 1970
Sometimes a Great Notion, 1970
Five Easy Pieces, 1970
Getting Straight, 1970

1960s

Paint Your Wagon, 1969
The Way West, 1967
Shenandoah, 1965
The Great Race, 1965
Fields of Honor, 1964
Adventure West, 1962
The Character, 1961
Ring of Fire, 1961

1950s

Tonka, 1958
The Day Called X, 1957
Oregon Passage, 1957
Portland Expose, 1956
The Indian Fighter, 1955
Pillars of the Sky, 1955
Sioux Uprising, 1952
Bend of the River, 1952

1940s

Rachel and the Stranger, 1949
Golden Earrings, 1946
Canyon Passage, 1946
Thunderhead, Son of Flicka, 1944

1930s

Abe Lincoln in Illinois, 1939
Running Wild, 1938
Lost Horizon, 1937
Big Timber, 1937
Singing Waters, 1931
The Big Trail, 1930

1920s

The Reporter, 1928
Our Daily Bread, 1928
The Reporter, 1927
Mystery House, 1927
Forbidden Traffic, 1927
The Ice Flood, 1926
The General, 1926
Flames*, 1926
Youth's Highway*, 1925

Winds of Chance, 1925
Vanishing Horse, 1925
The Fighting Romeo*, 1925
The Fighting Parson*, 1925
The Fighting Chance*, 1925
Scarlet and Gold*, 1925
Phantom Shadows*, 1925
Peggy of the Secret Service, 1925
Hills Aflame*, 1925
Under the Rouge*, 1924
Trail of Vengeance*, 1924
Shackles of Fear*, 1924
Passing on the West, 1924
Harbor Patrol, 1924
Driftwood, 1924
Beaten*, 1924
Way of the Transgressor*, 1923
The Vow of Vengeance*, 1923
The Power Divine*, 1923
The Frame Up*, 1923
The Flash*, 1923
Scars of Hate*, 1923
Flames of Passion*, 1923
Crashing Courage*, 1923
Covered Wagon, 1923
Underground Trail, 1922
The Range Patrol*, 1922
The Mine Looters, 1922
The Death Message*, 1922
His Last Assignment, 1922
Bulldog Courage*, 1922
Barriers of Folly*, 1922
Headed North, 1920
The Golden Trail*, 1920

1910s

Martyrs of Yesterday*, 1919
The Stolen Pie, 1916
Grace's Visit to the Rogue Valley, 1915
Where Cowboy is King*, 1915

1900s

The Fisherman's Bride, 1908

APPENDIX G

NOTABLE PRODUCTIONS FILMED IN WASHINGTON

Selected productions are listed here. Washington-based producers are noted with an asterisk (*). For a full list of films shot in Seattle, see the City of Seattle Office of Film + Music website and the “Movies Filmed in Washington State” website.

Sources: http://www.seattle.gov/filmoffice/film_history.htm; <http://www.angelfire.com/film/wastatefilms/>

2010s

Rogue Saints Movie*, 2010
Grassroots, 2010
Nothing Against Life*, 2010
Late Autumn, 2010
A Not So Still Life*, 2010
Judas Kiss, 2010

2000s

The Details*, 2009
Rock Paper Scissors*, 2009
Oy Vey! My Son is Gay!!, 2009
Cost of Living*, 2008
World's Greatest Dad, 2008
Traveling, 2008
Dear Lemon Lima, 2008
The Immaculate Conception of Little Dizzle*, 2008
North American*, 2008
Yonder*, 2008
Render Me Dead*, 2008
Humpday*, 2008
Battle in Seattle, 2007
Miss Shellagh's Miniskirt*, 2007
The Last Mimzy, 2006
Outsourced*, 2006
Cthulhu*, 2006
Firewall, 2005
Expiration Date*, 2005
We Go Way Back*, 2005
Firewall, 2005
The Ring 2, 2004
Brand Upon the Brain!, 2004
Police Beat*, 2003
Living Life*, 2003
Buffalo Bill's Defunct*, 2003
Inheritance*, 2003

The Naked Proof*, 2003
Enough, 2002
Life or Something Like It, 2002
The Ring, 2001
The Fugitive (TV series), 2000-2001
Rose Red (TV miniseries), 2000

1990s

Snow Falling on Cedars, 1999
The Leonard Cohen Afterworld, 1999
Real World: Seattle (TV series), 1998
Smoke Signals*, 1998
Book of Stars*, 1998
Ten Things I Hate about You, 1998
Under Heaven*, 1997
Frasier (TV series), 1997
Practical Magic, 1997
The Sixth Man, 1996
Prefontaine, 1996
Black Circle Boys, 1996
Assassins, 1995
Eden, 1995
Mad Love, 1994
Disclosure, 1994
Born to be Wild, 1994
Georgia, 1994
Little Buddha, 1993
On the Street, 1993
The Vanishing, 1992
Sleepless in Seattle, 1992
Singles, 1991
The Hand that Rocks the Cradle, 1991
Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me, 1991
Northern Exposure (TV series), 1990-1995
Twin Peaks (TV series), 1990-1991
Dogfight, 1990

1980s

The Fabulous Baker Boys, 1989
Come See the Paradise, 1989
Class of 1999, 1988
Third Degree Burn, 1988
Journey to Spirit Island*, 1988
Say Anything, 1988
Plain Clothes, 1987
Seven Hours to Judgment, 1987
L.A. Bad, 1986
Harry and the Hendersons, 1986
House of Games, 1986
Bombs Away*, 1985
Restless Natives*, 1985
Dark Mansions, 1985
Power, 1985
Twice in a Lifetime, 1984
Coming out of the Ice, 1982
Plaza Suite, 1982
War Games, 1982
An Officer and a Gentleman, 1981
Bustin' Loose, 1981
Barefoot in the Park, 1980

1970s

Gas City*, 1978
The Deer Hunter, 1978
Doubles*, 1978
Joyride, 1977
Sweet Revenge, 1977
The Black and Decker Hedgetrimmer
Murders*, 1976
Chickens: A Process*, 1975
Threshold: The Blue Angels Experience*, 1975
McQ, 1974
The Night Strangler (TV movie), 1974
99 and 44/100 Per Cent Dead, 1974
Parallax View, 1974
Cinderella Liberty, 1973
Harry in your Pocket, 1973
Livin' on the Mud*, 1972
Didn't You Hear?*, 1970

1960s

The Redwoods*, 1967
Slender Thread, 1965
It Happened at the World's Fair, 1963

1950s

The Hanging Tree, 1959
The Track of the Cat, 1954
The Olympic Elk, 1952

1940s

You Came Along, 1945
Seattle: Gateway to the Northwest, 1940

1930s

God's Country and the Woman, 1937
Call of the Wild, 1935
Tugboat Annie, 1933

1920s

The Patent Leather Kid, 1927

1910s

A Romance of Seattle, 1919
The Lure of Alaska, 1915
An Odyssey of the North, 1914

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