

Forging a Gay Mainstream
Negotiating Gay Cinema in the
American Hegemony

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ABSTRACT**Forging a Gay Mainstream**
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American Hegemony

Peter Knegt

The line between “studio” and “independent” film has recently blurred considerably with respect to the American film industry. This trend has manifested literally in “Indiewood,” a term coined to describe the growth of studio-owned “specialty divisions” that distribute technically independent films. This thesis seeks to explore the implications of “Indiewood” on the economics of gay film, asking how changes in the infrastructure of the American film industry have altered the manner in which gay film is produced and distributed, and what themes are being privileged in this new alignment. Situated within Gramscian framework of “hegemony,” this analysis will examine what I term “Gay Indiewood,” in relation to neoliberalism, the dominant power of American society. While “Indiewood” can clearly be seen as representing neoliberalism in its definitive transferring of independent film into the corporate world, this thesis will explore its relationship to what Lisa Duggan terms “the new homonormativity,” a form of neoliberalism within gay politics. By linking the concepts of “Gay Indiewood,” “the new homonormativity” and “neoliberalism,” this thesis urges a closer look at the mainstreaming of homosexuality in the American hegemonic arrangement.

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INTRODUCTION

Popular opinion has suggested that post-9/11, the “climate of ‘official opinion’” regarding gays in America has moved towards greater acceptance (Duggan, 2003: 44). Though as history scholar Lisa Duggan notes in *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy*, acknowledgement of the “most-assimilated, gender-appropriate, politically-mainstream portions of the gay population” had already moved in that direction (Duggan, 2003: 44). What *had* changed was a shift from “culture war” alliances and attacks, to a “superficial ‘multiculturalism’ compatible with the global aspirations of U.S. business interests” (Duggan, 2003: 44). This placed some proponents of “equality politics” within neoliberalism, an economic movement that Duggan considers the “hegemony of the contemporary United States” (Duggan, 2003: 45).

“Hegemony” is a concept most notably discussed by Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci in his *Letters From Prison*, written for the most part in the 1920s and 1930s. The term itself, as defined by one of Gramsci’s theoretical successors, Welsh novelist and critic Raymond Williams, refers to “political rule or domination, especially in relations between social classes, and especially to definitions of a ruling class” (Williams, 1977: 109). When Gramsci’s *Letters* was translated into English in the 1970s, scholars “enthusiastically received” his concept as an “important tool for cultural analysis and social critique¹” (Artz, 2000: 1).

In *Cultural Hegemony in the United States*, scholars Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy suggest that the “more familiar [scholars] became with the concept, the more they discovered its many possibilities” (Artz, 2000: 1). A wide variety of “theorists,

analysts, and researchers were reworking and applying their own variations of the concept” (Artz, 2000: 1). Artz and Murphy summarize the mass discussion that arose from this:

Power is best secured if subordinates buy into the arrangement, agree to the terms, and make the relationship theirs. Hegemony is that system of power that has the support of the subordinate. [It] addresses how social practices, relationships, and structures are negotiated among diverse social forces. (Artz, 2000: 2-3).

Examples of this negotiation are rampant throughout history. Well before Gramsci popularized the term within the Academy, “hegemony” had been used in a complicated variety of contexts, particularly during the dramatic growth of European capitalism in the late 19th century² (Artz, 2000: 6). Duggan suggests that arguably since the early 1980s, hegemony in the United States can be defined as neoliberalism, the “brand name” for the form of procorporate, “free market,” anti-“big government” rhetoric “shaping U.S. policy and dominating international financial institutions” (Duggan, 2002: 177). Primarily associated with economic and trade policy, the cultural politics of neoliberalism are “considered and debated relatively rarely” in discussions of the economic and political mechanisms of U.S. cultural imperialism (Duggan, 2002: 177).

Artz and Murphy, working three decades after Gramsci’s translation, suggested an ample entry point into contemporary discussions of hegemony lies within most media practices, which “illustrate how culture relates to political conditions” (Artz, 2000: 27). As a student of cultural studies who has predominantly focused on American gay cinema

during my academic career, the idea of examining gay³ cinema within the context of neoliberalism and its substantial political and economic power in the United States was appealing. I had spent the last two years dividing my time between academia and work as a journalist for an online magazine that focused on the independent film industry. This juxtaposition of observing both theory and practice simultaneously led me to critically witness an evolution in the business practices of gay cinema.

While covering the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, I attended a half dozen gay-themed panels in an attempt to contextualize some ideas for this study. Christine Vachon, often dubbed the “godmother of new queer cinema,” and the producer of a wide array of related titles⁴ acknowledged the pragmatic problems affecting the current gay cinema during a panel for her latest film, *Savage Grace* (Kalin, 2008):

There was a point [in the 1990s] though, from a more economic point of view, where you really could make a queer movie. If you made it for the right price you could make it and market it purely to a gay and lesbian audience and it could make its money back. And that I don't think is the case anymore.

The film's director, Tom Kalin, spoke alongside Vachon at the same panel, and suggested that that the 1990s was simply “a period of time where the broadcast landscape was different.” He is referring to the fact that filmmaking is generally more expensive now, and you cannot get away with making a film – gay or otherwise – as efficiently as you could in the 1990s due to a variety of factors. These factors include the suggestion that a paying audience is much less likely to accept films with lower production values,

and the related fact that the rise of “Indiewood⁵,” a term coined to describe the growth of studio-owned “specialty divisions” that distribute technically independent films, has blurred lines between studio and independent filmmaking, therefore exponentially increased the average cost of the latter (McClintock, 2008: 32).

This study will explore the implications of “Indiewood” on the economics of gay film, asking how related changes in the infrastructure of the American film industry have altered the manner in which gay film is produced and distributed. I will examine “Indiewood”’s release of a number of gay-themed films, a group of works I will refer to as “Gay Indiewood.” As media scholar Charles Acland notes, such “Gramscian approaches” to cultural critique produces “a historical portrait of the dynamic relations between dominant and subordinate forms and practices” (Acland, 2003: 17). Situating it within Gramscian framework of “hegemony,” I will examine “Gay Indiewood” in relation to neoliberalism, the dominant “power” of American society. What do the economic proponents of “Gay Indiewood” suggest about the relationship between gay cinema and the hegemonic relationship of the United States? While it can clearly be seen as representing neoliberalism in its definitive transferring of independent film into the corporate world, I would also like to explore its relationship to what Duggan terms “the new homonormativity,” a form of neoliberalism within gay politics (Duggan, 2002: 177). As Artz and Murphy note:

Given the dynamics of material, political, and cultural conditions, parallel yet distinct worldviews re-create the hegemonic relations that appear throughout culture: in art, law, philosophy, fashion, movies, entertainment, religion, family

relations, and other cultural practices. Each of these cultural realms intimately intersects with corresponding economic and political conditions of any hegemony (Artz, 2000: 28).

Duggan discusses the advent of a “highly visible and influential center-libertarian-conservative-classical liberal formation in gay politics” that aims to “contest and displace the expansively democratic vision represented by progressive activists” (Duggan, 2002: 177). This “new homonormativity” seeks to replace the expansively democratic vision represented by progressive activists with a “model of narrowly constrained public life cordoned off from the ‘private’ control and vast inequalities of economic life” (Duggan, 2002: 177). Duggan suggests that the primary strategy of this “turn of the century neoliberalism” is privatization⁶ (Duggan, 2002: 178).

In *Queer Theory and Social Change*, Max H. Kirsch explains that the rationalization capitalist ideology produces “may thus be masked in forms of conscious thought and action that reinforce the goals of that ideology while appearing on the surface as resistance” (Kirsch, 2001: 42). The new “center” declared by the writers and politicians in which Duggan draws from undoubtedly attests to this idea, disguising a rights movement as, in part, a move toward an incorporation into the dominant capitalist ideologies of American imperialist culture. Kirsch believes that these “rationalizations” may convert expressions of difference into “avenues of opportunity for new markets” (Kirsch, 2001: 42).

The idea of a gay market is certainly not a new one. Since the early 1990s, the United States has seen a rapid increase in the visibility of a gay consumer niche (Sender,

2004: 1). Gay spending was estimated at \$641 billion in 2006 (Kaplan, 2006: 7). Gay critics are concerned that the structure of this market “misrepresents ‘real’ communities,” has “a negative effect on GLBT politics,” and has “a mainstreaming effect on GLBT subcultures” (Sender, 2004: 7). These are precisely some of the concerns Duggan has regarding the neoliberalist politics of “the new homonormativity.” Duggan notes a transition from the civil rights lobbies and identity politics organizations toward advocating “the abandonment of progressive-left organizations, and the adoption of a mainstream, neoliberal brand of identity/equality politics” (Duggan, 2002: 44). In a sense, “Gay Indiewood” represents a similar transition.

Interpreting Gramsci, Raymond Williams sees hegemony as “culture,” a “culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of a particular class” (Williams, 1977: 112). Seeing the film industry as a “culture” that represents the lived dominance and subordination of the United States, the rise of independent cinema in the 1990s represented what Williams explains as a “counter-hegemony,” which rejects the established hegemonic order (Hollywood) and seeks to replace it by articulating an alternative (independent film) (Williams, 1977: 113). But when independent cinema began to show economic potential, the Hollywood studios experienced a “hegemonic crisis.” As Williams notes, hegemony “continually has to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified” (Williams, 1977: 112). I suggest that this period represented a “hegemonic negotiation” of the American film industry, which resulted in an acceptance of certain privileged gay themes within the mainstream, particularly those featuring white gays and lesbians played by attractive and “gender-appropriate” actors and actresses. I will argue that the facets of this “negotiation” correlate to formations represented within

“the new homonormativity.”

As film critic Emanuel Levy notes, until the 1990s, “Hollywood’s official record on homosexuality was deplorable⁷” (Levy, 1999: 443). Under the studios, “gays and lesbians suffered from stereotyping of the worst sort” (Levy, 1999: 442). The rise of independent cinema in the 1980s and early 1990s gave gay cinema greater potential to create itself and decipher its own images. However, independent film’s financial success led the Hollywood studios into an identity crisis. Nearly every major Hollywood studio began acquiring various independent distributors or simply establishing their own “vaguely separate” so-called “dependents,” such as Warner Independent Pictures or Fox Searchlight, and as a result, “Indiewood” was born (Benshoff, 2006: 284).

While gay independent filmmaking may still be thriving, filling an exceedingly large amount of film festival⁸ programs around the world, its economic opportunities through traditional theatrical releases has vastly transformed as a result of these changes. Consolidation of theatre chains and the closure of arthouse venues have resulted in fewer theatrical screens, and the growth of cable, DVD, and new media platforms have generated alternatives to theatrical exhibition that didn’t exist, or existed in a more primitive, less financially lucrative way in the 1990s⁹. While one could convincingly argue that independent gay and lesbian films could reach a much wider audience today than in the 1990s, their presence within dominant forms of distribution and exhibition has been greatly reduced.

In 2007, the highest grossing independent gay film was Q. Allan Brocka’s *Boy Culture*, which grossed only \$220,400¹⁰ for its distributor, TLA Releasing (Rentrak, 2008). The year before, another TLA release, Todd Stephens’ *Another Gay Movie*,

topped the list with \$681,100 (Rentrak, 2008). As Jon Gerrans – co-president of Strand Releasing, one of the oldest American distributors specializing in gay releases – notes: “Most of the time you lose money on [gay] theatrical releases.” (qtd. in Benshoff, 2006: 284). This is despite the fact that there are roughly twenty million GLBT-identified people in the United States with an alleged buying power of \$641 billion¹¹ (Kaplan, 2006: 7).

This scenario is particularly troubling if you look back to just over a decade ago, with the example of Rose Troche and Guinevere Turner’s film, *Go Fish*. In 1994, producer John Pierson sold the film to distributor Samuel Goldwyn at a pizzeria in Park City, Utah during the Sundance Film Festival for \$400,000 (Vachon, 2006: 64). This is all the more impressive considering that Troche and Turner had brought the \$15,000 work-in-progress to Pierson and co-producer Christine Vachon just a year earlier, who helped them acquire the additional \$53,000 necessary to complete it (Vachon, 2006: 65). *Go Fish* ended up earning \$2,405,285 at the North American box office in the summer of 1994 (Rentrak, 2008). That is well over twice the combined gross of *Boy Culture* and *Another Gay Movie*. More over, that gross adjusts to \$3,924,400 if you consider 2008 inflation (Rentrak, 2008).

Brokeback Mountain is the highest grossing gay themed film of the past decade¹², and its position at the centre of a new trend in the theatrical distribution of such films is clear. Since 2001, seventeen films that arguably feature prominent gay content have grossed over \$1,000,000 US in domestic theatrical release. Of them, only five¹³ were released by independent distributors (Benshoff, 2006: 285). The remaining twelve came from Hollywood studios or, in respect to all but one, their “dependents¹⁴” (such as

Brokeback, which was released by Universal's Focus Features). While I am not suggesting that "Gay Indiewood" has replaced or even challenged its independent counterparts in the overall amount of productions, a shift in exhibition and distribution practices has certainly given these films a unique position within the Hollywood lexicon in that they are gay-themed films, often produced and/or directed by gay people, but owned and distributed by Hollywood studios. Previously, Hollywood examples of gay themes were almost exclusively directed and produced by heterosexual, white men, and developed solely by the studios¹⁵.

In terms of their content, the films of this trend seem to generally represent a compromise between more progressive gay independent filmmaking of the early 1990s (most notably examples from the era of 'New Queer Cinema,' such as Kalin's *Swoon* or Todd Haynes' *Poison*) and their heavily incorporated Hollywood counterparts (such as Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* or Mike Nichols' *The Birdcage*). Like many gay filmgoers, I have been fascinated by their financial success, which has increasingly come from within the mainstream. I have been cautiously excited about the possibilities that the films offer, including recognition, tolerance promotion, and general cinematic enjoyment. However, I also understand that there are a wide array of problems with these texts and their representations. While much can (and has) been said about the representations within these texts, I believe that the fact that gay cinematic texts are misrepresentative should be the beginning of a cultural analysis, not an end.

In the introduction to a 2005 dossier in *Social Text* entitled "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?," queer scholars David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz suggest that "the contemporary mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity – as a

mass-mediated consumer lifestyle and embattled legal category – demands a renewed queer studies” that insists on “broadened consideration” of, among other things, “national manifestations of sexual, racial, and gendered hierarchies” (Eng, 2005: 1). Like all cultural practices, cinema does not exist in a vacuum. By analyzing its political economy, we can gain insight into “national manifestations” of hierarchies, in that the American film industry is both “constitutive of and constituted by the society in which it is produced and consumed” (Levy, 1999: 13). As Douglas Kellner notes:

Inserting texts into the system of culture within which they are produced and distributed can help elucidate features and effects of the texts that textual analysis alone might miss or downplay... The system of production often determines what sort of artifacts will be produced, what structural limits there will be as to what can and cannot be said and shown, and what sort of audience effects the text may generate (Kellner, 2002: 15).

Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz ask that “if mainstream media attention to queer lives and issues has helped establish the social and legal foundation for the emergence of gay marriage, family, and domesticity, what are the costs of this new visibility?” (Eng, 2005: 2). Just as “the new homonormativity” seeks to shrink rather than expand the public sphere, new trends in the film industry, while undoubtedly pushing less disguised gay and lesbian images further into the mainstream, has shifted their modes of production toward privatization. Within dominant forms of cinematic distribution and exhibition, “Indiewood” has taken over the way that gay cinema is disseminated. While in many

cases the films themselves remain independently produced, their acquisition by studios or their dependents shifts control of the films' circulation. Duggan's fear regarding "the new homonormativity" is that if they succeed in "wrestling the constituencies" for identity politics further away from the progressive-left, "the result would be a major realignment in U.S. politics" (Duggan, 2003: 45). What are the costs for the future of "gay film" in America if the studios continue to "wrestle away" control?

This study will be divided into three chapters. Chapter one, "Cruising: The Economic Rise (and Fall?) of Gay Independent Film," will first examine the history of economic hierarchies within the American film industry, bringing particular focus to the emergence of independent cinema in the late 1980s and 1990s and discussing the significance of the concepts "independent" and "Hollywood" within this narrative. This will provide context for discussions regarding the political economy of gay cinema leading up to "Indiewood". What were the factors that led to the emergence of a gay and lesbian independent cinema in the 1990s, and how did this evolve into the current trend? What is the social significance of these developments? This discussion will also relate to work on the "new gay market" to produce evident overall trends within the commodification of gay and lesbian identity.

I address, in chapter two, "Intercourse: A Gay Negotiation of Post-9/11 Hegemony" the inclusion of "gay" in the United States' hegemonic arrangement, adhering to the concepts of "hegemony" and "counter-hegemony" as asserted by Williams. The origins of the concept will be briefly detailed leading into a contemporary renegotiation of its attributes as exemplified by returning to discussions from chapter one. How do these concepts function in relation to this specific history of film? Findings from

this discussion will be situated in regard to Duggan's suggestion of "the new homonormativity." Referencing the work of writers within this movement, I intend to utilize Williams' concepts in regard to Duggan's proposed political formation, its origins, and its correlation to the infrastructure of "Indiewood."

Chapter three, "Premature Ejaculation: The Myth of *Brokeback Mountain*," will analyze the current state of gay cinema. I will examine the group of twenty films listed in Appendix I, in terms of their production¹⁶, as well as their representation of GLBT people both inside and outside of the actual cinematic text (including within marketing). What content has been deemed acceptable within "Gay Indiewood," and why? I will then look specifically at the marketing campaigns during the 2005 lead-up to the Academy Awards, a period I will argue was the economic movement's peak. This analysis will pay particular attention to *Brokeback Mountain*, which best exemplifies both the attributes and limitations of "Gay Indiewood" due to the substantial discussion that surrounded it.

In the concluding chapter, "Post Coitus: What's Beyond The *Mountain*?" I will bring the previous chapters together, unifying the different arguments. This chapter will also suggest future trends in gay cinema based on this discussion, as well as positing concerns for the limitations of a political economic study and posing questions for future research.

Film scholar Julia Knight notes that film distribution is "a neglected field of academic study," and there has been "no in depth study of distribution practices across the sector" (Knight, 2007). Considering the rather drastic alterations to these practices in light of recent technological advances, Knight's suggestion presents a clear and urgent academic need. Knight's answer to this need is years-in-the-making study, the *Film and*

Video Distribution Database, set to launch in Fall, 2008.¹⁷ This thesis is of considerably less ambition, and is intended as an exploratory work. My goal is not to provide an answer to the problems facing the distribution practices of American gay cinema, but to utilize my findings to simply situate its current state, ask what this “mainstreaming” of gay themes suggests, and how it connects to other arenas in the hegemonic arrangement of the United States. As French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu attests, “the pure intention of the artist is that of a producer who aims to be autonomous, that is, entirely the master of his product” (Bourdieu, 1984: 4). “Gay Indiewood” is an example of that control being removed from the artists, and as I intend to portray, this speaks not only to the film industry, but to the consideration of gays within the American hegemony.

Notes

¹ Stuart Hall noted: “Gramsci has fertilized our political imagination, transformed our way of thinking, our style of thought, our whole political project... If I were to try to summarize, in a sentence, what Gramsci did for people of my generation, I would have to say something like this: simply, he made it possible for us to read Marx again, in a new way: that is, to go on ‘thinking’ the second half of the 20th century, face-to-face with the realities of the modern world, from a position somewhere within the legacy of Marx’s thought.” See Hall, 1991: 7-8.

² For further explanation of “hegemony” and its evolution as a concept, see Artz, 2000: 5-10

³ Though other identities (predominately lesbian, but also bisexual and transgendered people) are very often included within what I am describing as a “gay market” or “gay cinema,” I will resist using the “GLBT” acronym unless it is relating to a specific statistic or fact. “GLBT” or “gay and lesbian” may still be used in cited sources, but I will refrain from doing so in my own work to highlight the exclusionary practices of these identities within these realms, as well as for continuity.

⁴ Vachon’s producing credits include *Poison* (Haynes, 1991) *Swoon* (Kalin, 1992), *Kids* (Clark, 1995), and *Boys Don’t Cry* (Peirce, 1999)

⁵ See Biskind, 2004 for further discussion of the origin of “Indiewood,” a term brought into use in the press in 2000 to describe the economic mainstreaming of independent film.

⁶ Privatization defined as the “the transfer of wealth and decision making from public, more-or-less accountable decision-making bodies to individual or corporate, unaccountable hands,” see Duggan, 2002: 177.

⁷ See Russo, 1981, for further discussion.

⁸ As of 2007, there were at least 150 gay film festivals worldwide, according to www.PlanetOut.com. For further discussion regarding gay film festivals, see Rich, 1999; Gamson, 1997.

⁹ See Rosen, 2008, for further discussion.

¹⁰ All grosses in \$US and refer to domestic box office, which includes only the United States and Canada.

¹¹ Data for 2006. See Kaplan, 2006.

¹² See Appendix I

¹³ LionsGate’s *All Over The Guy* (Davis, 2001), Lot 47’s *L.I.E.* (Cuesta, 2001), Newmarket’s *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003), and Samuel Goldwyn’s *Mambo Italiano* (Gaudreault, 2003).

¹⁴ *Brokeback Mountain*, for example, was distributed by Focus Features, which is owned by Universal Pictures, which is turn owned by the Universal-Vivendi corporation.

¹⁵ *Philadelphia, In & Out, The Birdcage, My Best Friend's Wedding, As Good As It Gets, and The Crying Game* are all alleged examples.

¹⁶ This includes box office grosses, budgets and release platforms.

¹⁷ See <http://homepage.mac.com/peterdean/FVDD/index.html>.

CHAPTER I
CRUISING:
THE ECONOMIC RISE (AND FALL?) OF GAY INDEPENDENT FILM

In an article on identity assignment and box-office success in the feature film industry for *Industrial and Corporate Change*, economics scholars Ezra W. Zuckerman and Tai-Young Kim suggest that the American film industry of the 1990s represented “a compelling setting for research” because

in a manner akin to the beer and wine industries, it was divided between a high-status specialty segment that arose to counter mass-market producers. In particular, while actors and products in the film industry may be arrayed along a number of dimensions, the key boundary, especially during the 1990s, divided the films released by major or Hollywood studios from those released by independent or art-house distributors. In addition to differing in their scale, major and independent releases differed in a number of related ways, including their association with particular genres (Kim, 2003: 31).

This chapter will explore the creation of this “division” of “Hollywood” and “independent,” and how it led to economic opportunities for both gay independent film and, subsequently, “Gay Indiewood.” Kim and Zuckerman compared the film industry to the wine and beer industries, separated by “high status” and “mass-market” demographics, and thus it is important to consider the influential social aspects of these developments. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of “taste culture” is a useful tool to, as he notes, “establish the conditions in which the consumers of cultural goods,

and their taste for them, are produced,” and at the same time, “to describe the different ways of appropriating these objects as are regarded at a particular moment as works of art” (Bourdieu, 1984: 1). The film industry may be controlled by companies, independent or “Hollywood,” but their output is worthless without consumer interest. As the history of this chapter will explain, the popularity of “independent film” was bred not only out of a need to represent alternative themes and stories, but also out of a consumer niche of “high status” consumers turned off by the increasingly “mass-market” Hollywood products of the 1980s and 1990s. “Indiewood”’s creation was due in large part to Hollywood’s interest in tapping into this niche, which the success of independent film determined was profitable. An eventual focus of this study will be to investigate what “Gay Indiewood” deemed appropriate for its “high status” consumers.

First it is necessary for the mainly historiographic analysis of this chapter to introduce key terms and issues before launching into any theoretical discussion or detailed analysis. Concepts such as “Hollywood film,” “independent film,” “gay cinema,” and “the gay market,” need to be examined. Because these concepts are far from value-free or neutral, I aim to explore them – in varying capacities – by looking at certain fragments of their histories, evolutions, and present formations. In doing so, I hope to also provide a historical context for the remaining chapters, specifically the initial dichotomy of independent gay cinema and Hollywood-produced gay images, and how these notions have evolved.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first is an exploration of the contrasting notions of “independent film” and “Hollywood film” and particular histories within these extensive concepts that pertain to this analysis. While it is imperative to

understand how, through this, contemporary economic formations of “gay cinema” came to exist, I would also like to briefly consider these developments in the context of the work of Bourdieu and how consumers themselves played a role in this history. The second section is concerned primarily with “gay cinema,” and what defines this concept and the films categorized within it. I will examine the commercial evolution of this category, as well as the factors leading to the trend of “Gay Indiewood,” in order to lay the contextual groundwork for the following chapters. The latter portion of the chapter will situate the gay film market within work regarding “the new gay market” as a whole to bring context to further discussions regarding the relationship between business and politics.

Hollywood Vs. Independent Film

In 1948, many film historians argue that a “new Hollywood” commenced when the Paramount US Supreme Court decision forced major studios to sell their theatre chains (Gomery, 1998: 47). Before that time, film historians David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson explain that the Hollywood film industry was referred to as “the studio system” and had been considered an oligopoly, with eight companies dominating nearly all aspects of film production, distribution and exhibition¹ (Bordwell, 2003, 214). There were the so-called “Big Five²,” or “Majors,” which to be considered as such had to be “vertically integrated, owning a theater chain and having an international distribution operation,” and three smaller companies that had no or few theatre chains that were known as the “Little Three³,” or “Minors” (Bordwell, 2003: 214). The “Majors” generally provided the bulk of the expensive, or “A,” pictures for big theatres while the

“Minors” supplied the additional films needed to meet demand, as well as catering to smaller theatres that were not owned by the others (Bordwell, 2003: 218).

However, a few independent firms did exist. While the rare example (such as David O. Selznick) made “A” pictures comparable to the Majors, the majority made only inexpensive “B” pictures collectively known as “Poverty Row” (Bordwell, 2003: 213). These films often filled the second halves of double features and most fell into action genres such as Westerns or crime thrillers (Bordwell, 2003: 218). But there was also some small independent producers “even further removed from the Hollywood mainstream,” producing low-budget films for specific ethnic groups (Bordwell, 2003: 219). For example, Oscar Micheaux created the Micheaux Book and Film Company in 1918 to concentrate on “black-related topics” such as lynching and interracial marriage. Micheaux worked “quickly on low budgets” and averaged a film a year until 1940, making one final film in 1948 (Bordwell, 2003: 162-63).

Despite a few successes of varying degrees within independent production, Bordwell and Thompson insist that it “would have been virtually impossible for a new company – large or small – to gain a significant share of the film market” (Bordwell, 2003: 218). The studios had created a “secure, stable situation” by loaning each other stars, playing each other’s films in their theatres and cooperating in other ways (Bordwell, 2003: 218-19). While the 1948 decision certainly reduced the impenetrable stronghold of the studios and made them susceptible to an extensive variety of economic crises that have occurred since, their relative dominance to other modes of production has remained in tact. Hollywood economics scholar Douglas Gomery argues that during the second half of the twentieth century, “Hollywood has significantly transformed itself as

new owners and managers have adapted new and different business tools” (Gomery, 1998: 47). He suggests that by understanding how these corporate strategies have changed, one “can better understand how the ‘film industry’ as business, social and cultural practice has continued to dominate mass entertainment image making” (Gomery, 1998: 47).

A transitional strategy pertinent to the current situation began occurring in the 1970s, as the film industry began to consolidate and concentrate with media conglomerates. By the start of the 1980s, all but one of the “majors⁴” had become subsidiaries of conglomerates⁵ (Bordwell, 2003: 681). These initial incarnations led to the model of vertically integrated media conglomerates known today. They also led to profits considerably greater than in the “studio era” that existed before 1948 (Gomery, 1998: 51). By 2007, six studios – all wings of conglomerates - grossed 78% of the \$9.664 billion annual domestic box office share⁶ (Rentrak, 2008).

However, somewhere in the midst of this transition toward a conglomerate-dominated American media industry, one of the most significant economic and artistic threats to the studios’ stronghold came in the form of what is generally referred to as “the new American independent cinema.” Timelines and definitions of this formation have been greatly debated, specifically because this cinema “doesn’t exist in a social or economic void” (Levy, 1999: 20). In a chapter from *Contemporary American Cinema*, author and film scholar Jim Hillier attempts to make sense of accepted meanings and associations:

Feature-length, usually – but not always – fictional narrative films made and distributed outside the “normal” financing and distribution channels of the major “studios” and therefore marginal to the mainstream movie industry which accounts for the vast majority of box office revenues in both North America and Europe and large parts of the rest of the world. Very often, this “independent cinema” is seen as a phenomenon, if not exclusively then at least primarily of the 1980s and 1990s (Hillier, 2006: 248).

The “phenomenon” is often defined in contrast to “Hollywood,” not just economically but artistically. Hillier notes differences that “mark the independent product from the mainstream product” involve “different kinds of stories” that are “slightly and less conventionally ‘dramatic,’” and films that are “less often, if at all, driven by stars,” and “sometimes working with more daring or controversial subject matter” (Hillier, 2006: 248-49). Hillier also posits 1984 as the beginning of the era, marking Jim Jarmusch’s *Stranger Than Paradise* as a starting point (Hillier, 2006: 249). Film critic Emanuel Levy disagrees in his study, *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film*. Levy feels that organizationally, the era began in 1977-1978, with the conception of the Independent Feature Project (IFP)⁷, as well as with the work of a “number of quintessentially independent directors,” such as David Lynch, John Sayles and Charles Burnett (Levy, 1999: 7).

Levy also argues that a complex list⁸ of conditions facilitated the emergence of the new American independent cinema as “an alternative system to Hollywood” from this initial organizational starting point. These include the “need of self-expression” and

Hollywood's move away from "serious, middle-range films" such as the 1970s work of Woody Allen, Francis Ford Coppola and Robert Altman, toward what Levy terms "megablockbuster Hollywood" (Levy, 1999: 21). Additionally, there were increased opportunities and capital in financing independent film due to opportunities for films to be seen in ancillary markets, and as Levy suggests, a "greater demand for visual media, driven by an increase in the number of theatres and the adoption of home video as a dominant form of entertainment in the United States⁹" (Levy, 1999: 24). The "proliferation" of film schools across the United States certainly played a role, particularly the University of Southern California, New York University, the American Film Institute, and the University of California at Los Angeles, as did the emergence of the Sundance Film Festival as "the primary showcase for indies" and the rise of regional festivals (Levy, 1999: 35).

Levy considers the "arguably most important factor," though, in the proliferation of "supportive audiences" (Levy, 1999: 28). He explains that the maturation of the baby-boom generation, "which possesses more sophisticated taste, more disposable time, and more money to spend on movies," has provided "indispensable backing" for independent film (Levy, 1999: 28). The core audience¹⁰ of "indie films," figured by Levy at 5 to 10 percent of the market, is small, but it's "loyal and appreciative" (Levy, 1999: 28).

Pierre Bourdieu notes how tastes "simultaneously manifest and reassert cultural hierarchies" (Bourdieu, 1984: 8). This includes aesthetic tastes, such as Bourdieu's example of classical music being "better" than pop, which correlates obviously to the "loyal and appreciative" people that helped facilitate the rise of independent film. Bourdieu notes that "to the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts" corresponds "a

social hierarchy of the consumers” (Bourdieu, 1984: 1). This “predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’” (Bourdieu, 1984: 1). Independent films, with their “different kind of stories” and “controversial subject matter,” are at the top of the social hierarchy of the art of cinema. In the 1990s, they also tended to be heavily favoured during “awards season,”¹¹ a similar marker of the social importance of seeing a film. As Bourdieu notes:

The manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it: the importance attached to manners can be understood once it is seen that it is these imponderables of practice which distinguish the different – and ranked – modes of culture acquisition, early or late, domestic or scholastic, and the classes of individuals which they characterize (Bourdieu, 1984: 2).

By the 1980s, as Hollywood began primarily focusing mainly on films marketed at families, or just youth by itself (the highest grossing films of the decade exemplify this, with the *Star Wars* sequels, the *Indiana Jones* films, and *E.T.*), independent film provided a “film culture” that was often discussed in film journals and well-respected magazines and newspapers. To “acquire” the viewing of an independent film was important socially in terms of the potential for debate or conversation regarding it, and this certainly contributed to the commercial viability independent film received as the 1980s wore on. By the end of the decade, independent releases were reaching numbers four times that of studio-based releases (Bordwell, 2003: 695). In 1988, independent film production had reached 393, an increase from 193 in 1986 (Wyatt, 1998: 74). The success of this trend is

particularly evident in two releases from that period: Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986), which amassed over \$100 million and an Academy Award for best picture, and Steven Soderbergh's *sex, lies and videotape* (1989), which became one of the most profitable films in the industry's history¹² (Levy, 1999: 50).

Justin Wyatt, professor of film, radio and television at the University of North Texas, considers the development of the two largest independent companies, New Line Cinema and *sex* distributor Miramax Films in his article "The Formation of the 'Major Independent'." I shall briefly discuss his analysis of Miramax to show how the marketplace for independent film shifted and expanded over the 1980s and 1990s. Miramax, founded by brothers Harvey and Bob Weinstein in 1979, was originally created to distribute films deemed "commercially unfeasible" by the major studios (Wyatt, 1998: 79). It began by acquiring distribution rights to films which, at the right "pickup price," would allow them to gain a small profit¹³ (Wyatt, 1998: 79).

Wyatt attributes *sex, lies and videotape* as a moment that shifted both Miramax into greater visibility, and independent film into greater economic expectations. Premiering at Sundance, *sex, lies and videotape* was bought by the then up-and-coming distributor (Bordwell, 2003: 695). The film's staggering financial success "can be attributed to its topicality" as many critics "considered the film as primarily centered on the relationship between culture and technology in the age of 'safe sex'" (Wyatt, 1998: 80). Miramax aggressively marketed the film by capitalizing on the "risky content" that had become a definitive quality of independent film.

This technique was replicated throughout the first half of the 1990s with Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992) an imperative example. Miramax generated massive

publicity in the film's marketing campaign. The original poster for its November 1992 North American release focused on Miranda Richardson's character holding a smoking gun and the tagline: "Play it at your own risk. Sex. Murder. Betrayal. In Neil Jordan's new thriller, nothing is what it seems to be" (qtd. in Wyatt, 1998: 80). By January, Miramax had replaced the tagline with: "The movie everyone is talking about, but no one is giving its secrets" (qtd. in Wyatt, 1998: 80). As Wyatt explains: "Miramax wanted to stay away from the film's political elements and instead position it as a thriller based around a core secret" (Wyatt, 1998: 81). That "secret" involved the biological sex of Jaye Davidson's character, which is revealed midway through the film. Wyatt credits this secret with the film's crossover success as the "barrage of publicity" generated from it led the film to a remarkable \$62.5 million domestic gross (Wyatt, 1998: 81). But as a *Variety* article on the campaign noted:

Miramax sold the film as an action-thriller with a big "secret." If it had been realistically pegged as a relationship film with gay connotations, it might have never broken beyond major cities (Fleming, 1993: 68).

While Wyatt acknowledges the notable fact that this deceptive marketing "allowed viewers to engage the subject of gayness," he fails to recognize that it also reinforced homophobic ideologies by treating the gay content as a scandalous secret (Wyatt, 1998: 831). In essence, the slogan bares similarity to the theme of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" initiative that was implemented by the United States government later that year.

The success of *The Crying Game* and other early 1990s Miramax films certainly benefited the independent film industry as a whole by raising its profile and thus administering interest in the mass array of considerably smaller distributors. However, it also exploited the subject matter and themes that independent film had defined itself upon in an effort to compete with the studios. While the artistic qualities of independent film production remained an alternative to the studios, the political economic lines were beginning to blur. This idea was only reinforced in May of 1993, when Disney acquired Miramax for close to \$60 million¹⁴ (Wyatt, 1998: 84).

While the intent of this merger was to leave Miramax separate from its allied company, Wyatt attests that “corporate domination” has somewhat constrained Miramax “despite their greater access to capital” (Wyatt, 1998: 85). As the 1990s wore on, Miramax’s output became more indistinguishable from studio offerings. Examples include *The English Patient* (Minghella, 1996), *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997), *Shakespeare in Love* (Madden, 1998) and *The Cider House Rules* (Hallstrom, 1999). While Miramax obviously became a rare economic example in the “new independent” world, its position as both a symbol of the era and a major factor in its arguable demise is notable. Ira Deutchman of Fine Line Releasing noted that “the Disney era of Miramax has definitely affected the U.S. film marketplace. People are buying films earlier and earlier, and paying more and more” (qtd. in Wyatt, 1998: 84). As a result, the marketplace for independent film became significantly fragmented. Essentially, Miramax’s marketing tactics and focus on financial gain¹⁵ helped usher in the formation of “Indiewood,” and forced the rest of distributors to downsize or follow suit.

This idea also goes back to the previous discussions about the idea of independent film's place in the "cultural hierarchy" of cinema. While this factor is certainly not the primary reason for independent film's existence, it did play a significant role in its success, and Miramax provides a great example of how that success was incorporated back into Hollywood-style productions to create the possibility of more financial gain. Films like aforementioned examples *Shakespeare in Love* and *Good Will Hunting* maintained "independent film" attributes such as relatively lower budgets (*Love* cost \$25 million, *Hunting* just \$10 million), adult-oriented content and even, in *Hunting's* case, a director, Gus Van Sant, with considerable "indie-cred" (Rentrak). They went against that grain by casting more notable stars (Robin Williams, for example), and giving the films studio-sized marketing budgets. This compromise had many initial success stories, with both *Hunting* and *Love* grossing over \$100 million in North America and launching the careers of Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, and to some extent, Gwyneth Paltrow (Rentrak).

Bourdieu notes that "nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even 'common' (because the 'common' people make them their own, especially for aesthetic purposes)" (Bourdieu, 1984: 6). Films like *Shakespeare in Love* and *Good Will Hunting*, though possibly subject to such distinction in their similarities to studio-released films, could hide beneath the well-established "status" that Miramax itself had gained as the company that released films like *sex, lies and videotape* and *The Crying Game*. Therefore, they were capable of tapping into the market reserved for more traditionally "independent films" while also proving accessible enough to appeal to the "common people" that would rarely see independent films.

By the end of the 1990s, the model Miramax essentially nurtured into significant financial possibilities was adapted by nearly every major Hollywood studio, as each had either acquired an independent company¹⁶, or established their own “vaguely separate” “dependents” to distribute acquired films that were independently produced¹⁷ (Benshoff, 2006: 284). Emanuel Levy reflects on these changes in 1999 and found that “indies are now no longer content with a modest profit, but instead want the next *The Full Monty*¹⁸” (Levy, 1999: 504). Ironically, earning studio-level grosses became “a near necessity in the new economy of independent films,” as companies began to require “significant infrastructure to accommodate increased demand” (Levy, 1999: 504). Levy notes that at the time, some feared “that this new environment will lead to a chilling of the creative environment associated with indie filmmaking” (Levy, 1999: 504-05).

Gay Independent Film

One of the main claims of Levy’s study (as explicitly noted in its title) is that the “new independent American cinema” was “very much the cinema of the ‘Other America’” (Levy, 1999: 52). He notes that this claim is validated in two ways. First, that “the characters of most indies are outsiders” (Levy, 1999: 52). And second, that the filmmakers themselves are outsiders: “members of ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and women¹⁹” (Levy, 1999: 52). Levy finds that this “cinema of outsiders” was not a movement if “movement” is defined “as a neat category with an official organization and a formal leadership” (Levy, 1999: 52). However,

if “movement” suggests a shared creative process and unity of spirit or vision, then perhaps one can think of the indie films of the last two decades as comprising a loose artistic movement, an art world with its own institutional structure, values and goals. The artistic drive behind the indie movement [was] born out of a creative need to explore new themes, new forms, and new styles, as well as a politically motivated need to render unfamiliar forbidden experiences previously ignored. New cinematic forms often emerge as a reaction against the oppressive nature of American society and the restrictive rigidity of dominant culture and mainstream cinema (Levy, 1999: 52-53).

A “gay cinema” is a notable form that emerged during the “new independent American cinema.” In Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman’s documentary film adaptation of Vito Russo’s book, *The Celluloid Closet* (1996), narrator Lily Tomlin suggests that “homosexuality has been traditionally used by Hollywood to get easy laughs from straight audiences, and to inspire fear among gays by condemning their deviant lifestyle” (Epstein, 1996). In the film industry, homosexuals have “consistently suffered distortion, derision, and condescension” and have “experienced a systematic effort to devalue their subculture” (Levy, 1999: 442). The “new independent American cinema” changed that. Gay cinema certainly existed prior to this era, but it was through “the new independent cinema” that gay images found both a voice through a larger cinematic movement, and financial prosperity.

By the early 1980s, there were very few “American independent films” that dealt “matter-of-factly” with the gay experience (Levy, 1999: 447). It was in 1986, with the

release of two, *Parting Glances* (Sherwood, 1986) and *Desert Hearts* (Deitch, 1986), that the first inklings of a wave of gay content came under this subheading. The difference between them and their studio counterparts²⁰ was that “they presented homosexuality as a natural part of life and let their characters and stories go on from there” (Levy, 1999: 447). Both films were financed, at least in part, by the gay community. While much of *Hearts*’ estimated \$1.25 million budget came when distributor Samuel Goldwyn came on board mid-production, *Glances* was entirely financed by director Bill Sherwood and his friends in gay arenas. Christine Vachon, who got her first job working as Sherwood’s assistant on the film, recalls the scenario:

In the spring of 1984, Bill raised \$40,000 from friends, angling to start production in June. SAG [the Screen Actor’s Guild] did away with the low-budget pay scale right before they started, which meant that pay rates shot up. Bill had to scrap his initial cast six weeks before they began filming... Steve Buscemi swept in and got the part of the punk rocker. At the time, he was a New York City firefighter... [Bill] shot most of *Parting Glances* after hours to save money on locations (Vachon, 2006: 27).

Parting Glances opened to an impressive \$12,232 on a sole New York City screen over the weekend of February 23-25, 1986 (Rentrak, 2008). It went on to gross \$537,681, over ten times its budget (Rentrak, 2008)²¹.

The rise of the gay independent film that followed got particular notice in the early 1990s, when renowned GLBT-focused film critic B. Ruby Rich announced the

emergence of a “new queer cinema” (or NQC, as I will refer to it) at the 1992 Sundance Film Festival (Stacey, 2007: 2). It is important for the purposes of this study to distinguish NQC from the “independent gay cinema” of which it is a part. NQC is often mistakenly referenced to as a concept encompassing the entire independent gay cinematic “boom” of that era, whereas it actually references a specific style within the films it represents, and usually only pertains to certain films released between 1990 and 1992²² (Aaron, 2006: 399). Rich explains:

Of course, the new queer film and videos aren't all the same, and don't share a single aesthetic vocabulary or strategy or concern. Yet they are nonetheless united by a common style. Call it HomoPomo: there are traces in all of them of appropriation and pastiche, irony as well as a reworking of history with social constructionism very much in mind... these works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive. Above all, they're full of pleasure (qtd. in Stacey, 2007: 3).

NQC coincided with the emergence of queer theory and AIDS activism beyond it (Stacey, 2007: 3). Essentially, it “promised a generative space in which to combine academic and political agendas concerned with representing non-normative sexualities through audiovisual media” (Stacey, 2007: 3). Though there was nothing particularly “new” about this, as Richard Dyer’s study of gay-authored film, *Now You See It*, can attest from its writing over a decade earlier, its placement within the independent film culture of the Sundance Film Festival and comparatively mainstream art house cinema

was certainly a new development²³ (Waugh, 2000: 11). The gay independent cinema that followed owes a great deal to this. The wide array of discussion and coverage NQC received generated considerable interest in gay filmmaking within the “American independent cinema.” NQC films such as *Poison* (Haynes, 1991) and *My Own Private Idaho* (Van Sant, 1992) – created by, and arguably, for gay people – were financially successful through independent modes of production. *My Own Private Idaho*, the most expensive NQC film at a \$2.5 million budget, grossed well over twice that in theatres alone²⁴ (Rentrak, 2008). Though this study focuses on narrative film, it is notable to state that *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1991) remains the highest grossing non-narrative gay-themed film of all time, grossing \$3.78 million from a \$450,000 budget²⁵ (Rentrak, 2008).

While *My Own Private Idaho* benefited from marketing highlighting the presence of its up-and-coming stars, River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves, and *Paris is Burning* (though much less so) from its slew of festival awards and a rather accessible story of New York City subculture²⁶, the success of Todd Haynes’ inherently inaccessible *Poison* presents a unique example. Loosely based on the writings of French author Jean Genet, *Poison* is divided into three parts unconnected by narrative: “Hero,” “Horror,” and “Homo.” Initially intended as an hour-long art film, producer Vachon claims that the film’s design is “deliberately arty,” and an “experimentation with narrative and aesthetic” (Vachon, 2006: 45). Haynes and Vachon pulled together funding from every possible source, ranging from a \$25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to private investors²⁷ to raise the film’s \$250,000 budget (Vachon, 2006: 45).

On March 29, 1991, just seven days before *Poison* was set to open on one screen in New York with no advertising budget to speak of, *The Washington Post* ran a lead story on page B1 entitled, “NEA Plans Response to Latest Attack. Lawmakers Invited To See Film on Prison Life” (Vachon, 2006: 50). Based solely on reading a review in *Variety*, the Reverend Donald Wildmon²⁸ protested the film as “pornographic” (Benshoff, 2006: 229). Wildmon felt this was particularly a problem due to the NEA’s federal tax dollar-funded grant given to the film (Benshoff, 2006: 229). The NEA declined to give in to Wildmon’s protests, with their chair John Frohnmayer²⁹ announcing:

We’re not here to be censors, we are not here to create a blacklist, we are not here to tell what the subject matter should be. *Poison* is the work of a serious artist dealing with serious issues in our society. What I think is really objectionable... Is for people who have not confronted the art to make statements about it, because art must be confronted (qtd. in Vachon, 2006: 54).

Frohnmayer suggested Haynes and Vachon send copies of the film to Republican congressional aides (Vachon, 2006: 54). The result was another *Washington Post* headline: “NEA Screening More Boredom Than Sodom?” (Vachon, 2006: 54). The worst that the aides could say was the film was “boring³⁰”, but the controversy surrounding the protests made audiences consider otherwise (Vachon, 2006: 55). Released by small New York-based distributor Zeitgeist, *Poison* opened on April 5, 1991 at New York’s Angelika Film Center. It earned just under \$25,000 in three days (approximately the same amount the NEA had funded them for), a record for the popular

Angelika³¹ that would not be broken until 1999's *The Blair Witch Project* (Rentrak, 2008; Vachon, 2006: 55-56).

Poison went on to gross \$609,524, a stunning number for what was predominately an experimental work (Rentrak, 2008). Its success, like independent film counterparts *sex, lies and videotape* before it and *The Crying Game* after, can certainly be attributed to its topicality and the controversy it raised. Without Reverend Wildmon, it is doubtful *Poison* would have financially succeeded as it did. However, unlike *Game*, wherein Miramax itself mounted the publicity surrounding the film's "secret," Haynes and Vachon did not exploit the film's subject matter for marketing purposes. Conservative leaders and pundits did that on their own. *The Crying Game*'s transsexual secret was purposely kept, in part, to attract wider audiences, while *Poison*'s homosexual content was proudly and explicitly present through interviews with the producers and distributors during the NEA controversy (Vachon, 2006: 55). On the contrary, it was likely a main reason so many people flocked to see it³². By defying dominant ideologies, *Poison* made it clear that there was a market for gay independent cinema.

As soon as it was suggested that there was money to be made from gay films, "the 'new' market began to garner an unprecedented response from producers" (Levy, 1999: 460). Mark Finch, of gay-oriented distributor Frameline noted that, simply, "the reason there's a higher degree of attention now is because distributors have shown a profit" (qtd. in Levy, 1999: 460). However, this "new gay film market" did not just suddenly appear. It was gradually and steadily formed by "dedicated filmmakers, festival programmers, and savvy distributors" (Levy, 1999: 460). Like the independent market as a whole, a number of specific factors contributed to the solidifying of the gay market. Critical

attention of the films, which had initially occurred within the GLBT press, spread to more mainstream media such as the *Village Voice* and *Los Angeles Weekly*, while unique marketing strategies, such as director Nicole Conn's "grassroots marketing campaign" for *Claire of the Moon* (1992)³³ targeted gay viewers in innovative ways (Levy, 1999: 458-463). Gay film festivals, such as Los Angeles' Outfest, New York's NewFest and San Francisco's Frameline, had an "immeasurable" impact in their serving as platforms for independent productions to find distributors³⁴, as did the development of new distributors specializing in gay film³⁵ (Aaron, 2006: 402-205; Levy, 1999: 460). The significant population of gay people working within the film industry and "promoting gay causes within the mainstream power structure," and the undeniable influence that the AIDS epidemic had in creating an atmosphere of urgency in the gay film community³⁶ were also certainly contributing factors (Levy, 1999: 458-463; Aaron, 2006: 402-405).

Yet as this market solidified, NQC disappeared. B. Ruby Rich found that "despite the initial furor on the indie scene, and the dramatic increase in the production of, and audience for, queer films during the 1990s," a "new and enduring sector of popular radical work failed to materialize" (Rich, 1993: 85). Film scholar Michelle Aaron did not find this particularly surprising, asking how "a marriage between the popular and the radical [can] be sustained when such an association erodes the very meaning of each" (Aaron, 2006: 405). Either way, NQC's success helped form the modes of production necessary to bring forth an economically sustainable "independent gay cinema" throughout the rest of the 1990s.

Though the films have been challenged as "fairly innocuous and mostly unremarkable," particularly in comparison to NQC, they nonetheless proved financially

successful (Aaron, 2006: 405). The initial fragmentation of the independent film industry, as previously noted in regard to Miramax's evolution to "mini-major," actually benefited gay independent film. Gay-focused distributors survived easily by targeting niches. Films aimed toward lesbians, such as the aforementioned *Go Fish*, and *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love* (Maggneti, 1995), and gay men, such as *Jeffrey* (Ashley, 1995), and *Love! Valour! Compassion* (Mantello, 1997) were able to recuperate their rather conservative budgets by marketing themselves to specific sub-subcultures (Aaron, 2006: 405; Rentrak, 2008).

At a panel at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival³⁷, Vachon reflected back at *Trick* (Fall, 1999) as the "movie that really sums up" this niche marketing. Detailing a night in the life of a twentysomething musical-theatre writer as he and a go-go dancer try and find a place to have sex, *Trick* was produced for \$450,000 by the small production company Good Machine (Rentrak, 2008). It was bought by independent distributor Fine Line at the Sundance in January 1999, and was marketed through gay film festivals and within magazines aimed at younger gay male demographics leading up to its July 23, 1999 release date (Benshoff, 2006: 270; Rentrak, 2008). Playing on six screens in cities with prevalent gay communities³⁸, it opened to a \$118,594 gross on 6 screens, and by the end of September, it had expanded its run to 94 screens and accumulated \$2.08 million (Rentrak, 2008). As Vachon noted: "No matter what you think of the movie, that movie was really made for exactly the right amount of money and it came out and everybody did well out of it" (Vachon, 2008).

Unlike NQC, the great majority of these films dealt solely with white gay men and lesbians. As Rich suggests, NQC had "journeyed from radical impulse to niche

market” (Rich, 2000: 23). Transgendered subcultures had much more limited options. It was not until 1999’s *Boys Don’t Cry* that a film returned to those NQC sensibilities³⁹, though its cross-over success actually helped move gay independent film further into the margins of distribution and exhibition. Produced by Vachon and her company Killer Films, *Boys Don’t Cry* spent many years in development. The decade-long “passion project” of first-time director Kimberly Peirce, the film chronicles the real-life events surrounding the horrific murder of transgendered boy Brandon Teena. It was plagued by a dueling project at Fox Searchlight⁴⁰, and Fox threatened to sue Killer Films over the rights⁴¹ (Vachon, 2006: 98). *Boys* beat Fox’s project into production, and in the end it was Fox Searchlight themselves who offered \$5 million for the distribution rights to the \$1.7 million production after seeing 20 minutes of footage at Sundance⁴². *Boys Don’t Cry* opened on October 10, 1999 to a remarkable \$73,320 on 2 screens (Rentrak, 2008). Buoyed by an Academy Award for lead actress Hilary Swank, the film ended up gaining significant mainstream appeal and grossing \$11.54 million (Rentrak, 2008). Distributed by Searchlight, it was one of the first gay-themed films released by the growing “Indiewood” industry, and its success made others take notice.

Perhaps cynically, Aaron considers NQC as “essentially kick-starting Hollywood’s awareness of a queerer audience,” who by the beginning of the 2000s, had “appropriated queer matters” into their renegotiated industry (Aaron, 2006: 405). “Indiewood” distributors are much less likely to market solely to niches, as their level of grosses, despite profits, would not be substantial enough in the new economic environment. An article published in *Variety* on March 5, 2008 announced that the average cost of producing a “specialty picture⁴³” in 2007 jumped a whopping 60% over

the previous year to \$49.2 million, while the average cost of advertising such a film increased by 44% to \$25.7 million (McClintock, 2008: 32). That is a far cry from *Poison's* \$250,000 production budget and \$0 advertising budget. Changes in modes of production that began in the late 1990s have not only done considerable damage to the theatrical distribution and exhibition of gay independent films, but has also reduced theatrically released gay-themed films altogether. Between 1991 and 2000, eighteen studio (or studio “dependent”) and twenty-seven independently-released gay-themed films would gross over \$1 million⁴⁴ (Rentrak, 2008). From 2001 and 2008, there were twelve studio and five independent films, despite a considerably higher price of admission and a supposedly “booming” gay market⁴⁵ (Rentrak 2008).

The “New Gay Market”

Despite the drastic drop in gay independent film, a “gay film market” still exists. In fact, there are more gay independent films being made now than ten years ago (Benshoff, 2006: 268). These films have instead found distribution mainly “through other outlets, including the Internet, video and DVD, and cable and pay television” (Benshoff, 2006: 268). Income from these outlets has far surpassed theatrical revenues (Benshoff, 2006: 285). It is important to note that this is the case throughout independent film⁴⁶, with “commercial urban art houses so filled up with studio specialty division releases that truly independent films have a tough time getting in” (Rosen, 2008: 1) Specifically regarding gay independent film, specialized mail-order video companies such as TLA Video, Wolfe Video and Culture Q Connection have been marketing to the

gay community for many years, in addition to actually funding productions that they plan on releasing through their online mail-order catalogs (Benshoff, 2006: 286).

While this certainly produces a wider variety of options, it also poses new problems. First of all, the films belong to a relatively ghettoized and extremely low-budget niche market, often resulting in a quality that make the “fairly innocuous and mostly unremarkable” gay independent cinema of the mid-to-late 1990s seem masterful in comparison. Examples currently in TLA’s catalog include standouts such as *Soul Maid* (Mohr, 2007), which TLA describes:

Spirituality, gay romance and complete whimsy inhabit this sweet nutty confection of a film about a gay man who cleans houses in his undies and a spirit named Glintentica (TLA Video, 2008)⁴⁷.

Of the six films⁴⁸ from the catalog I viewed out of curiosity (including *Maid*), all offered basic narratives that are constructed around opportunities for sex. They have more in common narratively with mainstream gay pornography than NQC. Another example, *Socket* (Abley, 2008), is a particular example of this. As described by TLA:

Told with panache, sex and nudity, this fiery hot erotic thriller tells the story of two men who get off on electric current and each other (TLA Video, 2008)⁴⁹.

It is not possible for a study of this capacity (or intent) to give a proper evaluation of the quality of this vast new trend in gay independent film. However, it is imperative to

note how the political economy of this new trend suggests a move toward an almost entirely private gay independent film exhibition, comparable to the manner in which gay pornography or earlier examples like “beefcake magazines⁵⁰” were attained by the public (Benshoff, 2006: 283). In an article in *Screen International*, film critic Mike Goodridge suggested that

the reality of the gay market in the US... many men and women are closeted or live in areas where they don't have access to theatres playing a gay movie, or video stores which will stock a gay film (Goodridge, 2003: 12-13).

While this may be true, it is doubtful that there has been a significant increase in closeted gays since the sustainable independent gay film industry of the 1990s. The most prevalent reason behind this trend in distribution and exhibition is likely that Hollywood's intensified stronghold on film distribution makes it challenging to see any independent film outside of a decreasing few art-house theatres (many of which are also playing “specialty films”). Concurrently, as Benshoff and Griffin suggest, it is perhaps also the case that many gay filmgoers want films “made in the Hollywood mode” and may choose “to patronize Hollywood films before they do independent ones” (Benshoff, 2006: 287). This idea may be partially attributed to a growing sense that collective gay identity in America is being constructed more as a target market than as a political movement. Katherine Sender, professor of communication at the University of Pennsylvania, notes: For gay people “unaccustomed to seeing images of themselves,” let alone “being taken seriously as explicitly gay, national corporate appeals to the gay

market can seem profoundly affirming” (Sender, 2004: 6). Seeing gay themes in a Hollywood or “Indiewood” film appeals to this idea, as gays can feel part of the dominant culture.

In her study, *Business Not Politics: The Making of a Gay Market*, Sender examines the rapidly developing visibility of a new consumer niche throughout corporate America. As of 2006, 175 of the Fortune 500 companies run advertisements aimed at gay consumers (Gunther, 2005: 54). Advocates and critics have looked at the boom in gay marketing “with both excitement and trepidation, speculating about its cultural significance” (Sender, 2004: 1). However, Sender is concerned that this marketing misrepresents “real communities,” has a negative effect on gay politics, and has a “mainstreaming effect on GLBT subcultures”:

For although marketers and journalists refer to “the gay market” and, more, recently, “the GLBT market” to encompass all members of the “class” of non-heterosexual people, their interest and investment are mainly focused on affluent gay men. There is some interest in lesbians, but mostly marketers hope that lesbians will interpret ads to gay men as appealing to them as well. Marketers occasionally acknowledge bisexuals and transgender people in their consideration of the gay market, but most believe these groups to be too small to warrant marketing attention... The recent shift to include Ls, Bs and Ts in reference to the GLBT market appears to be a somewhat disingenuous inclusivity that exists in name only: by far the dominant target of market research and advertising appeals remains gay men (Sender, 2004: 10-11).

These claims have been evident in the “gay film market” since NQC allowed it to solidify. Independent film, though “a cinema of outsiders,” was and is not without exclusions based partially on economics. Gay men, because of their suggested strength as a “niche market,” have overwhelmingly dominated cinematic images aimed at gay subcultures. However, “Gay Indiewood” is not necessarily directed at a “gay market.” With costs of production and thus expectations for revenues exponentially higher than the independent film of the 1990s, “the gay market” just becomes one fraction of a greater one. While “Gay Indiewood” films are often produced or directed by gays and provide progressive cinematic texts and/or representations, the distribution and exhibition (and the associated marketing, now often costing a considerable portion of a film’s overall budget) have been placed in corporate hands. As Martha Gever, editor of *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, notes, sometimes our identities are constituted “as much in the events as in the images we watch” (Gever, 1990: 201).

Sender’s study focuses on the trope of “business, not politics.” While corporate representatives and media executives have been careful to circumscribe “the gay market” within a “discursive framework of sound business practices,” Sender argues that tracing a history of gay and lesbian themed marketing “reveals a complicated and contradictory relationship between these apparently discrete imperatives” (Sender, 2004: 23). The division of business and politics “disavows the extent to which all economic activity has political effects, from the macroeconomic impact of NAFTA to the daily microeconomic decisions householders making in the distribution of their weekly paychecks” (Sender, 2004: 5).

In an earlier study on “the gay market,” *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes To Market*, scholar Alexandra Chasin also analyzes the market in relation to politics, expanding to consider the contemporary gay social and political movement from 1960s to the 1990s. Chasin believes that while “religious, moral, legal, and medical systems have profoundly influenced the gay and lesbian movement,” economic systems have also affected its course (Chasin, 2000: 2). She explains:

It is impossible to isolate wholly economic influences from other forces, but it is equally impossible to understand the history of gay and lesbian political life in this country without considering the ways that identity and identity politics function in the marketplace. The way that gay men and lesbians in the United States come to understand themselves as “gay,” and as “American,” has everything to do with understandings of the relationship between citizenship and consumption. In turn, citizenship and consumption are only intelligible in relation to ideas about nation, sexuality, market, race, class, gender, and the public and the private spheres (Chasin, 2000: 3-4).

While this study has a much narrower focus than Chasin or Sender, and examines not so much a “gay market” as it does the gay elements of a film market, the correlation between economics and politics remains a substantial point of discussion in the following chapters. As I examine the relationship between the economics of “Gay Indiewood” and politics of “the new homonormativity” to each other and to the history discussed in this chapter, I intend to produce a greater understanding of the positioning of gayness within a

dominant culture. While “the new independent cinema” offered an opportunity for a economically viable “gay cinema” to emerge as a reaction against the restrictions of dominant culture and mainstream cinema,” “Indiewood” posits a unique economic transition. Blending elements of both independent modes of production and those of Hollywood, how have these developments led gays to understand themselves as gay or as American? After all, America’s film industry, as Bordwell and Thompson note, is “securely at the center of America’s, if not the world’s, popular culture” (Bordwell, 2003: 703).

Notes

¹ Since the earliest days of cinema, the film industry has been divided into three main components. “Production” involves the actual making of the film: the financing, writing, shooting, editing, etc. “Distribution” refers to the shipping of copies (or prints) of the finished film to various theatres. The theaters where the film is actually projected to audiences make up the third arm, or “exhibition.” More recently, cable television sales, video-cassette and DVD rentals, etc. also comprise film exhibition. See Benschoff, 2004: 17.

² The “Big Five” were Warner Brothers, Paramount, Leow’s/MGM, 20th Century Fox and RKO. See Bordwell, 2003: 214.

³ The “Little Three” were Columbia, United Artists, Universal. See Bordwell, 2003: 214.

⁴ At that point the “majors” included six of the eight “Big Five” studios and a sole new entry, Disney, which had been considered as such since the 1950s. See Bordwell, 2003: 681.

⁵ For example, Warner Brothers was now owned by the Kinney Company and Paramount was a division of Gulf + Western. See Bordwell, 2003: 681.

⁶ The 2007 market share was led by, in order of percentage, Paramount, Warner Brothers, Disney, Sony/Columbia, 20th Century Fox, and Universal. See Rentrak, 2008.

⁷ IFP began as a sidebar to the New York Film Festival, when Sandra Schulberg programmed 20 films from the 100 submissions for showings at the Lincoln Center. See Levy, 1999: 7-8.

⁸ See Levy, 1999: 20-51 for more extensive explanation.

⁹ Such as television and, at the time, video.

¹⁰ Levy considers the “typical indie public” as being composed of: “College students and college graduates; Singles and childless couples; Discriminating viewers seeking provocative entertainment; Informed viewers with sharper sensibility and greater awareness of new film releases and directors; Frequent moviegoers who go to the movies at least once a month.” See Levy, 1999: 28-29.

¹¹ “Awards season” refers primarily to the “race” for the Academy Awards, with a slew of precursory awards that lead up to it. In the 1990s, a large portion of films that successfully vied for these awards (a few examples being *The Crying Game*, *Howards End*, *The Piano*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Fargo*, *The English Patient*, *Shakespeare in Love*, and *Good Will Hunting*), were independent films.

¹² Produced for only \$1.2 million, *sex, lies and videotape* ended up grossing nearly \$100 million in worldwide theatrical release. See Bordwell, 2003: 695.

¹³ One example is Billie August's *Twist and Shout* (1986), which Miramax bought for \$50,000 and went on to gross \$1.5 million. See Wyatt, 1998: 78.

¹⁴ The Miramax-Disney deal included Disney's ownership of Miramax's 200-title film library, and the talents of the Weinsteins themselves. In addition, Disney agreed to finance the development, production and marketing of Miramax's features. See Wyatt, 1998: 84.

¹⁵ For an extensive discussion of Miramax and its evolution, including Harvey Weinstein's portrayal as "a boisterous bully who tears phones out of walls and overturns tables," see Biskind, 2004.

¹⁶ Time/Warner purchased New Line in a situation similar to one described regarding Miramax.

¹⁷ Examples include as Sony Pictures Classics, Warner Independent Pictures and Fox Searchlight.

¹⁸ 1997's *The Full Monty* cost only \$3.5 million to produce but grossed \$256 million worldwide. See Lee, 1998.

¹⁹ Women still qualify as a minority in terms of impact on film production. See Levy, 1999: 52.

²⁰ Particularly the 1982 duo of *Personal Best* and *Making Love*, rare – at the time – examples of Hollywood attempting to tell an explicitly gay story.

²¹ Unfortunately, Sherwood would never be able to follow up this success. He died of AIDS-related causes on February 10, 1990. See Vachon, 2006: 36.

²² The films generally noted within this formation include, but are not exclusive to: *Tongues United* (Riggs, 1990), *Poison* (Haynes, 1991), *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1991), *My Own Private Idaho* (Van Sant, 1991), *Edward II* (Jarman, 1991), *Young Soul Rebels* (Julien, 1991), *Swoon* (Kalin, 1992), *The Hours and Times* (Munch, 1992) and *The Living End* (Araki, 1992). See Aaron, 2006: 398-99.

²³ Queer film scholar Thomas Waugh reflects on the era: "People were beginning to talk about the New Queer Cinema as well, though I have never understood exactly what was meant, other than an amnesiac semantic construction of the music video generation, because the queer cinema had been a process of flux and accelerando since the late 1970s and was anything but New" (Waugh, 2000: 11).

²⁴ See Appendix B for a full list of 1991-2000 gay film box office information, including grosses adjusted for 2008 inflation.

²⁵ At the time this gross was the third-highest ever for a documentary (following Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* and, the Madonna concert film *Truth or Dare*), and it remains in the top twenty as of 2008. See Rentrak, 2008.

²⁶ *Paris is Burning*'s publicity was also heightened by its extensive portrayal of "voguing" at the same time Madonna appropriated the move into her work. See Levy, 1999: 464.

²⁷ These private investors included, oddly enough, *Brady Bunch* creator Sherwood Schwartz. See Vachon, 2006: 45.

²⁸ Wildmon is the leader of the American Family Association.

²⁹ John Frohnmayer was "pushed out of office" the following year due to his stance regarding *Poison*. See Vachon, 2006: 54.

³⁰ Though one senator's wife said that the movie made her want to "bathe in Clorox." See Vachon, 2006: 56.

³¹ Vachon describes the Angelika as "like the Grauman's Chinese Theatre of independent film" during the early 1990s. See Vachon, 2006: 55.

³² Vachon claims "the gay community's biggest beef was here wasn't enough sex." See Vachon, 2006: 55.

³³ Conn distributed the film herself, using a word-of-mouth tactic to find the interest of Strand Releasing, who then bought the film and distributed it further. See Levy, 1999: 460-61.

³⁴ The role of gay film festivals in the history of "gay independent film" is extremely extensive. It was actually the initial topic of this thesis. From decades, nearly every gay film began their "life" at a gay film festival. The first took place in San Francisco in 1977, and by the 1980s, nearly every major American city had one. They remain a prominent part of gay independent film production today. See Rich, 2006; Gamson, 1997.

³⁵ Examples include Frameline and Strand Releasing.

³⁶ Jose Arroyo has claimed that AIDS is the "absent centre" of two of the "foundational new queer films," *Edward II* and *My Own Private Idaho*. Both Tom Kalin and Todd Haynes have concluded that AIDS is,

actually, what their films (*Swoon* and *Poison*) were all about (see Arroyo, 1993: 70-96; Saunders, 1998: 134; Lim, 2002: 43).

³⁷ Panel took place January 18, 2008 in Park City, Utah with the cast, producer, writer and director of *Savage Grace*.

³⁸ These cities were New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Toronto and Miami (Rentrak, 2008).

³⁹ For the debate on *Boys Don't Cry*'s "queer sensibilities," see Aaron, 2006: 399.

⁴⁰ This project was to star Drew Barrymore as Brandon Teena (see Vachon, 2006: 98).

⁴¹ This was averted at the last minute due to Vachon's trip to Nebraska to get Brandon Teena's girlfriend to sign a release (see Vachon, 2006: 98).

⁴² Fox Searchlight's Lindsay Law had to personally call Drew Barrymore to inform her that her project was "dead." She was "devastated." (see Vachon, 2006: 100).

⁴³ The term adopted to acknowledge a film that follows an "independent film" exhibition trajectory of fewer screens in larger cities, whether they actually are "independent" or not.

⁴⁴ See Appendix A

⁴⁵ See Appendix B

⁴⁶ See Rosen, 2008 for an expanded discussion of theatrical alternatives for independent film, most notably online exhibition.

⁴⁷ The description also notes "3 Reasons To Buy This Film": "A very cute cast! Spirituality collides with gay romance! A true discovery!!!" (see TLA Video, 2008).

⁴⁸ These films – all "editor's picks" - were: *Soul Maid*; *Socket*; *S Is For Sexy* (Tuccio, 2008); *You Belong To Me* (Sauli, 2008); *Naked Boys Singing!* (Schrock, 2007)

⁴⁹ The "3 Reasons To Buy This Film" include "An erotic fantasy with full-frontal!" and "We've never seen a film about guys who get off by getting electrocuted." (see TLA Video, 2008).

⁵⁰ Beefcake magazines were published in North America in the 1930s to 1960s and were marketed primarily to gay men. They featured photographs of young, muscular men in athletic poses.

CHAPTER II
INTERCOURSE:
A GAY NEGOTIATION OF POST-9/11 HEGEMONY

If cinema is indeed “securely at the center of America’s, if not the world’s, popular culture,” how can this dominance be explained or categorized to produce a greater understanding of the position of gays within both this cinema and the society it represents? Most media practices in the United States, including film, “illustrate how culture relates to political and material conditions” (Artz, 2000: 27). This chapter will discuss how the economic practices of gay cinema relate to “the new homonormativity¹,” a term coined by Lisa Duggan in 2002 to describe a neo-liberalist movement within U.S. gay politics. This discussion will both address the historiography of the previous chapter, and provide a context for the analysis of the following chapter. Before doing so, it is imperative to first introduce a theoretical framework that would allow for this discussion to take place. I believe this framework can be found within contemporary discussions of hegemony.

Duggan argues that the hegemonic arrangement of American society has been dominated by neoliberalism for decades. Neoliberalism² is defined by Duggan as “the brand name for the form of procorporate, ‘free market,’ anti-‘big government’ rhetoric shaping U.S. policy and dominating international financial institutions since the 1970s,” which is associated primarily “with economic and trade policy” (Duggan, 2002: 177). During the 1970s, as U.S. based corporations faced global competitors and declining profit rates, “previously conflicting big and small business interests increasingly converged, and business groups organized to redistribute resources upward” (Duggan, 2003: 11). This idea was exemplified many times in the history of the film industry

discussed in the previous chapter, most obviously when Hollywood studios started becoming parts of media conglomerates in the late 1970s. “Indiewood” itself is also an example of this convergence. By buying distributors or fragmenting the market by distributing their own “indie” films, Hollywood organized itself so that even the few million dollars made by a small independent film they owned was redistributed toward the media giants that control the studio. For example, last year’s French Edith Piaf biopic, *La Vie En Rose*, grossed \$10,301,706 for Picturehouse Films. Picturehouse is owned by New Line, which is owned by Warner Brothers, which is owned by Time-Warner, Inc (Rentrak, 2008).

Duggan suggests that while neoliberalist hegemony was built over several decades beginning the 1940s and 1950s³, it received serious traction with the “Washington Consensus” of the 1980s, “a set of policy imperatives for international government and business operations⁴” (Duggan, 2003: 12). The Consensus was a “kind of backroom dealing among the financial, business, and political elites” of the United States, and continued through both the “Republican” governments of Reagan and the Bushes, as well as the “Democratic” Clinton administration (Duggan, 2003: 12). Neoliberalism hides itself in the “domestic political language of two party electoral politics” (Duggan, 2003: 12). In terms of “shrinking public institutions, expanding profit-making prerogatives, and undercutting democratic practices and noncommercial cultures,” neoliberalism has remained present in policy initiatives through both parties (Duggan, 2003: 13). However, the specifics of the neoliberalist agenda has changed. The construction of neoliberalist politics has always relied heavily on identity and cultural politics (Duggan, 2003: 12). In terms of the politics of sexuality, this culminated

post-9/11, when “emergent ‘multicultural,’ neoliberal ‘equality’ politics” arose with “a stripped-down, nonredistributive form of ‘equality’ designed for global consumption” (Duggan, 2003: 12).

The first half of this chapter will utilize the concept of hegemony, most dominantly through the work of Raymond Williams, to discuss the American film industry’s role within neoliberalism. It will address the specific negotiations that were seen in the history discussed in the previous chapter. This half will be divided into two sections, one discussing the idea of hegemony more generally, and the second making use of Williams’ idea of a “counter-hegemony.” Here I intend to more specifically argue that “Gay Indiewood” represents an example of a subordinate group buying into the neoliberalist hegemonic arrangement, and also to make use of Williams’ concept to promote a further understanding of “independent” vs. “Hollywood” in the context of this study. The second half of the chapter will bring this discussion into “the new homonormativity,” discussing its conception and ideologies, and contextualizing them within ideas of hegemony and trends within gay cinema through the work of Duggan.

Hegemony as The U.S. Film Industry

Raymond Williams’ 1977 work, *Marxism and Literature*, distinguishes between previous definitions of hegemony and its acquisition of greater significance through the work of Gramsci (the term itself dates back to Ancient Greece). Gramsci’s work acknowledges the division between “rule” and “hegemony.” While “rule” is a political notion articulated with adversity, “hegemony” is a multifaceted connection of

considerably more variation, including not only the political, but social and cultural forces as well (Williams, 1977: 108; Lawner, 1973: 42).

Gramsci's distinction embraced and extended two dominant ideas: culture as a "whole social process" and ideology in the Marxist sense (Williams, 1977: 108). Instead of insisting culture is a process by which individuals classify their own lives, hegemony relates it to specific powers and influences (Williams, 1977: 109). The recognition of this process takes hegemony beyond ideology. What is crucial is not only the system of ideas and beliefs but the entire social progression that is prepared by "specific and dominant meanings and values" (Williams, 1977: 109). Williams felt that there were two "immediate" advantages to this conception of hegemony. First, Gramsci's recognition of domination and subordination correlates successfully with the social processes of developed societies where older ideas were often derived from historical situations that no longer apply (Williams, 1977: 110). Second, "and more immediately in this context," that "cultural tradition and practice are seen as much more than superstructural expressions – reflections, mediations, or typifications – of a formed social and economic structure" (Williams, 1977: 110). This perception permitted a new way of viewing cultural activity: not as a superstructure, but as a "whole area of lived experience," related to a wide arena of "realities" (Williams, 1977: 111).

Essentially, Williams connects hegemony to domination by describing hegemony *as* a culture – "a culture which also has to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular class" (Williams, 1977: 112). As such, consumer culture is simply a part of a hegemonic existence, as are its many fragments. As Artz and Murphy explain:

Within a stable hegemony, how we live our lives and how we understand our lives generally correspond to the political and material conditions for that hegemony. Major social groups that benefit from the hegemonic arrangement support the political institutions and material conditions for that hegemony. Major social groups that benefit from the hegemonic arrangement support the political institutions that administer the allocation of resources. They also participate in the production and consumption of popular culture and those rituals and practices that underwrite the hegemonic relationship (Artz, 2000: 27).

In this sense, seeing this hegemony *as* Hollywood is clear. Social groups of a hegemonic society are likely to consume Hollywood product. Thus films are generally going to be made with content reflecting the dominant beliefs within those groups. Film scholars Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin note in *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movies* that “Hollywood film is American film” (Benshoff, 2004: 24). They dominate American theatres (and DVD-store shelves, and cable television programming) so much so that “US citizens have relatively little access to other types of films – films often made by minority filmmakers that tell stories and express viewpoints and that are ignored or underexplored by Hollywood movies” (Benshoff, 2004: 24).

There are other less obvious examples of Hollywood economics that clearly illustrate hegemonic control and adjustment. A stunning one is found within statistics regarding the employment of women in the industry. In her analysis *The Celluloid*

Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women in the Top 250 Films of 2005, University of Southern California scholar Martha M. Lauzen notes that in 2005, women comprised only 17% of all directors, producers, executive producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors working in the top domestic grossing films⁵ (Lauzen, 2006). This was the same percentage of women employed in the film industry in 1998 (Lauzen, 2006). According to Williams, this example is simply one “reality” of “whole area of lived experience” that contributes to hegemony. It sheds light on the positioning of women within American society by exposing the limitations placed on female workers in one specific “power.”

Sociologist Alan Hunt, adopting Gramsci’s and Williams’ discussion, comes to define hegemony as “an active process involving the production, reproduction and mobilization of popular consent” (Hunt, 1990: 311). He also suggests that hegemony can never constitute its leadership by “simply articulating the immediate interests of its own constituents” (Hunt, 1990: 311). One of the most “important corollaries” of hegemony⁶ is that for a “hegemonic project to be dominant it must address and incorporate, if only partially, some aspects of the aspirations, interests, and ideology of subordinate groups” (Hunt, 1990: 311). As noted in the previous chapter, Hollywood – which in itself could be considered a hegemonic project – incorporated the “aspirations, interests, and ideology” of independent film to maintain its own economic leadership in the American film industry.

Counter-Hegemonies and Hegemonic Negotiation

Perhaps this claim can be better articulated through Williams' most significant addition to Gramsci's hegemony. Williams, though stressing how many "blind alleys" are no longer entered because of its merit, did discuss difficulties that may arise from Gramsci's theory. He worried that it might illicit a "totalizing tendency" that might lead to an "abstract totalization" along the same lines of the superstructure (Williams, 1977: 112). Instead, "in practice," hegemony should "never be singular":

Its internal structures are highly complex, as can readily be seen in any concrete analysis. Moreover (and this is crucial, reminding us of the necessary thrust of the concept), it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own (Williams, 1977: 112).

Williams is claiming that hegemonic relations are always in flux, and as result, Artz and Murphy suggest that "new cultural practices are frequently emerging while residual practices from earlier negotiations live on" (Artz, 2000: 61). They argue that these "emergent cultural practices" arise from the "contradictions of the present order, whereas residual practices reflect prior and existing consensual agreements" (Artz, 2000, 61). These emergent and residual practices can be dominant themselves, such as the example Artz and Murphy give of the Nike shoe commercial that "used the residual pull"

of The Beatles' song "Revolution," as a "theme song for personal growth and self-improvement" (Artz, 2000: 61). However, they can also be alternative or oppositional, as Williams notes:

We have then to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice (Williams, 1977: 112-13).

The terms both represent "emergent cultural practices," but differ in their intentions. "Alternative hegemony" refers to a subordinate group that simply practices behaviors or actions that do not fit into the dominant hegemony (Artz, 2000: 62; Williams, 1977: 113). This definition also applies to "counter-hegemony." However, "counter-hegemony" specifically applies to alternative hegemonies that are oppositional by challenging accepted dominant-subordinate relations within hegemony (Artz, 2000: 62; Williams, 1977: 113-14). It is imperative to an understanding of "Gay Indiewood"'s role in the Hollywood hegemonic arrangement to view the history of "independent cinema" within these terms.

Though Williams only briefly details these additions to Gramsci's conception, their influence has been great. In his article, "Rights and Social Movements: Counter-Hegemonic Strategies," Hunt utilizes this concept to suggest that it is possible to advance rights strategies within progressive politics without "succumbing to illusions about what political commentator and author Stuart Scheingold called 'the myth of rights'⁷" (Hunt, 1990: 309). He notes, in specific regard to counter-hegemonies, that a "hegemonic

crisis” may take place. This “crisis” to the dominant hegemony may occur “either as a result of circumstances internal to its own project” or as a result of “a rapid advance of counter-hegemonic forces which has the result of undermining the previously secured leadership of the dominant bloc such that it is no longer able to rule the old way” (Hunt, 1990: 314-15).

Hunt stresses that the origins of these forces may lie as defined by an “alternative hegemony”:

Counter-hegemony is not some purely oppositional project conceived of as if it were constructed “elsewhere,” fully finished and then drawn into place, like some Trojan horse of the mind, to do battle with the prevailing dominant hegemony. Without such an understanding the quest for counter-hegemony can only be a continuation of that which the concept seeks to displace, namely, the search for a unitary political subject which needs simply to achieve consciousness of itself to be able to challenge the dominant hegemony (Hunt, 1990: 313).

The “new independent cinema” did not construct itself to “battle” the Hollywood economic stronghold. It was born out of a want and need to express alternative themes and tell different stories, and it was not until the early 1990s – when it began to attain significant financial success – that it became a “counter-hegemony” in the economic sense. In an artistic sense, this distinction differs. Just as Hunt noted that the alternative to the aforementioned counter-hegemonic scenario is “a conception of counter-hegemony which has to start from that which exists,” the artistic intent of independent film was

conceived directly against that which existed: Hollywood (Hunt, 1990: 313). Such a conception “requires a ‘reworking’ or ‘refashioning’ of the elements which are constitutive of the prevailing hegemony” (Hunt, 1990: 313). As previously noted by Emanuel Levy, the artistic drive behind independent film was born out of a “creative need” to explore “new themes, new forms, and new styles” not produced in the so-called Hollywood hegemony (Levy, 1999: 52). This need was “politically motivated” to “render unfamiliar or forbidden experiences previously ignored” (Levy, 1999: 52).

However, it was not independent cinema’s artistic drives that led to a hegemonic renegotiation of Hollywood. Though it certainly incorporated creative elements of independent film into its own⁸, Hollywood gains strength and power “by making its form and practice seem to be basic common sense” (Benshoff, 2004: 24). This often conceals the fact that “Hollywood form and practice developed over time in response to specific socio-political factors, and it also works to erase awareness that there are other ways of making (and understanding) film as a cultural artifact” (Benshoff, 2004: 24). The true threat of independent film came when another way of making film began making enough money and thus finding enough exposure to weaken that “strength and power.” As a result, “Indiewood” was formed toward the end of the 1990s, and the new Hollywood hegemonic arrangement came to include a significant amount of the subordinate groups and themes represented initially in “new independent film.”

Prior to this renegotiation, Hollywood’s interest in gay content existed mainly in portrayals of gays as victims or for the purposes of humor (thus making the content marketable to much of mainstream society) until “new independent cinema” suggested that there was a “gay market” for film. This situation introduced considerably more

progressive images of gays into the “Hollywood hegemonic project” as a result. It also placed the control of the films in the hands of the “hegemons.”⁹ They were now marketed and distributed in the corporate interest of Hollywood studios. At the same time, this trend significantly reduced the presence of truly “independent” gay film in dominant forms of cinematic distribution and exhibition. This simultaneously presented subordinate values while reinforcing dominant interests. Progressive gay images were being pushed into the mainstream, but only to provide financial gain for the Hollywood institution that had initially shunned them. Additionally, the basic idea that Hollywood finally allowed these images by introducing a network of “specialty” divisions to release them speaks to the same suggestion. Once “Indiewood” became a part of the Hollywood hegemonic arrangement, nearly all gay content distributed through the studios were released by these divisions¹⁰.

The insistence on the “contested nature” of hegemony applies “with even greater force to counter-hegemony” (Hunt, 1990: 314). Counter-hegemonies tend to follow a process which is “never incremental or evolutionary, but it involves both advances and retreats, as well as changes in pace” (Hunt, 1990: 314). This could be specifically applied to New Queer Cinema, the wave of films (such as Van Sant’s *My Own Private Idaho* and Livingston’s *Paris is Burning*) that played a strong role in the economic possibility of the gay independent films that followed. Viewing NQC as its own counter-hegemony, one specific to a subordinate group that intended to provide a “generative space” to combine agendas “concerned with representing non-normative sexualities,” it failed to materialize beyond its essential two-year existence (Stacey, 2007: 3). As film scholar Michelle Aaron notes: “Perhaps the most irreparable of charges against NQC is

that the promise of the films was never fully realized” (Aaron, 2006: 405). Instead, NQC led to a niche market of films targeted at gays that became counter-hegemonic themselves, but less in their concern to represent non-normative sexualities, and more in their economic viability outside the Hollywood hegemonic arrangement.

As a whole, the gay films within the “new independent cinema,” both NQC and otherwise, led to a new hegemonic arrangement that included “Indiewood,” a mode Hollywood saw fit for representing the subordinate values expressed in the gay independent films of the 1990s. Yet one must resist assuming that Hollywood institutions – or other hegemonic forces – are fully to blame for this arrangement. Gay filmmakers and gay producers were not entirely forced into allowing “Indiewood” to distribute their work (even though economic shifts certainly made it challenging to provide financially viable alternatives).

Even prior to “Indiewood,” gay independent film was exhibiting tendencies toward more commercially viable works. In a sense, “Gay Indiewood” could be seen just as easily as gay film “buying into” the hegemony as it could the hegemony incorporating gay film. That is why it is important to examine related counter-hegemonic practices within other arenas. Just as Williams argued that hegemony should be realized as a “complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits,” the same certainly applies to counter-hegemonies (Williams, 1977: 112). A counter-hegemonic practice, NQC artistically aligned itself with both intellectual forces (queer theory in the Academy) and political forces (AIDS activism, and the “queer nation” movement that arose from it in the early 1990s). I intend to argue that “Gay Indiewood,” at least economically, has aligned itself with a right-wing movement in gay

political and intellectual thought. Unlike NQC and its “queer” relations, the allegiance of this counter-hegemony to dominant forces allowed a renegotiation of hegemony in the United States.

“The New Homonormativity”

After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Moral Majority founder Rev. Jerry Falwell appeared on Rev. Pat Robertson’s Christian television show, *The 700 Club*, to discuss the causes of the tragic event. He explained:

I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America, I point the finger in their face and say ‘you helped this happen’ (qtd. in Duggan, 2003: 43).

Falwell claimed that “given this national moral state,” America “probably deserves” what happened on September 11th (qtd. in Duggan, 2003: 43). Soon after, it was announced that relief funds for families of those killed in the World Trade Center would exclude same-sex domestic partners (Duggan, 2003: 43). While Duggan notes that “such attacks and exclusions had been typical fare in national politics since the early 1980s,” Falwell’s statement was quickly repudiated by politicians from both national parties, and the exclusion of gays from relief funds was rescinded by Republican

president George W. Bush and the Republican governor of New York, George Pataki, who commented:

In all honesty, for too long, the party that I am proud to be a member of... was a party that did express intolerance (qtd. in Duggan, 2003: 44).

This was a significant event in an ongoing move toward what Duggan calls “multicultural diversity” within the neoliberal mainstream represented in U.S. politics, best – though certainly not exclusive to – the Republican party (Duggan, 2003: 45). Since September 11, 2001, this shift has only “intensified,” with an “added emphasis on the [American] model of gay ‘heroes’ and ‘victims’ as a rhetorical boost for demands for inclusion in marriage and the military” (Duggan, 2003: 46). At the level of politics, this “gay conservatism” is most “visibly represented” by the Log Cabin Republicans and its leader (until recently), Rich Tafel¹¹ (Robinson, 2005: 2).

Duggan suggests a crucial moment in the creation of this movement came with the “Liberty For All” Log Cabin National Leadership Conference, which was held in New York City on August 30, 1999. At the conference, speaker and prominent Log Cabin member Jonathan Rauch declared this new center “libertarian radical independent,” and suggested an online writer’s group, the Independent Gay Forum (IGF), was the “cutting edge” of this new gay movement. Under the heading “Forging a Gay Mainstream,” the IGF’s website proclaimed the organization’s principles¹². Among them:

We share a belief in the fundamental virtues of the American system and its traditions of individual liberty, personal moral autonomy and responsibility, and equality before the law. We believe those traditions depend on the institutions of a market economy, free discussion, and limited government (qtd. in Duggan, 2002: 176).

Paul Robinson begins the introduction to *Queer Wars: The New Gay Right and Its Critics*, a study examining the work of writers associated with the IGF or its beliefs, by stating the obvious: “The gay movement began on the left” (Robinson, 2005: 1). In the decades that followed the eruption of Gay Liberation in the 1960s, this continued, with gays developing national organizations with clear ties to left-wing politics (Robinson, 2005: 1). As “members of a despised and even persecuted minority,” gays’ interests were “represented – if they were represented at all – by the liberal wing of the Democratic Party” (Robinson, 2005: 1). Robinson notes, in the past decade or so, this story “has dramatically changed” (Robinson, 2005: 1). A significant number of gay people have declared themselves “gay conservatives”¹³, and this trend “as a political and intellectual force” is “arguably the most important new development in the gay world” (Robinson, 2005: 2).

Intellectually, the movement is represented by a variety of figures, the most notable examined by Robinson in *Queer Wars*. Robinson sees his subjects as “part of a broad-gauged movement within the gay community” (Robinson, 2005: 3). In 1996, one such subject, literary critic and writer Bruce Bawer, published an anthology of gay conservative writings¹⁴ called *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy*. In it,

Bawer claims his work as part of “a groundswell for change” or “a new gay paradigm¹⁵” that marks “the homosexual movement’s coming of age and shedding of its youthful radicalism” (Bawer, 1996: 5). Bawer, a self-described “elitist” and “monogamous churchgoing Christian,” invokes “most gay people” as a “Nixonian silent majority” of the “conventional and opposed to Left queerthink” (Bawer 1993: 26; Bawer, 1996: ix-xv). His ideas regarding social change are perhaps best summarized in a 1996 piece he wrote for *The Advocate*, in which he takes sight on “left-wing activist” Urvashi Vaid:

In 1995, even as veteran activist Urvashi Vaid issued a call for a radical gay rights movement aligned with workers and other victim groups against the capitalist oppressor, mounting evidence suggested that major corporations may well do more to bring about gay equality than any other Establishment institution (or, for that matter, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force)... More than ever, it seemed reasonable to suggest that much of gay America’s hope resides not in working-class revolt but in its exact opposite – a trickling down of gay-positive sentiments from elite corporate boardrooms into shops, farms, and factories (Bawer, 1996: 112).

Bawer’s left-bashing and, as described by Lisa Duggan, his “gleeful anticipation” of the “Disneyfication of democracy as boardroom deal making” is rampant throughout this “new gay paradigm.” (Duggan, 2002: 183). One example comes from IGF writer Rob Blanchard, who in 1997 joined forces with the Christian right to “attack the reputation and funding” of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Centre, a progressive arts and

community organization led by lesbians of colour in San Antonio, Texas (Duggan, 2002: 183). The attack is characteristic of historic right-wing strategies of denying public funding to “political” art projects (as noted in the previous chapter of this study regarding Todd Haynes’ *Poison*). Blanchard and five other white gay men, self-proclaimed affiliates of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, the San Antonio Equal Rights Political Caucus, the Log Cabin Republicans, and the San Antonio Gay and Lesbian Community Center, wrote a letter to the city of San Antonio asking for removal of Esperanza’s city funding:

It is a political organization – obsessed with victimhood and using ‘sexism, racism and homophobia’ as rhetorical and political ploys to extract guilt money from individuals and organizations, including the City. Esperanza has made its battle for tax dollars a referendum on homosexuality and we resent this. But Esperanza’s greatest damage to the gay and lesbian community is the divisiveness it creates within by repeatedly injecting issues of class, race and gender for self-serving purposes (Esperanza Center, 1997)¹⁶.

Duggan notes that Blanchard and company’s attack “attributes ‘divisiveness’” to an “inclusive agenda” and “locates unity in the unmarked centrality of prosperous white men, whose interests unproblematically define the interests of ‘the gay and lesbian community’” (Duggan, 2002: 183). This inclusivity is suggestive of one of the most significant of the movement’s characteristics, its dominant representation through the work of white men and its tendency to focus on masculinity¹⁷. Robinson explains:

For the most part, gay conservatism is a story about men and by men. Lesbians figure in it, if at all, mainly as foils, whose devotion to domesticity is held up as an example to their libidinous gay brothers. The fact that the new gay conservatism is so resolutely masculine – in personnel and preoccupation – is no doubt significant (Robinson, 2005: 3).

This significance is partially attributed to the fact that central to the Gay Liberation movement was the connection between the oppression of homosexuals and the oppression of women (Robinson, 2005: 3). For example, Bawer sees no such alliance. On the contrary, he “expressly denies” that gays “have any obligation to battle misogyny, just as they have no obligation to battle racism” (Robinson, 2005: 26). Additionally, Bawer fails to recognize that for some gays, “the right to adopt an unpopular gender style is as essential to their sense of self as is his own need to love men” (Robinson, 2005: 26). Because women’s rights have been marginalized by Bawer and other gay conservatives, Robinson suggests that women’s rights activists “find it easier to discard the notion that gays are victims of the same patriarchal values that keep women in their place” (Robinson, 2005: 3). In terms of the gay right, they would be correct in doing so. By discarding the rights of women and races, (white, affluent) gay conservatives have arguably created the first gay counter-hegemonic practice in the United States to at least partially incorporate itself into the hegemonic arrangement.

Duggan feels that the writer “whose work most fully elaborates an overarching framework for the efforts of this group” is Andrew Sullivan, former editor of *New*

Republic (Duggan, 2002: 184). She argues that Sullivan “sets the terms” for gay conservative arguments by attacking the “extremes” of what he calls “prohibitionism and liberationism,” claiming that that this reconciles the “best arguments of contemporary conservatives and liberals,” offering a “third way” approach (Duggan, 2002: 184). Sullivan discusses this approach in his book, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality*:

In an appeal to “nature,” the most persuasive form of this argument is rooted in one of the oldest traditions throughout the West, a tradition that still carries a great deal of intuitive sense. It posits a norm – the heterosexual identity – that is undeniably valuable in any society and any culture, that seems to characterize the vast majority of humanity, and without which civilization would simply evaporate: and it attempts to judge homosexuality by the standards of that norm (Sullivan, 1995: 21).

It is through such claims that Duggan comes to define this development in the gay rights movement as “the new homonormativity.” She specifies the characteristics of such as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions,” instead upholding and sustaining them while “promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2002: 179). Sullivan’s core argument – and as Duggan suggests, the “the key to the entire framework” of the movement – is that

homosexuality is an involuntary condition¹⁸ in a “small fixed minority” of the population (Sullivan, 1995: 47; Duggan, 2002: 184). Sullivan provides some clever metaphors:

As albinos reminds us of the brilliance of color; as redheads offer a startling contrast to the blandness of their peers; as genius teaches us, by contrast, of the virtue of moderation: so the homosexual person might be seen as a natural foil to the heterosexual norm, a variation that does not eclipse the theme, but resonates within it (Sullivan, 1995: 47).

Here Sullivan is acknowledging that if homosexuality were a choice, then antigay sentiments would be warranted as an opposition to this choice. As Duggan notes, this view suggests that “it is only because homosexuality is involuntary,” and “therefore cannot threaten an equally involuntary heterosexual majority, that attacking it morally and legally does not make sense” (Duggan, 2002: 185). In a sense, the counter-hegemonic strategy of this claim is to annihilate threats to dominant norms by “resonating” gays within them. This idea is analogous to the counter-hegemonic practices discussed regarding “Gay Indiewood” in that both projects “buy into” the hegemonic arrangement instead of attempting to reverse the hegemony. This strategy is noted by Hunt:

The most significant stage in the construction of counter-hegemony comes about with the putting into place of discourses, which whilst building on the elements of

the hegemonic discourses, introduce elements which transcend it (Hunt, 1990: 314).

While aligning himself with hegemonic discourses, Sullivan, for example, has two specific goals to transcend it. As Duggan notes:

Sullivan's plan is simple. It involves focusing primarily on two issues – gay access to marriage and the military – then demobilizing the gay population to a “prepolitical” state¹⁹ (Duggan, 2002: 187).

This plan coincides with what Hunt describes as “the emphasis on counter-hegemony as a transcendent project.” Such a project involves “a line of thought which does not negate that which exists,” but instead “strives to construct, in Gramsci's terms, ‘good sense’ from ‘common sense,’” valorizing “those elements or features which are ‘new’” (Hunt, 1990: 311). The effect of this process “ends up with the dying away or exhaustion of elements once dominant” (Hunt, 1990: 314). Comparatively, “Gay Indiewood” aligns itself with the “common sense” of the Hollywood economic arrangement, bringing with it the “good sense” of progressive gay images. However, in doing so “Gay Indiewood” played a role in the fragmentation of independent film industry, “exhausting” distribution and exhibition modes and pushing gay independent films into the arguably subordinate modes of DVD and internet release.

Hunt finds that examples of “transcendent projects” also serve to illustrate other important counter-hegemonic practices (Hunt, 1990: 314). Leftist conceptions of

counter-hegemony often involve “strategies which are directed at negating or reversing the existing hegemony” (Hunt, 1990: 314). This could be exemplified through the “queer” counter-hegemonic practices (including NQC) of the early 1990s, which, as noted, defined itself by concerns in representing non-normative sexualities. Sullivan disregards “queer” as a “uniform and compulsory” identity “used to label... [and] to tell everyone that they have a single and particular identity” (despite the fact that, as Duggan notes, the term “has been used most often precisely to question the uniformity of sexual identities”) (Sullivan, 1995: 85; Duggan, 2002: 186). Similarly, “Indiewood” (and thus, “Gay Indiewood”), economically counters the “leftist” strategy of the “new independent cinema” (and thus, NQC and other independent gay film) by aligning itself with the very institution that independent cinema defines itself *against*: Hollywood.

Though these ideas identify similarities in the counter-hegemonic strategies of both “the new homonormativity” and “Gay Indiewood,” more direct correlations can be experienced through Duggan’s characterization of gay conservatism as an economic movement. As noted in the introduction this study, Duggan views the movement as a “highly visible and influential center-libertarian-conservative-classical liberal formation” that aims “to contest and displace the expansively democratic vision represented by progressive activists” (Duggan, 2002: 177). In its place is a “model of narrowly constrained public life cordoned off from the “private” control and vast inequalities of economic life” (Duggan, 2002: 177). This was exemplified previously though Bawer in his suggestion that “gay America’s hope” lies in “a trickling down of gay-positive sentiments from elite corporate boardrooms,” and is thoroughly discussed by Duggan. In this sense, “the new homonormativity” is not only a counter-hegemonic practice within

gay rights, but also as part of the neoliberalist movement. As a “crucial part of the cultural front” of this movement, “the new homonormativity” can be seen as a practice within the hegemonic arrangement:

In a wide range of cultural policy territories – from public spending for culture and education to the “moral” foundations for welfare reform, from affirmative action to marriage and domestic partnership debates – neoliberalism’s profoundly antidemocratic and antiegalitarian agenda has shaped public discussion²⁰ (Duggan, 2002: 177).

The primary strategy of neoliberalism is privatization, which Duggan defines as describing “the transfer of wealth and decision making from public, more-or-less accountable decision-making bodies to individual or corporate, unaccountable hands” (Duggan, 2002: 178). Essentially, neoliberals suggest that there should be a privatization of economic enterprises, which they “consider fundamentally ‘private’ and inappropriately placed in any ‘public’ arena²¹” (Duggan, 2002: 178). They go even further by advocating that many “ostensibly public services and functions” be “placed in private profit-making hands,” including cultural production²².

Relating these ideas to the history of the economics of gay cinema discussed in the previous chapter is rather clear. The transition of the dominant source of gay images in theatrical distribution from the “new independent cinema” to “Indiewood” represents the “transfer of wealth and decision making” from gay filmmakers, producers and companies, to divisions within the conglomerate-owned Hollywood infrastructure. In this

sense, you could view these ideas in a simple equation: “the new homonormativity” is to neoliberalism as “Gay Indiewood” is to Hollywood. By aligning themselves with dominant practices they became, arguably, the first gay-oriented movements to successfully infiltrate hegemonic arrangements. These suggestions, as well as aforementioned correlations, are based solely on a historiographic account of the trends that led to “Indiewood”’s emergence. They do not speak to the specificities of “Gay Indiewood” or what characterizes its role within hegemony as Hollywood. It is important to now utilize the noted history, as well as its application to concepts discussed in this chapter, to more thoroughly analyze “Gay Indiewood,” and attempt to make sense of its implications.

Notes

¹ Duggan is “riffing” on the term on term “heteronormativity,” which was coined by Michael Warner. She notes that she doesn’t “mean the terms to be parallel” as “there is no structure for gay life, no matter how conservative or normalizing, that might compare with the institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual coupling.” See Duggan, 2002: 191.

² Neoliberalism is a complex, loaded term, and the scope of this study will not allow for extensive discussion. For a more expansive discussion, including in the context of its use here, please see Duggan’s 2003 work, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*.

³ Duggan divides the construction of a U.S. neoliberal hegemony into five phases: “(1) attacks on the New Deal coalition, on progressive unionism, and on popular front political culture and progressive redistributive internationalism during the 1950s and 1960s; (2) attacks on downwardly redistributive social movements, especially the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, but including feminism, lesbian and gay liberation, and countercultural mobilizations during the 1960s and 1970s; (3) pro-business activism during the 1970s, as U.S. based corporations faced global competition and falling profit rates, previously conflicting big and small business interests increasingly converged, and business groups organized to redistribute resources upward; (4) domestically focused ‘cultural wars’ attacks on public institutions and spaces for democratic public life, in alliances with religious moralists and racial nationalists, during the 1980s and 1990s; and (5) emergent ‘multicultural,’ neoliberal ‘equality’ politics – a stripped-down, nonredistributive form of ‘equality’ designed for global consumption during the 21st century, and compatible with continued upward redistribution of resources” (Duggan, 2003: 12).

⁴ More specifically, the “Washington Consensus” was designed to “recreate the glove in the interests of unimpeded operation of capitalist ‘free’ markets, and to cut back public, noncommercial powers and resources that might impede or drain potential profit making” (Duggan, 2003: 12-13).

⁵ Lauzen’s study analyzed “behind-the-scenes employment of 2,488 individuals working on the top 250 domestic grossing films (foreign films omitted) of 2005 with combined domestic box office grosses of approximately \$8.3 billion”. Additional findings included that 19% of the films released in 2005 employed no women directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers, or editors. Only one film failed to employ a man in at least one of these roles. See Lauzen, 2006 for more discussion.

⁶ Referring to Gramsci's conception of the concept.

⁷ Though not directly applicable to this study (and referenced only to give context to Hunt's study), "the myth of rights" is a warning against "illusions that the quest for legal rights and their realization through litigation can achieve substantive gains for progressive social movements." For further discussion, see Scheingold, 1974.

⁸ This is exemplified by Hollywood "imitations" of independent film form and style. One of many examples includes Columbia-TriStar's *Go* (Liman, 1999), which uses a multiple time frame narrative similar to independent film *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994).

⁹ Within concepts of hegemony, a "hegemon" is the name given to the people in power. See Artz, 2000.

¹⁰ See Appendix A.

¹¹ Rich Tafel founded the Log Cabin Republicans in 1990 and remained its executive director and president until January 1, 2003. See Robinson, 2005: 3-5.

¹² See www.indegayforum.org for other principles and expanded information.

¹³ Robinson confesses that he using the term "conservative" in a "capacious and perhaps excessively elastic" sense: "With some justice, two of the figures, I discuss, Michelangelo Signorile and Gabriel Rotello, emphatically reject the label. But critics on the gay left have seen important affinities between Signorile and Rotello and self-confessed conservatives like Bruce Bawer and Andrew Sullivan. Essentially I have measured conservatism among three axes. The first and most obvious is politics: gay conservatives repudiate the gay movement's affiliation with the left. The second is gender: gay conservatives seek to rescue homosexuality from its association with gender deviance – with effeminate men and mannish women. And, finally, gay conservatives reject what they consider the sexual license of the Gay Liberation movement and urge gays to restrain their erotic behavior." See Robinson, 2005: 2-3.

¹⁴ The majority of which are by writers for the Independent Gay Forum.

¹⁵ Though Bawer is insistent in his claims regarding this "gay conservatism" as something new, Robinson notes that there "obviously" were gay conservatives prior to this movement. Robinson notes Ray Cohn, but notes Cohn "was entirely closeted, whereas the defining character of the new generation of conservatives is that they are out, and, like their liberal predecessors, make coming out the sine qua non of gay dignity." See Robinson, 2005: 4-5.

¹⁶ The text of this letter is available on the Esperanza Center website (<http://www.esperanzacenter.org>), along with other documents relating to this conflict. It additionally published in the *New York Times* on September 11, 1997 and is discussed in Chasin, 2000: 228-33.

¹⁷ Examples of female writers or, at least the inclusion of female issues within male writings are few. Andrew Sullivan discusses lesbians in many of his analyses, while a lesbian columnist, Nora Vincent, has as Robinson claims, "made a career of denouncing what she considers the mindless radicalism and terminal dowdiness of lesbian intellectuals." In *The Attack Queers: Liberal Media and the Gay Right*, Richard Goldstein argues that Camille Paglia is the "lesbian counterpart" to Andrew Sullivan. However, Robinson suggests that Paglia's thinking "is far too idiosyncratic and her politics too leftist" to be consider among his subjects. See Robinson, 2005; Goldstein, 2002.

¹⁸ Created by both nature and nurture. For further explanation, see Sullivan, 1995: 47.

¹⁹ Duggan explains that for Sullivan, "the beauty of the debate over gays in the military is that even though it is temporarily been lost for the forces of gay inclusion, it garnered 'the best of both worlds'; that is, it allows the conservatives to 'point to the virtues of a loyal and dedicated soldier, homosexual or heterosexual, and to celebrate his patriotism' with absolutely no abrogation of liberal principles." She notes marriage as an "even better" opportunity of such, which is exemplified by Sullivan when he notes that "marriage is not simply a private contract; it is a social and public recognition of a private commitment. As such, it is the highest public recognition of personal integrity." See Duggan, 2002: 187; Sullivan, 1995: 176-79.

²⁰ Despite this, Duggan notes that "the cultural politics of neoliberalism are considered and debated relatively rarely in discussions of the economic and political mechanisms of U.S. cultural imperialism." See Duggan, 2002: 177.

²¹ Duggan's use, and by which my own, of the terms "private" and "public" not as literally geographic spaces or social zones but "as rhetorics employed in political debates." Additionally, she notes that she is "necessarily compressing a very complex array of debates" in her use of the terms. See Duggan, 2002: 192.

²² Duggan also lists education, garbage collection, and prison building as examples. And she also imperatively notes in this regard that although many neoliberals "would argue for the expansion of the

institutions of civil society as alternatives to state action in the public interest,” which in practice “often means recommendations for corporate sponsorship (and thus corporate control of, for instance, arts institutions) or for the conversion of nonprofit to profit-making operations. See Duggan, 2002: 178, 191.

CHAPTER III PREMATURE EJACULATION: THE MYTH OF BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

Unlike the “new independent cinema,” which shared “creative process and unity of spirit and vision,” or New Queer Cinema, which was “united by a common style,” the definitive quality of “Gay Indiewood” is one of economics. The previous chapter has made clear how these economics could be considered part of a neoliberalist agenda. “Gay Indiewood” represents Hollywood’s incorporation of gay independent films into its own infrastructure. What was not made clear is what this incorporation might suggest about trends in the negotiation of gay themes into the hegemonic arrangement. Since specialty divisions “choose” which films to produce and/or distribute, what content has been deemed acceptable?

This question is particularly interesting because little has been written about “Gay Indiewood” under this specific heading. For this reason, I will briefly define the term “Gay Indiewood” as gay-themed films theatrically released through a network of “specialty divisions” owned by major studios¹, beginning in 2001. Though there are earlier examples of what could technically be considered “Gay Indiewood” (such as 1998’s *Velvet Goldmine* or 1999’s *Boys Don’t Cry*, both released by specialty divisions of studios), the films I will reference are: *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001), *The Deep End* (2001), *The Hours* (2002), *Far From Heaven* (2002), *Monster* (2003), *Kinsey* (2004), *A Home at the End of the World* (2004), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Capote* (2005), and *Transamerica* (2005).

One of the most significant attributes that separates the films of “Indiewood” from both Hollywood and independent film is the cost of the film’s production. Gay-themed

studio releases, modest in comparison to “blockbuster” releases, which rarely cost under \$100 million², still far outreach the budgets of independent films. For example, 1997’s *In & Out* cost \$35 million and 1999’s *The Talented Mr. Ripley* cost \$40 million (Rentrak). Even the \$15 million budgeted *Philadelphia* – in 1993 the most expensive gay-themed film ever made – cost \$12.5 million more than 1992’s *My Own Private Idaho*, which was the most expensive NQC film (Rentrak). Most gay independent films released in the past decade cost very little. *Boy Culture*, the highest grossing gay independent film of 2007, cost just \$500,000 (Rentrak). “Gay Indiewood” films fall somewhere in the middle. The average budget of the 10 films is a little over \$11 million, with *The Hours* the most expensive at \$25 million and both *Kissing Jessica Stein* and *Transamerica* the cheapest at just \$1 million (Rentrak). The distinction usually depends on whether the films were developed by the specialty division, such as *Brokeback Mountain* or *Far From Heaven*, which both cost \$14 million and \$15 million respectively, or purchased after the film was independently produced, such as *Stein* or *Transamerica* (Rentrak).

This chapter will analyze “Gay Indiewood” through four sections in an attempt to build on the historical and theoretical discussions in the previous chapters, as well as by raising questions about what this “movement” suggests. Though this study focuses on the economic, the first section will highlight content trends, making use of Gayle Rubin’s suggestion of a “charmed circle” of “respectable” sexualities, which will build on previous discussions of Pierre Bourdieu’s “cultural hierarchies.” The second section will focus on defining “Gay Indiewood” in terms of its commercial viability, suggesting factors that determine its existence and asking what these factors mean for the representation of sexuality. One of the factors, the “cultural capital” given to a large

majority of the films through exposure from Academy Award nominations, will be specifically discussed in the third section. By looking at how the films are marketed to Academy voters, this section will employ British Media scholar Jonathan Bignell's extensive work *Media Semiotics* with specific regard to *Brokeback Mountain's* awards campaign. The final section will utilize these findings to suggest a "myth of tolerance" displayed in the marketing of *Brokeback*, asking how the film's "success story" exemplifies problems with "Gay Indiewood" and the United States hegemonic arrangement altogether.

Cultural Hierarchies and "Gay IndieWood"

There are some notable parallels in content that I would like to discuss before furthering an economic analysis, if only because films – as a consumer product – are in themselves an advertisement. Bignell notes that "in order to 'sell' a film," a complex variety of techniques are used (Bignell, 2002: 181)³. While the main focus of this chapter will come through both detailing financial data from the films as well as their direct marketing campaigns, it would be erroneous to entirely ignore their content. The marketing campaigns are usually based in their entirety on aspects of the film's plot, themes or characters (though this may be manipulated to suit the goals of the campaign). Considering that one of the "Gay Indiewood"'s characteristics is that its films are often produced independently and then purchased by "specialty divisions" for distribution, trends within content may suggest what "Gay Indiewood" as an industry deems adequate to market.

Besides obvious characteristics that should be assumed (all of the films feature a lead character who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered), perhaps the most evident trend among the films' plot devices is their placement in the past. The six highest-grossing films, *Brokeback Mountain*, *The Hours*, *Capote*, *Monster*, *Far From Heaven* and *Kinsey*, all exemplify this⁴. *Brokeback* details the relationship of two men between 1963 and 1983. *The Hours* is divided into three separate narratives, one in the present, the others in 1923 and 1951. *Capote* covers roughly five years leading up to Truman Capote (Phillip Seymour Hoffman)'s writing of *In Cold Blood*, which was published in 1966. *Monster* follows the true story of serial killer Aileen Wuornos (Charlize Theron) during the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Far From Heaven* is set in a Douglas Sirk-inspired 1950s. *Kinsey* is primarily set in the late 1940s.

This theme of nostalgia in mainstream cinema is certainly not exclusive to "Gay IndieWood." Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon finds that in "general cultural commentary in the mass media," nostalgia is seen as one of the "key components of contemporary culture" (Hutcheon, 1998: 194). In the 1990s, she notes that the media tells us that nostalgia "has become an obsession of both mass culture and high art" (Hutcheon, 1998: 194). However, Hutcheon believes this obsession is not actually coming from either, but from the media itself (Hutcheon, 1998: 194).

Hutcheon's working definition of "nostalgia" does not suggest a simple repetition or duplication of memory (Hutcheon, 1998: 197). Borrowing from Susan Stewart's study *On Longing*, Hutcheon calls nostalgia a "social disease" defined as "the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition" (Hutcheon, 1998: 197). One of her arguments is that by "denying or at least degrading the present as it is lived, nostalgia makes the

idealized (and therefore always absent) past into the site of immediacy, presence, and authenticity” (Hutcheon, 1998: 197). She argues this in comparison to “irony,” another often-theorized postmodern concept⁵:

Unlike the knowingness of irony – a mark of the fall from innocence, if ever there was one – nostalgia is, in this, way, “prelapsarian” and indeed utopian. Few have ever accused irony (even satiric irony) of successfully reinstating the authentic and the ideal (Hutcheon, 1998: 198).

The six films previously noted as exemplifying “Gay Indiewood”’s fascination with nostalgia each do so in very different ways. From a marketing perspective, it could be seen as a tactic to “deny or degrade” the gay present, instead idealizing the past and making the experience of watching gay content easier for mainstream audiences in the sense that it feels more like a history lesson than a participation in gay cinema. However, in terms of their sexuality, “the past” is often not a very ideal place for the characters within the films. For example, *The Hours*’ two historical characters deal with horrific emotional trauma due, in part, to their sexual repression; and the central theme of *Brokeback Mountain* is that the love of the two main characters is challenged by societal constraints on homosexuality. It could perhaps be suggested – in another, more specifically focused study – that by idealizing these situations, the nostalgia of “Gay Indiewood” makes it easier for mainstream audiences to watch the films because it portrays homosexuality in the conservative utopia of these challenged contexts.

It is important to briefly note in this regard that “the new homonormativity” also displays nostalgic tendencies. Neoliberalism, the political ideology the movement is based in, is suggestive of nostalgia by its “neo” prefix alone, signaling a new form of an established movement. Additionally, as the extensive discussion in the previous chapter suggests, “the new homonormativity” denies, and very often degrades, the work of more radical gay movements. One example was given through Andrew Sullivan, whose “plan” is to focus primarily on gay access to marriage and the military (Sullivan, 1995: 29). As noted in chapter two, Duggan suggests that this plan would “then demobilize the gay population to a ‘prepolitical’ state” (Duggan, 2002: 187). “The new homonormativity” utilized “nostalgic tactics” to align itself with hegemonic powers that, particularly in American conservative politics, are significantly nostalgic entities. In a sense, “Gay Indiewood” could be seen as employing nostalgia to align itself with audiences.

These ideas return to Pierre Bourdieu’s suggestions regarding taste culture. As discussed in chapter one, Bourdieu notes how tastes “simultaneously manifest and reassert cultural hierarchies,” which could be directly applied to the nostalgic tendencies of “Gay Indiewood.” Historical films, particularly biopic examples like *Capote*, *Kinsey* and *Monster* (and, in a sense, *The Hours*⁶), which deal with real-life figures, come with cultural capital by presenting the gay experience as an educational one. Bourdieu notes that a cultural work “has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (Bourdieu, 1984: 2). Particularly by depicting figures such as Virginia Woolf or Truman Capote, the films appeal to elite tastes that have this so-called “competence,” and place the subjects’ sexuality as a secondary consideration. Taste not only “classifies,” but it “classifies the

classifier” (Bourdieu, 1984: 7). Seeing *The Hours* or *Capote* classifies the classifier as participating in the more “intellectual” or “literary” side of film culture, and in doing so having the “cultural competence” to encode it.

Bourdieu’s ideas could also be extended to suggest greater practices within the representations of specific racial and sexual subcultures. Not surprisingly, the films focus largely on gay male representations (five of the ten⁷, all white), with some lesbian (three, all white⁸), and one transgendered and bisexual representation each (both white⁹). This is partially indicative of “Gay Indiewood”’s role as a financial market. Marketers are most interested in gay white male consumers, and considerably less interested in gay consumers of colour for “reasons of lower market size and less disposable income” (Sender, 2004: 220). In an analysis of 2003 issues of gay or lesbian magazines *Curve*, *Girlfriends*, *The Advocate*, and *Out*, only 10 percent of national ads included men of colour, and only 8 percent of national ads included women of colour (Sender, 2004: 220)¹⁰. This can be compared to the approximately 25 percent of the U.S. population that are not white (Sender, 2004: 220).

It is important to note that, unlike *Curve* or *Out*, “Gay Indiewood” is not being marketed solely to gays. Which is why it is important to consider the representational elements of the films in relation to queer theorist Gayle Rubin’s ideas in “Thinking Sex: Notes For a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality.” Rubin notes that sexual stratification interacts with other forms of social stratification:

The system of sexual oppression cuts across other modes of social inequality... It is not reducible to, or understandable in terms of, class, race, ethnicity, or gender.

Wealth, white skin, male gender, and ethnic privileges can mitigate the effects of sexual stratification (Rubin, 1993: 22).

They can also make certain types of non-normative sexualities marketable to mainstream cinema audiences. Rubin suggests a “charmed circle of sex,” showing how legal, social, psychological and media discourses “distinguish abject desires from normative sexuality” (Rubin, 1993: 13). According to Rubin’s 15-year old theory, the charmed circle includes “monogamous, private, vanilla, procreative, same-generation and heterosexual sex” (Rubin, 1993: 15). She suggests a process by which nonnormative sex is refused entry into the “charmed circles” and where some “delegitimized practices” are subject to even more constraint (Rubin, 1993: 15). “Queer sex” requires specific restrictions, and Rubin acknowledges that “some forms of homosexuality are moving in the direction of respectability” – specifically “vanilla, coupled, and monogamous” – but that “most homosexuality is still on the bad side of the line” (Rubin, 1993: 15).

The trends of “Gay IndieWood” cinema reflect this idea in many ways: In addition to race, nearly all of the characters (if they aren’t repressing their sexuality, that is) are coupled for the majority of the film’s duration: *Brokeback’s* Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger); *The Hours’* Clarrisa Vaughan (Meryl Streep) and Sally Lester (Allison Janney); *Monster’s* Wuornos (Theron) and Selby (Christina Ricci); *Capote’s* title character and Jack Dunphy (Bruce Greenwood); *Kissing Jessica Stein’s* Jessica Stein (Jennifer Westfeldt) and Helen Cooper (Heather Juergensen). These couplings are also all essentially monogamous. Even *Brokeback’s*

Jack and Ennis, if you don't count occasional sex with their wives and Jack's late-in-the-film attempt at another relationship, are a monogamous couple.

Evidently, Rubin's triad of respectable forms of homosexuality corresponds quite easily to trends in "the new homonormativity" as well. As noted, half of gay conservative writer Andrew Sullivan's "simple plan" was monogamous gay marriage. In fact, it is one of – if not *the* – main goal of the gay conservative movement. And this movement is led by a group of mainly white gay men. The Independent Gay Forum, the main source of Duggan's analysis, consists of thirty men and three women, all but one of which are white (Duggan, 2002: 176). This statistic's manifestation in the movement's ideology was suggested in chapter two, particularly in how – unlike left-leaning gay movements – "the new homonormativity" discards the rights of women and races in their platform.

One addition I'd like to suggest toward Rubin's "respectable," and therefore marketable, specimen, is (in regard to gay men or lesbians) their gender-normative characteristics. Of the seven films featuring gay male characters, only *Capote's* Truman Capote displays what could commonly be regarded as effeminate qualities. Examples of masculine characters include *Brokeback's* Jack and Ennis, *Far From Heaven's* Frank Whitaker (Dennis Quaid), *The Hours's* Richard Brown (Ed Harris), and *The Deep End's* Beau Hall (Jonathan Tucker) and Darby Reese (Josh Lucas). In most cases, the actors playing them are not only masculine, but also very attractive. Katharine Sender argues in regard to the gay market that "in its personification of the ideal gay consumer, marketers struggled with the stereotype of the hypersexual, promiscuous gay man," attempting to displace him with "manifestations of homosexuality that have become the public face of

gayness” (Sender, 2004: 13). This is certainly true here as well (if one were to visualize Sender’s conception, this “public face” could easily look like Jake Gyllenhaal’s: masculine, handsome, and non-threatening), but likely because “Gay Indiewood” is not necessarily a “gay market” at all.

As these films are marketed to general audiences, masculine, good-looking gay male characters create a more accessible diegesis for audiences not used to seeing dramatic gay characters at the movies¹¹. I fully believe that had Jack and Ennis been effeminate characters, *Brokeback* would not have gone over as well as it did in the mainstream (though, in *Brokeback*’s defense, the “butchness” of the characters is a necessary attribute, as the characters would likely not have been capable of surviving in the social world they existed in had they been feminine). A similar trend can be seen in the lesbian representations. Though the lesbians in “Gay Indiewood” are challenging to categorize as a whole (they are quite the mixed bag: a serial killer, her depressive girlfriend, Virginia Woolf, a repressed housewife, an out contemporary lesbian with a long-term partner, and a “straight” woman and the bisexual woman she begins dating), they do share a commonality. Applicable to all of “Gay Indiewood”’s characters except *Monster*’s real-life serial killer Aileen Wuornos, the women are all traditionally feminine and display little “mannish qualities.” This is heightened by the fact that most of them are played by popular, often glamorous actresses (Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, Nicole Kidman, even Wuornos was played by arguably the most glossy of the actresses, Charlize Theron).

In addition to the rather obvious marketability of this trend, it also falls in line with tendencies within “the new homonormativity” that haven’t yet been discussed at length in this study. In *Queer Wars*, Paul Robinson notes in regard to the movement:

The effeminate [men] and the mannish [women] must delay their gratification. Until the public relations war is won they are urged to tone down their act and keep a low profile. In the meantime, pundits apparently feel comfortable denigrating them in language any homophobe might envy (Robinson, 2005: 12).

One example comes from what could be regarded as the first manifesto of the new gay conservatism, Harvard educated marketing professionals Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen’s *After The Ball*. Kirk and Madsen “call out of the woodwork as our ambassadors of bad will all [of] the screamers, stompers, gender-benders, sadomasochists, and pederasts, and confirm America’s worst fears and hates” (Kirk, 1989: 75). Writer Bruce Bawer, noted in the previous chapter as referring to the gay conservatives as marking “the homosexual movement’s coming of age and shedding of its youthful radicalism,” expressed similar concerns. Bawer believes that while same-sex desire itself is in-born and therefore essential, effeminacy and mannishness are social constructions (Bawer, 1996). Specifically, he notes them as “manifestations of institutionalized prejudice” (Bawer, 1996: 7). For “Gay Indiewood,” it’s likely the institutionalized prejudice of effeminacy and mannishness that leads them to avoid putting such characters on the screen.

Rubin's model (as well as some of the extended examples I developed from it) works productively with Bourdieu's model of cultural hierarchies. It is suggestive of what Sender notes as "moral capital," which could be seen as working with the forms of capital noted by Bourdieu (social, cultural, etc). Sender defines the idea when discussing race representations of gay magazine covers:

Moral capital is a symbolic resource accumulated through specific sexual tastes and practices. These endow people with cultural privilege, which ranges from legal, psychological, or familial scrutiny to acknowledgement and celebration of one's sexuality by the media (Sender, 2004: 221).

Race, relationship status, and normative gender characteristics endow the cinematic characters of "Gay Indiewood" with the marketable value of exemplifying a "respectable homosexuality" for mainstream audiences. This same status is privileged by "the new homonormativity," who want to utilize this exclusivity to push their platform into the hegemonic arrangement. Just as "the new homonormativity" is – at its core - defined by Duggan through an economic term, neoliberalism, "Gay Indiewood" is an economic trend, not an artistic one. The "charmed circle" of representation is certainly not exclusive to "Gay Indiewood" in terms of contemporary American media, but the specifics of its economic development and features are.

An Economic Movement

Neoliberalism is often presented “not as a particular set of interests and political interventions” but as “a kind of ‘nonpolitics’ – a way of being reasonable and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government globally” (Duggan, 2002: 177). In a similar sense, “Gay Indiewood” was born out Hollywood’s reconfiguration in the mid-1990s, which saw an expansion of studios in the creation of “specialty divisions,” such as Fox Searchlight to 20th Century Fox or Warner Independent Pictures to Warner Brothers. As the idea of “Indiewood” is essentially a negotiation between artistic and economic ideals of both Hollywood film and independent film, it seemed only reasonable for gay content – which proved financially viable within both the “new independent cinema,” as well as within many late 1990s Hollywood comedies¹² – to be included within this industry. As such, “Gay Indiewood” differs from previous trends in gay cinema (most notably New Queer Cinema but to a lesser degree the gay independent film that followed) in that it is not “presented with a particular set of interests or political interventions” but as simply part of Hollywood’s economic redevelopment.

Since 2001, “Indiewood”-released gay films surpassed their independent counterparts in terms of box office grosses. Of the seventeen gay-themed releases that grossed \$1,000,000 from 2001-2008, five were released independently, one was released by a studio, and eleven were released by their subsidiary distribution companies¹³. From 1991-2000, forty-five gay films grossed over \$1 million. This is a significant issue in itself, as gay films in general had less than half the chance of making \$1,000,000 in the 2000s as they had in 1990s. In the 1990s, twenty-seven of them were released

independently, sixteen were released by studios, and two from “Indiewood.”¹⁴ While it could be suggested this move toward the mainstream represents a progression of acceptability regarding gay content, one must consider that the actual amount of studio or studio subsidiary gay releases dropped from sixteen to twelve in the first decade of the millennium. Though a considerably larger amount of gay films were released independently overall from 2001-2007 (whether through DVD release or in a few theatres), their financial capabilities within theatrical distribution was obviously greatly reduced by the presence of “Gay Indiewood.” Essentially, the reconfiguration of Hollywood to include “Indiewood” has forged a more visible gay mainstream only by fragmenting the market at the expense of independent film.

To fully understand the implications of this trend, it is important to move away from a focus on more general trends surrounding “Gay Indiewood”’s conception and analyze its specifics as an industry. One entity all films of “Gay Indiewood” share is access to studio marketing money. This includes both prints and advertising. Studio print money means the film can potentially afford a much wider release than it could with an independent distributor. Studio advertising money suggests both the possibility of large campaigns, as well as the fact that, even if the film was produced and directed with progressive representation in mind, the advertising (which often costs more than the film itself) is in corporate hands.

In this lies “Gay Indiewood”’s most clear and direct tie to “the new homonormativity.” Just as Bruce Bawer suggested that gay America’s hope for equality resides in a “trickling down of gay positive sentiments from elite corporate boardrooms,” this trend in the film industry is placing the fate of theatrically-released gay images with

the studios that have historically misrepresented them (Bawer, 1996: 112). As has been discussed in this study, the “positive sentiments” that strategy has articulated are largely white, gay and male. While this is not necessarily true of all “Gay Indiewood” films, which vary in terms of their content and, likely, in what the filmmakers aspire to represent and communicate, all the marketing all has the same intention. It is there to make as much money for the company as possible. Through examining advertising strategies and texts, it becomes possible to further ideas about “Gay Indiewood” and its relationship to the hegemonic arrangement. As Katharine Sender notes:

Even a cursory look at contemporary marketing activity reveals that the separation of business endeavors from their political effects is spurious... The cumulative impact of advertising on the economy in terms of generating ad revenues and stimulating consumption, the circulation of an ethos of consumption as part of the American Dream, and the affirmation of ideologies about gender, class, and race in advertising illustrate some of the profound effects marketing has on the political life of a citizenry (Sender, 2004: 4).

Focus Features allegedly spent \$5 million marketing *Brokeback Mountain*, a figure that is suspiciously low (Rentrak). In 2007, the average marketing cost of a “specialty release” was \$25.7 million (McClintock 5). Individual marketing costs of films are not released publicly, and therefore are obviously challenging to find, but *Brokeback’s* supposed cost is challenging considering the fact it had a platform release¹⁵ aimed at benefiting from awards attention. *Brokeback* opened initially on December 9,

2005 on 5 screens, the film slowly expanded, at its widest (2,089 screens) the week of the Academy Awards (Rentrak). Academy Awards campaigns, of which *Brokeback* aggressively mounted, are likely to add an additional \$15-20 million to a film's cost (McClintock, 2008: 32).

Eight of the 10 "Gay Indiewood" releases followed a similar release trajectory. Only *Kissing Jessica Stein* and *A Home At The End of the World*¹⁶ were released prior to September, which is what is considered the beginning of awards season. *Kissing Jessica Stein* is the only primarily comic film to come from the trend, a genre typically underappreciated by awards. The independently-produced film was purchased by distributor Fox Searchlight after it had played at a few major film festivals¹⁷, and was released during the spring of 2001. The film was marketed as an urban romantic comedy, with a poster featuring just one of the lead actresses and the slogan: "A funny smart, fresh look at sex and the single girl"¹⁸. However, this obviously deceptive campaign matches the content: *Stein* portrays a straight woman who "chooses" lesbianism after feeling disillusioned by men. After a relationship with a woman, the protagonist realizes that she's not sexually attracted to women, and that she cannot "choose" this lifestyle. This sets *Stein* apart from the other films in that it is about a heterosexual's ill-fated consideration of homosexuality, not homosexuality itself. The film is not necessarily offensive to gay people (it even won the GLAAD award for best gay-themed film of 2001), but one could make the argument that it doesn't belong in the categorization I'm suggesting.

While I have reiterated that it is economics, not content, that organizes "Gay Indiewood," it is notable that all of the non-*Stein* films display serious themes that either

have a notable social and/or historical commentary. As well, *Stein*'s release date and non-focus on awards possibilities does contrast it from the rest of the films' economics. Even *Home*, which stars Colin Farrell in a film about a "love triangle" between three people raising a child (a gay man, a straight man, and a straight woman), seemed originally poised as an awards contender. Based on an award-winning book by *The Hours*' author Michael Cunningham, the film's late August release date was intended as a beginning of a slow release into the fall. However, the film failed to catch on, and despite some minor awards campaigning, it did not receive any nominations and grossed only \$1 million, less than a sixth of its budget (Rentrak). The marketing attempted to highlight Farrell, both a known star and the film's "straight" character¹⁹ (despite actually having less screen time than lesser known co-stars Dallas Roberts and Robin Wright Penn), it is the lowest grossing "Gay Indiewood" film. Oddly enough, it is also the only one to have been featured prominently at gay film festivals, a marketing tactic aggressively used by the gay independent films of the 1990s but all but abandoned by "Gay Indiewood," suggestively due to the "pigeonholing effect" it might have.

The remaining eight films all focused on awards-season release strategies that lead up to the Academy Awards. An article in the *Journal of Cultural Economics* suggested that, in 1994, winning a best picture Oscar was worth \$100 million in box office and "video" revenues and sales to television and foreign markets (Casavant, 1994: 221). In his extensive study, *All About Oscar: The History and Politics of the Academy Awards*, Emanuel Levy goes as far as saying that "the goal of every studio in Hollywood is to win Best Picture, since the top prize carries with it both cash and prestige" (Levy, 2003: 298). As a result, studios spend millions of dollars "advocating" their films to

Academy voters. “Gay Indiewood”’s relationship with this process is a meaningful one. From the years 2002-2005, “Gay Indiewood” garnered a total of 26 nominations and 6 wins, 3 of which were for lead acting. The existence of the awards and the potential they give for profit is likely a leading cause of “Gay Indiewood”’s existence.

1999’s *Boys Don’t Cry* set the precedent that helped usher in “Gay Indiewood.” Made for just \$2 million, produced and directed by lesbians, and featuring unabashed content compared to Hollywood fare, the film went on to receive 3 major Academy Award nominations, with Hilary Swank winning the Best Actress statuette²⁰. It also went on to gross \$11.5 million (Rentrak). This was made possible by an aggressive marketing campaign by Fox Searchlight that focused on Swank’s “remarkable transformation” in playing transgendered Brandon Teena, and proved that the Academy’s stamp of approval trumped material mainstream audiences might otherwise ignore.

Jonathan Bignell discusses the “mythic meaning” of advertising by noting that ads “endow products with a certain social significance so that they can function in our real social world as indexical signs” that connote “the buyer’s good taste, trendiness, or some other ideologically valued quality” (Bignell, 2002: 36). If a film is nominated or wins an Academy Award, marketers embark on massive campaigns, placing bold declarations on a film’s advertisements. Thus, the Academy Awards bring a significant marketability to “Gay Indiewood” that returns to the idea of a “taste hierarchy.” Receiving attention from awards gives a film cultural capital and suggests that it is culturally important. This leads to economic capital. All of the seven “Gay Indiewood” films²¹ that received major nominations made the majority of their grosses during “Academy Award season.” *Brokeback Mountain*, the highest grossing example at \$83 million, was also the most

awarded (with three wins). The next three highest grossing (*The Hours*, *Monster*, and *Capote*), each received a win in a lead acting category.

Perhaps coinciding more with the purpose of this study is not the idea that the Academy Awards helped to supplant “Gay Indiewood” into the mainstream but how “Gay Indiewood” marketed its content to the Academy Awards. The most watched annual television event worldwide, the awards represent the zenith of mainstream exposure (Levy, 2003: 15). Bignell notes that ads “give meanings to products, to buyers of products and to readers of ads, and to the social world in which we and the products exist” (Bignell, 2002: 36). How is this negotiated when the product is a film and the readers of the ads are not consumers but Academy voters who are to give a prize worth both millions of dollars and a prestigious place within the Hollywood pantheon? What meaning do the ads give to the films and the social world in which they, and the gay people they represent, exist?

For Your Consideration: Brokeback Mountain and the “Gay Oscars”

There is no greater media spectacle than the Academy Awards. Film historian Anthony Holden explains that thanks to the awards, the American film industry “promotes its wares each year to more than a billion people worldwide – a larger audience than any global sporting event, any royal wedding – in a star-studded marathon television advertisement, good for at least three months of cunning advance build-up” (Holden, 1993: 31). Even Italian neo-realist director Federico Fellini once said, “in the mythology of the cinema, the Oscar is the supreme prize” (qtd. in Levy, 2003: 15). Since

the mythology of Hollywood film is really just a cultural representation of the mythology of American society, attention from Oscar could be seen as suggestive of a subject's place in the hegemonic arrangement.

This obviously varies from winner to winner. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King's* win for Best Picture in 2004 likely harbours no social commentary (though the wizards and hobbits of America might disagree), and just because an actress wins for playing a prostitute, as they have on many occasions, societal acceptability of that occupation is not necessarily suggested.²² However, for many subordinate groups, the Oscars have been quite telling. When African-American actress Hattie McDaniel won in 1939 for her supporting role in *Gone With The Wind*, Holden notes that she was “not merely the first black person to win an Oscar, but the first to attend an Academy [Awards] banquet as a guest rather than a waitress” (Holden, 1993: 145). In context, one must consider that *Wind* producer David Selznick had faced charges of racism from the American left, typified by the verdict of the American Labor Party, that the film “constituted an insult to President Lincoln and the Negro people” (Holden, 1993: 145). As chances for McDaniel's win grew, African-American critics “swallowed their complaints in favour of hymns to the artistry of the film's black performers, above all McDaniel” (Holden, 1993: 145). When the Oscar was handed to McDaniel, the *Wind* controversy became non-existent. There was “scarcely a dry eye in the house” as McDaniel concluded her speech: “I sincerely hope that I shall always be a credit to my race, and to the motion picture industry” (qtd. in Holden, 1993: 145). The Academy was “widely hailed for its display of liberalism,” and a “shift in American ideology” took place (Holden, 1993: 145).

While it could be argued that McDaniel's win represented a move toward a milestone in the cultural component of the counter-hegemony that culminated in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the fact that no black woman (and only three black men²³) won an Oscar in the 50 years that followed is just as telling as to that movement's progression into the hegemonic arrangement. Another example is found in the 385 nominees for Best Director, where only three have been women²⁴ and only eight have been non-white. Of them, no women have ever won, and Ang Lee, director of *Brokeback Mountain*, is the only one, of the eighty "Best Directors," who has not been white (Bloom, 2008: 2). These trends are not exclusive to the Oscars, and represent wide-reaching trends in positions of power. As Bignell notes: "The myths which are generated in culture can only acquire force because they relate to a certain context" (Bignell, 2002: 22). For gays, 2005 was a year that the myth of the Oscar made its mark.

2005 was "Gay Indiewood"'s pinnacle year. With the release of *Brokeback*, *Capote* and *Transamerica*, all within two months of each other and all the focus of much "Oscar buzz," the press deemed the awards ceremony "the gay Oscars." An article in the Hollywood trade paper *Variety*'s annual Oscars preview issue heralded that there was a "lavender reel mob," noting that "it's been some time since the love that dared not speak its name became the love that never shuts up" (Mermelstein, 2005: 8). The article, featured amid scores of Oscar campaign advertisements in a magazine considered one of the more influential parts of the season's marketing, was quick to downplay the gay elements of the films. An interview with *Transamerica*'s director Duncan Tucker noted how the "film plays broadly" and "is not an issue movie" (qtd. in Mermelstein, 2005: 8). *Capote*'s Bennett Miller suggests that "like Capote himself," he "prefers not to classify"

(qtd. in Mermelstein, 2005: 8). Yet judging from this article, people *did* want to classify, and with good reason, as these films represented a milestone for gays at the Academy Awards. Never had a gay-themed film been the front-runner to win Best Picture (as *Brokeback Mountain* was), and three actors were competing to become the first to win Oscars for gay characters who actually survived to the end of the film²⁵. However, for the studios, it truthfully was a matter of “business, not politics”: they wanted to make money.

As Sender’s study argues, “the division of business from politics disavows the extent to which all economic activity has political effects” (Sender, 2004: 3). As has been discussed, “Gay Indiewood” is no different. As an economic trend, it has shown many correlations to the gay conservative movement. Both display neo-liberalist tendencies in their model of privatization and pro-corporate rhetoric. While this comparison may not necessarily be indicative of the films or filmmakers themselves purposely exposing such political ideologies, I believe it is suggestive of greater trends within American society. The “gay Oscars” offer an interesting example of this suggestion because, as noted, the Academy Awards represent one of the largest media events in American culture. They choose “winners” that, beyond occasionally²⁶ rewarding one of the best achievements in that year’s filmmaking, represent acceptance by a powerful membership of voters²⁷ that in many ways could serve as a sample of dominant belief systems.

As previously discussed, for the studios, attention from Oscar predominantly means financial gain. The most notable method of a studio trying to ensure this gain is advertising campaigns, which “have become extremely elaborate over the years, reaching

their culmination in the 1990s” (Levy, 2003: 328). These ads, distinguished by the inclusion of the words “For Your Consideration” across the top, are a constant presence through film industry trade magazines from October through January. This process certainly suggests that the Oscars, like movies themselves, do not exist in a social or political vacuum. Holden notes in his study *Behind The Oscar*, “they are not immune to political pressures operating both within and outside the movie industry” (Holden, 1993: 271).

With good reason, the campaign for *Capote* centered on Phillip Seymour Hoffman’s performance, who was obviously their best chance at a major award²⁸. Ads essentially highlight quotes from critics celebrating Hoffman and, true to the essence of the film, do not directly deal with notions of Capote’s sexuality. For this reason, any analysis would be a moot point. *Transamerica*, on the other hand, is largely about a transgendered woman, Bree (Felicity Huffman), and her quest for a sex change operation. Since Felicity Hoffman’s performance was seen as the film’s only nomination possibility, the marketing campaign was minimal and focused exclusively on Huffman. Of the three different ads I encountered²⁹, all of them featured a picture of Huffman and the same quote, from *Maxim* film critic Pete Hammond: “Felicity Huffman is simply remarkable, so convincing, fiercely funny and deeply powerful in her performance.” While *Capote* and *Transamerica*’s campaigns could hide the gay behind their actors, *Brokeback Mountain* was in a different situation. It was going for the big prize, and when you’re selling a film about unrequited love between two men, it is challenging to downplay the gay elements. Perhaps for this reason, the external narrative of *Brokeback Mountain* –

the one that ends with its infamous Academy Award loss to Paul Haggis's *Crash* – is more telling than what actually happened in the diegesis.

Scott Herring, author of *Queering the Underworld: Slumming, Literature, and the Undoing of Lesbian and Gay History*, asked when introducing a dossier on the film: “Why single out Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain* for critique?” (93). He basically answers the question by explaining how, in a year full of other gay films, *Brokeback* was “everywhere” (93). It won countless awards and was featured repeatedly in the mainstream media, thus allowing people to champion the film for “promoting a certain strain of late modern U.S. sexual identity consumed by high-, middle-, and lowbrows alike” (Herring 93). Ellen Huang, a former movie executive who now runs The Queer Lounge, an organization promoting queer pictures with crossover potential, was quoted in *Moviemaker Magazine*:

Public interest in *Brokeback* has come in stages. At first it was driven by the curiosity to see two hot, hunky actors in these roles. Then there was a big push for the movie in the gay community, where I think people are seeing it multiple times. Not like *Philadelphia*, where gay people said, “It’s not really for us, it’s for the mainstream.” But then the Oscar nominations came and it’s been fueling interest from broader audiences. (22).

An article in *Rolling Stone* noted November 6th as the turning point, when conservative blogger Matt Drudge posted the headline on his website: “Hollywood Rocked: Gay Cowboy Movie Becomes An Oscar Frontrunner!” (qtd. in Boehlert 83).

Drudge warned that “despite nudity and explicit sex scenes,” the film was positioned to sweep the Oscars (qtd. in Boehlert 83). Queer academic and film critic B. Ruby Rich found that the process leading up to Oscar night saw “the anxiety that had characterized the gay community’s response prior to the film now shifted to the mainstream” (44). She explains:

Instead of fretting over whether the film will be heterosexualized, though, the mainstream press focused attention on how the film would do: would it make any money? Would anyone who wasn’t gay pay to see it? Would anyone outside major cities pay to see it? Would it break box-office records? In other words, the anxiety had moved from whether the film was gay enough to whether it was too gay. (44).

Responding in *Rolling Stone* to these fears, Focus Features head and *Brokeback* producer James Schmaus said that he

decided to ignore it. We were always vulnerable to others setting the agenda. But we wanted people to see the film and then talk about it. The film itself did most of the work (qtd. in Boehlert 83).

Schmaus’ statement falls in line with “business, not politics,” with his designation of any political statement placed on the film’s content. However, just as that article was going to print, Focus began its aggressive Oscar campaign³⁰. Of the ones I have included

in this study, three all feature the gay male characters of the film in their repressed heterosexual couplings: Jake Gyllenhaal and Anne Hathaway's characters gazing into each other's eyes; Heath Ledger and Michelle Williams in a sensual embrace; Gyllenhaal and Hathaway, this time smiling over the birth of their child. The text that accompanies the ads mostly features congratulatory adjectives, with the only suggestion being the use of *Entertainment Weekly's* quote "revolutionary" in bold capital letters. The ads that do not feature the couplings remain perplexing, with another showing Ledger through a rear view mirror in an image that is suggestive of looking through a gun, while one posits Ledger underneath a Fourth of July fireworks display, gazing in the direction of his wife and children.

Bignell notes that when we consider advertising, film, or other media texts, "it will become clear that the linguistic, visual, and other kinds of signs are used not simply to denote something, but also to trigger a range of connotations attached to the sign" (Bignell, 2002: 16). He utilizes the work of French lecturer and critic Roland Barthes to exemplify this phenomenon of making "myth" (Bignell, 2002: 16). In the same sense that I have referred to "mythologies" in this chapter, Bignell, through Barthes, does not mean the usual sense of traditional stories, but ways texts send meanings to the reader or viewer. As Bignell explains:

Myth takes hold of an existing sign, and makes it function as a signifier on another level. The sign "Rolls-Royce" becomes the signifier attached to the signified "luxury," for example. It is as if myth were a special form of language, which takes up existing signs and makes a new sign system out of them... Myth

is not an innocent language, but one that picks up existing signs and their connotations, and orders them purposefully to play a particular social role (Bignell, 2002: 17).

Without a hint of homoeroticism, the ads for *Brokeback Mountain* send a variety of meanings to the reader. The three ads featuring the heterosexual couplings, particularly the one with Gyllenhaal and Hathaway holding their newborn child, connote a dishonest portrayal of the film's content and themes, encapsulating all things heteronormative.

For Barthes, the function of myth is to naturalize ideas. In *Mythologies*, a prominent example he uses is imagining himself as a patron at a barber's, looking at the cover of French magazine *Paris Match*. The cover he references is a photograph of a black soldier in uniform, saluting the French flag. The picture connotes that

France is a great empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors (Barthes, 1973: 116).

Oddly enough, the image of Ledger on the Fourth of July shares similarities to the image Bignell uses to introduce Barthes. In the context of the film, it could be read that Ledger, a gay man, is faithfully serving the ideologies of his country by remaining in his heterosexual life. Out of context, and with the words "revolutionary" hanging atop the image, the text connotes a different meaning. Bignell notes how "reading the messages

in myth” involves “identifying the signs which it uses, and showing how they are built by means of codes into a structure which communicates particular messages and not others” (Bignell, 2002: 21). As an advertisement selling a film to Academy voters with tastes generally viewed as traditional and conservative, the ad with Ledger under the fireworks brings to mind ideas of patriotism, and likely, patriarchy, with Ledger’s dominant placement in the ad as he watches over his much smaller wife and children.

The ads are undeniably homophobic in their silence, and thus expose an inability for the film’s producers to truly “allow the film to do most of the work itself.” When *Brokeback* was placed in the same position of economic possibility (ie. Academy Award nominations), its content was compromised for financial gain. However, as the story goes, *Brokeback Mountain* lost Best Picture to *Crash*. Hollywood, “brave” as it was for releasing *Brokeback*, refused to award the film its highest honour.

A Myth of Tolerance

Myth, for Barthes, is about communicating social realities by, as Bignell interprets, “taking these realities outside the arena of political debate” (Bignell, 2002: 25). When discussing the image of the “soldier-Negro,” Barthes explains how myth

does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and external justification, it gives them the clarity which is not that of a statement but of fact (Barthes, 1973: 143).

Thus, myth serves the interest of the dominant ideology. In this sense, *Brokeback Mountain* itself is a myth. Countless articles suggested that its popularity and exposure marked a significant triumph for the gay community, placing them within a mainstream arena and patting Hollywood on the back for “allowing” this. This presents a “reality” of tolerance within dominant society.

Sarah Schulman is a lesbian writer, playwright and activist who writes about her experiences producing lesbian works of theatre in the dominant-interest fueled New York theatre scene. Her poignant merger of personal experience³¹ and ideological discourse in her book, *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS, and the Marketing of Gay America*, translates appropriately in this context, as she represents an author whose themes (predominantly non-white and lesbian) would be excluded from “Gay Indiewood.” She notes that “the breath of ideas permitted into the popular discourse is extremely narrow,” even though these restrictions “are accompanied by a rhetoric of ‘diversity’” (Schulman, 1998: 102). This contradictory idea has “come to be known as ‘tolerance’ and is now an intrinsic component of how dominant-culture people feel about themselves, how they rationalize their privileges and justify their own false sense of objectivity” (Schulman, 1998: 102).

Brokeback Mountain, in many ways, disclosed the attributes of this “tolerance.” A “tolerance,” as Schulman explains, defined by “the diminishment of the minority and the heroization of the majority” that “simply acknowledges that the minority exists and that claims that acknowledgment as an act of generosity” (Schulman, 1998: 102). In some circles, Hollywood was applauded for allowing *Brokeback* to exist. Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger were praised in countless reviews and even publicly by “gay icon” Madonna as “brave” for playing gay (Lacey, 2006: 9). Mainstream press such

as *USA Today* said the film “is erasing Hollywood’s homosexual stereotypes and raising consciousness of gay rights,” while Frank Rich of *The New York Times* wrote an opinion piece that announced that *Brokeback* “proves that American culture is far more liberal than we might believe” (Bowles, 2006: 5; Rich, 2006: 6). Rich went so far as to suggest that “there is no controversy, no *Fox News* tar and feathering, no roar from the religious right” (Rich, 2006: 6).

Critics from the Christian right included The U.S. Catholic Bishop’s Office for Film and Broadcasting, which went so far as to reverse their “Catholic News Service Rating” from a “L” standing for “appropriate for limited adult audiences” to an “O” for “morally offensive” (Lacey, 2006: 9). Television “personalities” such as Bill O’Reilly and Cal Thomas of *Fox News* “tarred” the film as “pro-homosexual propaganda,” and David Kupelian, on the right-wing website *Worldnetdaily.com*, said the film represented nothing less “than the rape of the Marlboro man” and an “attack on 3,000 years of Judeo-Christian values” (Lacey, 2006: 9).

This expected and anticipated criticism simply proves Frank Rich didn’t do his research, and perhaps that American culture is exactly as liberal as we thought. The more important underlying problem is how this praise of *Brokeback Mountain* is very much heroizing Hollywood for simply putting out, via “Indiewood,” a film about homosexual love. This praise erodes the decades of gay independent film that came before it, and facilitated it, in the sense that *Brokeback* belongs to a new economic arrangement in Hollywood that is banishing truly independent films to \$100,000 budgets and DVD bargain bins. It also is hypocritical considering the film’s marketing. Through championing *Brokeback* as “revolutionary” and “a landmark,” the marketers are

obviously referencing its gay themes, despite both director Ang Lee and co-writer Larry McMurtry's repeated emphasizing that the film is a "doomed love story" rather than a "gay story" (Lacey, 2006: 9). In its commercial advertising, the film was marketed primarily to women's audiences, focusing on the appeal of its straight stars and producing a poster³² that eerily resembles that of *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997). This is a perhaps subliminal attempt at getting a piece of the \$600 million box office that film drew in, but also speaks to the production of "homonormativity." Though it is possible the comparison is purely coincidental, constructing *Brokeback's* poster in the image of a poster that represents the most popular cinematic love story in contemporary film history normalizes the image of Ledger and Gyllenhaal through this comparison. It also builds on the noted emphasis that the film is a "doomed love story" and not a "gay story."

Schulman aptly describes American society as "deeply conflicted about homosexuality but no longer able to deny its existence" (Schulman, 1998: 107). She suggests that this combination makes gay people "simultaneously an ideal group for niche marketing and for the containment inherent in commodification to straight consumers" (Schulman, 1998: 107). "Indiewood," which formed around the time Schulman wrote those words, took advantage of this scenario. However, as film critic Kenneth Turan noted in a post-Oscars article in *The Los Angeles Times*:

In the privacy of the voting booth, as many political candidates who've led in polls only to lose elections have found out, people are free to act out the unspoken fears and conscious prejudices that they would never breathe to another soul, or,

likely, acknowledge to themselves. And at least this year, that acting out doomed *Brokeback Mountain* (Turan, 2006: 23).

It also seemed to doom “Gay Indiewood” itself. In the over two years since *Brokeback* broke ground, no specialty division has released an explicitly gay-themed film. Which perhaps displays the limitations of the placement of gay content within the infrastructure of dominant cinema. Unlike the Hollywood “gay films” that came before them, which simply incorporated gay characters and themes into Hollywood narratives, the films of “Gay Indiewood” commodified the virtues of gay independent films to tap into a new, “tolerant” hegemonic arrangement. *Brokeback Mountain* pushed this commodification to a level it had never experienced: massive press attention, constant pop cultural references, and the possibility of the “dominant bloc”’s biggest prize. Yet perhaps *Brokeback* had incorporated “Gay Indiewood” too far into the mainstream, obstructing the mechanisms in which subordinate groups can function in the dominant hegemony. Gramsci scholar T.J. Jackson Lears notes that those in power maintain their dominance “through the creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols” and that “they must also seek to win the consent of subordinate groups to the ‘existing social order’” (Lears, 1985: 567). Had *Brokeback Mountain* won Best Picture, or “Gay Indiewood” continued to grow beyond its potentially final example, this would have been a “symbol” that exceeded the existing social order.

Notes

¹ The exceptions are The Weinstein Company (*Transamerica*) and Newmarket Films (*Monster*). I have chosen to include the films released by these companies within my suggestion of “gay Indiewood” for a variety of reasons. First, the films themselves fall in line with the rest of “gay Indiewood” in terms of both

their economic attributes and representational qualities. Second, the companies share more in common with specialty divisions or studios than they do independent distributors. The Weinstein Company for reasons discussed in chapter 1 (The Weinstein brothers obviously have Hollywood-themed aspirations, and the company's film slate reflects this), and Newmarket in that it that among its releases was 2004's *The Passion of the Christ*, a film marketed with the money of a studio as well as one that reaped profits unheard of for any independent film in history. Also of note, *The Hours* was co-released by Paramount and Disney-subsidary Miramax, but was produced independently by Scott Rudin Productions, and therefore can be considered "Indiewood."

² There are a number of examples from films released in the summer of 2008, such as *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (\$185 million), *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* (\$200 million), and *Iron Man* (\$140 million).

³ Bignell's study, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*, also provides an extensive introduction to advertising. Specifically, Bignell details the ideological meanings of ads, suggesting that they "endow products with a certain social significance so that they can function in our real social world as indexical signs connoting the buyer's taste, trendiness, or some other ideologically valued quality." For further reading, please see Bignell, 2002: 28-54.

⁴ This trend is also exemplified in *A Home at the End of the World*, which takes place in 1980s.

⁵ Hutcheon notes that "in the Academy," irony and nostalgia are seen as the two key components of contemporary culture. Specifically, "in the 1980s, it was irony that captured our attention most; in the 1990s, it appears to be nostalgia that is holding sway." See Hutcheon, 1998: 194.

⁶ While *Capote*, *Kinsey* and *Monster* arguably present fact-based stories about their characters, *The Hours* is (partially) an admittedly semi-fictional account of Virginia Woolf's last years.

⁷ *Brokeback Mountain*, *Capote*, *Far From Heaven*, *The Deep End*, *A Home at the End of the World*

⁸ *The Hours*, *Monster*, *Kissing Jessica Stein*

⁹ *Transamerica* (transgendered), *Kinsey* (bisexual)

¹⁰ Sender imperatively notes - in regard to the magazine advertisements - that "the reasons for the underrepresentation of women of color in ads may be very different than those for the underrepresentation of men of color, since this lack of visibility is the product of multiple factors which include market size, perceived affluence, and gay and lesbian media readership figures. Nevertheless, the additional threat to the image of the respectable gay consumer that the stereotype of the hypersexual African American or Latina/o poses may in part explain the relative scarcity of people of color in national advertising to gay consumers" (Duggan, 2004: 220-21).

¹¹ Oddly enough, Hollywood's most prevalent use of gay male characters in the 1990s was in comedies (*In & Out*; *My Best Friend's Wedding*; *The Birdcage*), and in these cases, it seemed the most accessible idea was to make the characters excessively effeminate, and use this contrast to the straight characters in the films to make for comedic moments.

¹² 1996's *The Birdcage* remains the highest-grossing gay-themed film in America with \$124 million, while *In & Out* (\$67 million) and *To Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar* (\$36 million), were also considered hits in relation to their budgets and expectations.

¹³ See Appendix A.

¹⁴ See Appendix B.

¹⁵ A platform release refers to beginning on a small (usually 1-20) amount of screens and slowly expanding over weeks or even months to a wide release (usually over 1,500 screens).

¹⁶ *Stein* was released in February and *Home* was released in August.

¹⁷ Including the Chicago International Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival and the Los Angeles International Film Festival.

¹⁸ See Appendix C.

¹⁹ In the book, Farrell's character was bisexual, and though he does share a kiss with the gay male character in the film, he decides in the end to be with the woman.

²⁰ The other two nominations were for best supporting actress Chloe Sevigny and its original screenplay by Kimberly Peirce.

²¹ The only film that significantly campaigned and did not receive an Academy Award nomination was *The Deep End*, though it did get a Golden Globe nomination for best actress Tilda Swinton.

²² Examples include Mira Sorvino for *Mighty Aphrodite*, Kim Basinger for *L.A. Confidential*, Jane Fonda for *Klute*, and Elizabeth Taylor for *Butterfield 8*.

²³ Sidney Poitier for *Lilies of the Field*, Louis Gossett Jr for *An Officer and a Gentleman*, and Denzel Washington for *Glory*.

²⁴ Lina Wertmüller for 1976's *Seven Beauties*, Jane Campion for 1993's *The Piano* and Sofia Coppola for 2003's *Lost in Translation*.

²⁵ The three previous winners were William Hurt for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Tom Hanks for *Philadelphia*, and Hilary Swank for *Boys Don't Cry*, all played characters who died in the film. A fourth nominee from 2005, Jake Gyllenhaal in *Brokeback*, suffered the same fate.

²⁶ Perhaps "rarely" is a better adjective. In 20 years I have avidly watched films, I've personally respected (not agreed, but respected) the Academy Award's choices for best picture 5 times: 1991's *The Silence of the Lambs*, 1993's *Schindler's List*, 1999's *American Beauty*, 2003's *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, and 2007's *No Country For Old Men*. On just as many occasions I've been personally revolted (not just in disagreement, but revolted) by the same category's choices: 1990's *Dances With Wolves*, 1995's *Braveheart*, 2000's *Gladiator*, 2001's *A Beautiful Mind*, and, most of all, 2005's *Crash*.

²⁷ The voting membership of the Academy Awards is made up of 5,829 people, including 1,243 actors, 454 producers, 440 executives, and 369 public relations workers.

²⁸ See Appendix D for example.

²⁹ See Appendix E for example.

³⁰ See Appendices F to J.

³¹ The personal aspect of Schulman's book details her experiences as a lesbian playwright and specifically, how the musical *Rent* directly plagiarized her work but the powers of *Rent*'s owners disallowed her to successfully pursue legal action.

³² See Appendix K.

**CONCLUSION
POST-COITUS:
WHAT'S BEYOND THE *MOUNTAIN*?**

The ideas of hegemony and neoliberalism and their relationship to one another have wide reaching ramifications across many realms. Pierre Bourdieu suggests that neoliberalism has established hegemonic control through “sustained intervention” and as “a whole labour of symbolic inculcation... [that suggests] presuppositions of... maximum growth, competitiveness and productivity” (Bourdieu, 1998: 29-30). Neoliberalism’s dominance in American society has been evident since the 1970s, and the first chapter of this study exposed this in regard to the American film industry, where it has led to privatization and consolidation into a few corporate elites (though these trends predate neoliberalism in some regards). However, the overall intent of this study was to work with the concepts of “hegemony” and “neoliberalism” to illustrate how this situation has recently manifested itself in mainstream gay cinema. To borrow from Stuart Hall, this thesis has worked to “illuminate concrete historical cases or political questions; or thinking large concepts [through] in their application to concrete and specific situations” (Hall, 1985: 6).

In the introduction to this study, I discussed how panels at the Sundance Film Festival proved an inspiration for this topic. One in particular, featuring producer Christine Vachon and director Tom Kalin, suggested how it was no longer possible to make a successful theatrically-released gay independent film. This claim led me to investigate the history of independent film and the rise of studio-financed “Indiewood,” and how these factors led to a new arrangement in gay film output. “Gay Indiewood”

became a leading source of theatrically-released gay films in the first half of this decade, which brought forth a privileged branding of gay images. It also contributed to great changes in the distribution and exhibition practices of the gay independent film industry, which had dominated theatrically released gay films through the 1990s.

Neoliberalism is described by Bourdieu as a “programme for destroying collective structures” so that “market forces” can continue to configure society (Bourdieu, 1998: 29). Lisa Duggan went to great lengths to uncover this in her book, *The Twilight of Equality*, specifically in how neoliberalism’s pro-business “culture of upward (re)distribution” worked to replace “cultures of downward redistribution” found in the progressive-left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Duggan, 2003: 8). This study made use of Duggan’s specific work on a recent movement in gay politics (“the new homonormativity,” as she terms it) in chapter two, to suggest the correlations between different “gay examples” of neoliberalism. Like “Gay Indiewood,” “the new homonormativity” is an arrangement that gives advantage to certain identities and works to destroy its more collective predecessors. This development seems to have derived itself from what Duggan calls “phase five” of the United States’ neoliberalist hegemony, where some organizations within the “civil rights lobby” moved dramatically to the right, narrowing their focus and thus “accommodating rather than opposing the inequalities generated by neoliberalism” (Duggan, 2003: 9).

Bourdieu suggests in regard to neoliberalism:

Against this *doxa*, one has to try and defend oneself, I believe, by analyzing it and trying to understand the mechanisms through which it is produced and imposed.

But that is not enough, although it is important, and there are a certain number of empirical observations that can be brought forward to center it (Bourdieu, 1998: 38).

The third chapter of this study worked to build on previous discussions intended to achieve Bourdieu's initial suggestion by administering a more concrete examination of "Gay Indiewood." The chapter investigated content trends within the films as well as "Gay Indiewood"'s economics and marketing, specifically *Brokeback Mountain* and its Academy Awards campaign. Through this it was clear that while "Gay Indiewood"'s ties to the right are certainly more figurative than "the new homonormativity," its adoption of Hollywood marketing strategies is perhaps just as "accommodating" to the hegemonic arrangement and the inequalities it brings forth. Additionally, a "myth of tolerance," embedded in how people in the hegemonic arrangement rationalize their privileges, was exposed in the claims surrounding *Brokeback*'s "revolutionary" breakthrough. This suggests a core problem with the civil rights/equality politics that are a large part of the relationship between gays and hegemony.

However, much of the analysis offered begs further consideration given the limitations of a study of this scope. For example, areas I only touched on, such as the translation of Bourdieu's "taste culture" and Rubin's "charmed circle" into analyses of "Gay Indiewood," could easily be extended to exclusive studies that allow for more detailed qualitative analysis of the films' content. The reception of *Brokeback Mountain* points to the possibilities of an audience research study of "Gay Indiewood." As Douglas

Kellner notes, “audience research can reveal how people are actually using cultural texts and what sort of effects they are having on everyday life” (Kellner, 2002: 17).

B. Ruby Rich explained in an article for *Film Quarterly* entitled “Brokering Brokeback” that while the film’s “cycle of mainstream attention ended after analysis of the Oscar results, the LGBT community’s connection with the film continued” (Rich, 2007: 47). Personally, I doubt that the “L” and the “T” of that acronym felt especially connected to the film, but Rich’s assertion remains important, and perhaps speaks to the limitations of the primarily political economic approach of this study.

The week after the Academy Awards, a group of gay bloggers, who had been quite vocal in their disapproval of the advertising campaign discussed in this study¹, raised \$24,000 for a full page ad of their own². Running in *Variety* on March 10, 2006, the ad exclaimed:

Thank you for transforming countless lives through the most honored film of the year, *Brokeback Mountain*. We agree with everyone who named *Brokeback Mountain* best picture. Donated by the members and friends of the Ultimate Brokeback Forum, thousands of admirers from around the world, drawn together by the power of your film.

Rich called the act “unprecedented in the trade journal’s history and attested to the powerful loyalties the film had inspired by bringing its story out of into the open of mainstream release” (Rich, 2007: 48).

Film festivals aside, “Gay Indiewood” became the main source of U.S. theatrical viewing of gay themes in the first half of this decade. Even with all the noted criticisms

of its deceptive marketing and theoretical placement within an exclusive hegemonic arrangement, *Brokeback Mountain* did represent something new, as the “thousands of admirers” who bought that ad can verify. It is just unfortunate that recent examples of these films have dominated theatres at the expense of somewhat more inclusive independent works, and that the film’s content was downplayed through publicity in order to make it more marketable to an uncertain society. There is nothing necessarily offensive about the film’s narrative or style, or with the idea of an accessible, well-made gay film that was beloved by a large amount of gay men. Yet if *Brokeback* was a financial success and garnered so many fans, why did it also represent the end of “Gay Indiewood?”

Raymond Williams suggests that hegemony “continually has to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified” (Williams, 1977: 112). As the first chapter to this study detailed, this has been clearly exemplified in the American film industry. Hollywood’s hegemonic control has adapted and evolved mercilessly over the past century to maintain itself. “Indiewood” is a great example of this. Just as I finished drafting the three main chapters of this study, it became clear that changes suggested at the end of the third chapter were currently happening on a grander scale than I had suspected. During the 2008 Cannes Film Festival, where I was mainly covering acquisitions of independent films, an extreme lack of business activity from studio subsidiaries led to a barrage of questioning regarding “Indiewood”’s future. In an article in a special Cannes edition of *Variety*, Dade Hayes and Dave McNary asked: “Is the love affair between the major studios and their niche divisions officially over?” (Hayes, 2008: 6).

This question came in reference to Warner Brothers' closure of both of the specialty divisions it owned, Warner Independent Pictures and Picturehouse. Hayes and McNary wondered if the move was indicative of similar events in the future, as "recent times have seen far pricier specialty titles vie for Oscars and box office while costing a comparative fortune to make and market" (Hayes, 2008: 53). A few weeks after Cannes, Mark Gill, former President of Miramax, gave a speech at the Los Angeles Film Festival entitled, "Yes, The Sky Really Is Falling." Gill gave *indieWIRE*, the online publication I work for, the complete prepared transcript and allowed us to publish it. The story was picked up by *The New York Times* and *Entertainment Weekly* and caused a considerable stir among industry workers. His remarks often mirrored a lot of the problems this study discussed regarding gay independent film and how new developments in the film industry had made them increasingly prone to limited financial success within theatrical distribution. However, Gill was talking about independent film as a whole:

Here's how bad the odds are: of the 5000 films submitted to Sundance each year-- generally with budgets under \$10 million--maybe 100 of them got a US theatrical release three years ago. And it used to be that 20 of those would make money. Now maybe five do. That's one-tenth of one percent. Put another way, if you decide to make a movie budgeted under \$10 million on your own tomorrow, you have a 99.9% chance of failure. (Gill, 2008).

This new crisis in the independent film world demonstrates that "Gay Indiewood"'s post-*Brokeback* bust was perhaps more a matter of business than politics.

With higher box office returns becoming more and more necessary to remain competitive in Hollywood, just as gay themes were among the last to be “Indiewood” integrated, it seems that they were also among the first to go as the economy of the U.S. film industry became more aggressive and more concentrated.

So where does this situation leave gay cinema? Moreover, as an industry journalist whose portfolio dominantly features work on gay film, where does it leave me? By the time I began researching in early 2008, “Gay IndieWood” had been essentially non-existent for over two years³, and in terms of the success of theatrically-released gay films, nothing had replaced it. An article in *The Hollywood Reporter* on June 16, 2008 announced that while “gay pride abounds, indie gay films tank” and that gay movies were “doing worse than ever at box office and with critics” (Goldstein, 2008: 1). Reporter Gregg Goldstein noted how while gay-oriented film distributor Regent Releasing’s 12 films in theatres grossed just \$335,000 combined, “Regent/Here! CEO Paul Colichman says the channel's \$7-per-month fee, DVD revenue and low marketing costs make theatrical a worthwhile loss leader” (Goldstein, 2008: 1).

At the keynote address of an international workshop at the 2007 edition of Montreal’s Image+Nation International LGBT Film Festival, B. Ruby Rich discussed these developments, wondering if

we are really still talking about films? After all, aren’t we also talking about YouTube, MySpace, podcasts and Second Life? How are we morphing into the future? Do people still say ‘meet me at the movies’ or do they say ‘will you be my avatar’? (Rich, 2007).

While Rich remarked on the representational possibilities of these technological developments, which are certainly valid, it remains that people do in fact still say “meet me at the movies.” The 2007 North American box-office brought in \$9.664 billion, an all-time record. My calculations suggest only a few million of that came from gay-themed films (unless you go out on a ill-fated limb and count *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry*, in which you could add on another poorly spent \$120 million), but I have an inkling that a little more than a few million dollars of gay America’s reported \$641 billion annual spending went to going to the movies (Rentrak; Kaplan, 2006: 7).

Duggan argues that the “triumph of neoliberalism” may not be “an irreversible fate” (Duggan, 2003: 14). She notes this is only “if we are prepared to seize the moment of its faltering, to promote and ensure its downfall” (Duggan, 2003: 14). With regard to the film industry, is this even possible? History has certainly suggested a nearly indestructible resilience in its stronghold, and perhaps as technological advances open up new possibilities for distributing on a scale that challenges Hollywood, its time to simply spend our money there. T.J. Jackson Lears points out that for Gramsci, “the concept of hegemony” has “little meaning unless paired with the notion of domination” (Lears, 1986: 6). “Consent” and “force” nearly always “co-exist, though one or the other predominates” (Lears, 1986: 6). In the case of hegemony and cinema (and media altogether), there exists an oligarchy of large corporations that dominate the America mediascape. Though in this situation it is consent, not force, that maintains the hegemony. No one can be forced to go to the movies or buy a DVD. However, as this thesis has suggested, this content is achieved through the manipulation and control of

choice. It is up to those that this arrangement neglects to “seize the moment,” much like the American independent cinema did in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and find new and effective counter-hegemonic strategies that challenge dominant methods of media-making.

Notes

¹ See The Ultimate Brokeback Forum online at <http://www.davecullen.com/forum>

² See Appendix L.

³ There is only one quite questionable example of a post-*Brokeback* entry into that heading in Richard Eyre's 2006 film, *Notes on a Scandal*, which details the implicitly sexual obsession of Barbara Covett (Judi Dench) on Sheba Hart (Cate Blanchett).

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APPENDIX A

Gay-Themed Films Grossing \$1,000,000 Domestically 2001-2008¹

Title	Studio	Actual Gross	Adjusted Gross ²	Year
<i>Brokeback Mountain</i>	Focus	\$83,043,761	86,700,200	2005
<i>The Hours</i>	Miramax	41,675,994	47,136,000	2002
<i>Monster</i>	Newmarket	34,469,210	37,855,600	2003
<i>Rent</i>	Sony	29,077,547	30,934,500	2005
<i>Capote</i>	Sony Classics	28,750,530	30,197,800	2005
<i>Far From Heaven</i>	Focus	15,901,849	18,387,800	2002
<i>Kinsey</i>	Fox Search	10,254,979	11,123,500	2004
<i>Transamerica</i>	Weinstein	9,015,303	9,391,800	2005
<i>The Deep End</i>	Fox Search	8,823,109	10,631,400	2001
<i>Mambo Italiano</i>	IDP	6,253,026	7,072,200	2003
<i>Hedwig and the Angry Inch</i>	Fine Line	3,067,312	3,695,900	2001
<i>Camp</i>	IFC	1,629,862	1,843,400	2003
<i>L.I.E.</i>	Lot 47	1,138,836	1,372,200	2001
<i>Sordid Lives</i>	Regent	1,111,273	1,272,300	2001
<i>A Home at the End of the World</i>	Warner Independent	1,029,872	1,131,000	2004
<i>All Over the Guy</i>	LionsGate	1,022,324	1,231,800	2001
<i>My Summer of Love</i>	Focus	1,000,915	1,064,900	2005

¹ Grosses as of June 1, 2008. Domestically refers to United States and Canada grosses.
Source: Rentrak Box Office Tracking.

² Adjusted for 2008 Inflation

APPENDIX B

Gay-Themed Films Grossing \$1,000,000 Domestically 1991-2000³

Title	Studio	Actual Gross	Adjusted Gross ⁴	Year
<i>The Birdcage</i>	MGM	\$124,060,553	\$191,423,700	1996
<i>Philadelphia</i>	TriStar	83,043,761	126,366,300	1993
<i>The Talented Mr. Ripley</i>	Paramount	81,298,265	104,981,600	1999
<i>In & Out</i>	Paramount	63,856,929	94,881,100	1997
<i>The Crying Game</i>	Miramax	62,548,947	103,026,900	1992
<i>To Wong Foo, Thanks or Everything, Julie Newmar</i>	Universal	36,474,193	57,184,800	1995
<i>The Object of My Affection</i>	Fox	29,187,243	42,442,900	1998
<i>Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil</i>	WB	25,105,255	37,302,400	1997
<i>The Next Best Thing</i>	Paramount	14,990,582	18,949,600	2000
<i>Threesome</i>	TriStar	14,815,317	24,172,400	1994
<i>Chasing Amy</i>	Miramax	12,021,272	17,861,700	1997
<i>Boys Don't Cry</i>	Fox Search	11,540,607	14,802,200	1999
<i>The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert</i>	Gramercy	11,220,670	18,307,400	1994
<i>Gods and Monsters</i>	LionsGate	6,451,628	8,664,100	1998
<i>Six Degrees of Separation</i>	MGM	6,405,918	10,460,700	1993
<i>My Own Private Idaho</i>	Fine Line	6,401,336	10,369,900	1991
<i>The Opposite of Sex</i>	Sony	5,881,367	8,552,400	1998
<i>Three of Hearts</i>	New Line	5,495,507	9,053,000	1993
<i>Longtime Companion</i>	Goldwyn	4,609,953	7,432,600	1990
<i>Flawless</i>	MGM	4,488,529	6,025,900	1999
<i>Priest</i>	Miramax	4,165,845	6,531,300	1995
<i>Bound</i>	Gramercy	3,802,260	5,866,800	1996
<i>Paris Is Burning</i>	Miramax	3,779,620	6,122,800	1991
<i>Jeffrey</i>	Orion	3,487,767	5,595,800	1995
<i>Heavenly Creatures</i>	Miramax	3,049,135	4,799,500	1994
<i>Love! Valour! Compassion!</i>	Fine Line	2,977,807	4,424,500	1997
<i>Go Fish</i>	Goldwyn	2,405,285	3,924,400	1994
<i>Two Girls in Love</i>	Fine Line	2,210,408	3,465,500	1995
<i>But I'm a Cheerleader</i>	LionsGate	2,205,627	2,790,800	2000
<i>Wilde</i>	Sony	2,158,775	3,139,200	1998

³ Grosses as of June 1, 2008. Domestically refers to United States and Canada grosses.
Source: Rentrak Box Office Tracking.

⁴ Adjusted for 2008 Inflation

<i>Trick</i>	Fine Line	2,087,228	2,802,100	1999
<i>Strawberry and Chocolate</i>	Miramax	2,080,805	3,262,300	1995
<i>Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss</i>	Trim	2,070,399	3,010,700	1998
<i>Better Than Chocolate</i>	Trim	2,015,406	2,705,700	1999
<i>High Art</i>	October	1,960,216	2,850,500	1998
<i>Happy, Texas</i>	Paramount	1,955,933	2,625,900	1999
<i>Kiss Me Guido</i>	Param Class	1,918,497	2,850,600	1997
<i>I Shot Andy Warhol</i>	Orion	1,875,527	2,893,900	1996
<i>The Broken Hearts Club</i>	Sony	1,746,585	2,210,000	2000
<i>Beautiful Thing</i>	Sony	1,548,120	2,388,700	1996
<i>The Celluloid Closet</i>	Sony Class	1,400,591	2,161,100	1996
<i>Get Real</i>	Paramount	1,152,979	1,547,900	1999
<i>Chuck & Buck</i>	Art	1,055,671	1,335,800	2000
<i>Velvet Goldmine</i>	Miramax	1,053,788	1,532,400	1998
<i>French Twist</i>	Miramax	1,026,646	1,584,100	1996

APPENDIX C

Poster – *Kissing Jessica Stein*⁵

“A Delightful Comedy.”

ROBERT STONE, THE NEW YORK TIMES

KISSING jessica stein

A Funny,
Smart, Fresh
Look At Sex
And The
Single Girl.



⁵ Courtesy of The Internet Movie Database

APPENDIX D

For Your Consideration Ad – *Capote*⁶

FOR YOUR
CONSIDERATION

**BEST
PICTURE**
Producers
Caroline Baron
William Vince
Michael Ohoven

**BEST
DIRECTOR**
Bennett Miller

"A work of
considerable
beauty."
Daniel Mendelsohn,
THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS

capote

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

⁶ Variety Magazine; December 29, 2005

APPENDIX E

For Your Consideration Ad – *Transamerica*⁷


For your consideration
in all categories including

BEST ACTRESS
FELICITY HUFFMAN

WINNER
BEST ACTRESS
FELICITY HUFFMAN
TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER
BEST SCREENPLAY
DUNCAN TUCKER
DEANVILLE FILM FESTIVAL

WINNER
TOP 10 AUDIENCE
FAVORITE
CHICAGO IFFI FILM FESTIVAL

"FELICITY HUFFMAN
is simply remarkable,
so convincing,
fiercely funny
and deeply powerful
in her performance."
-PETE HAMMOND, MAXIM

TRANSAMERICA

IFC Films



THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

⁷ Variety Magazine; December 8, 2005

APPENDIX F

For Your Consideration Ad – *Brokeback Mountain*⁸

MAGNIFICENT

★★★★ UNMISSABLE AND UNFORGETTABLE.
 Hits you like a shot in the heart. This classic in the making ranks high on the list of the year's best movies. Ang Lee's filmmaking mastery has never been more evident. It's a landmark film and a triumph for Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal. Ledger's magnificent performance is an acting miracle. Anne Hathaway excels. Michelle Williams is a revelation.
 —Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE

**BROKEBACK
MOUNTAIN**

The New Film From Director Ang Lee

FOR UP TO THE MAXIMUM SURROUND SOUND EXPERIENCE
 Please check your receiver for DTS, Dolby Digital, and other

FOCUS
FEATURES

⁸ The Hollywood Reporter; December 1, 2005

APPENDIX G

For Your Consideration Ad – *Brokeback Mountain*⁹

MAGNIFICENT

★★★★. UNMISSABLE AND UNFORGETTABLE.
Was you like a shot in the heart. This classic in the making ranks high on the list of the year's best movies. Ang Lee's filmmaking mastery has never been more evident. It's a landmark film and a triumph for Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal. Ledger's magnificent performance is an acting miracle. Anne Hathaway excels. Michelle Williams is a revelation.
- Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE

**BROKEBACK
MOUNTAIN**
The New Film From Director Ang Lee

FOCUS
FEATURES

⁹ Variety Magazine; December 15, 2005

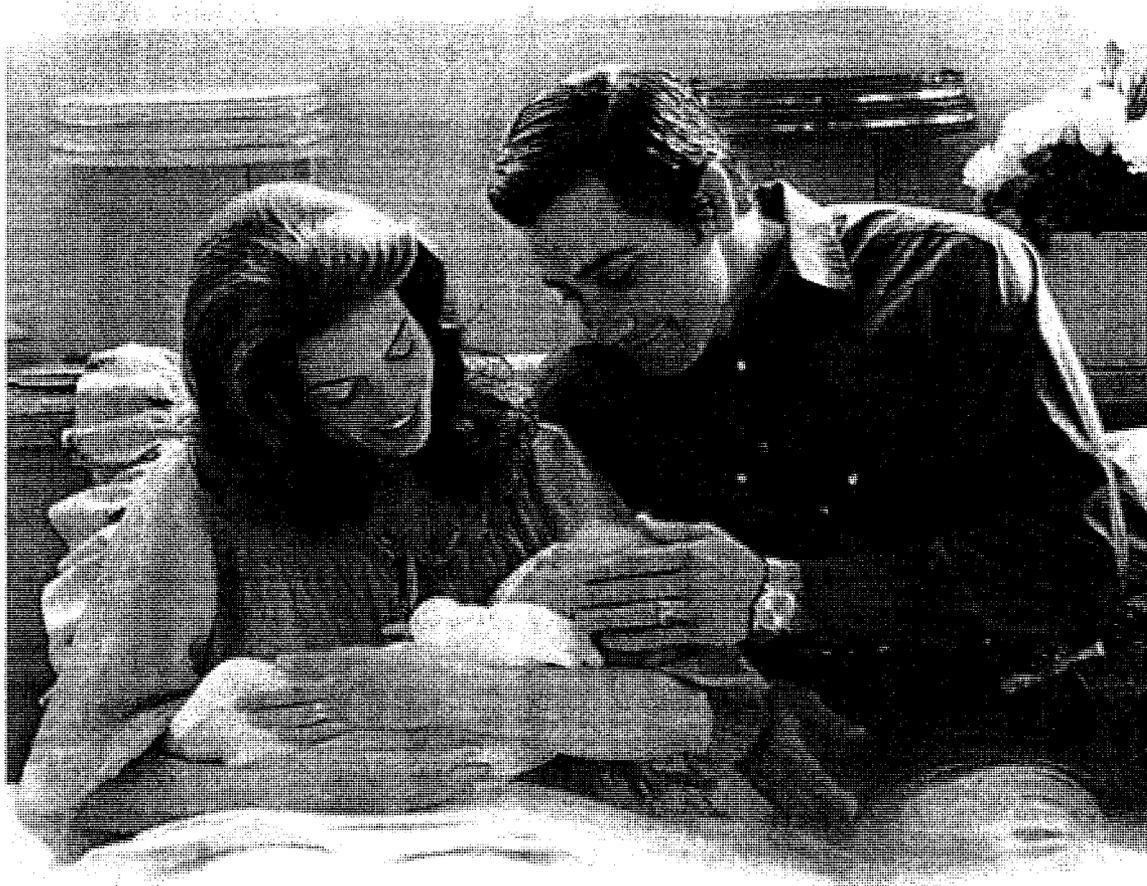
APPENDIX H

For Your Consideration Ad – *Brokeback Mountain*¹⁰**RAPTUROUS**

-ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

“★★★★. UNMISSABLE AND UNFORGETTABLE.**Hits you like a shot in the heart. This classic in the making ranks high on the list of the year's best movies. Ang Lee's filmmaking mastery has never been more evident.****It's a landmark film and a triumph for Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal. Anne Hathaway excels. Michelle Williams is a revelation.”**

- Peter Travers, ROLLING STONE

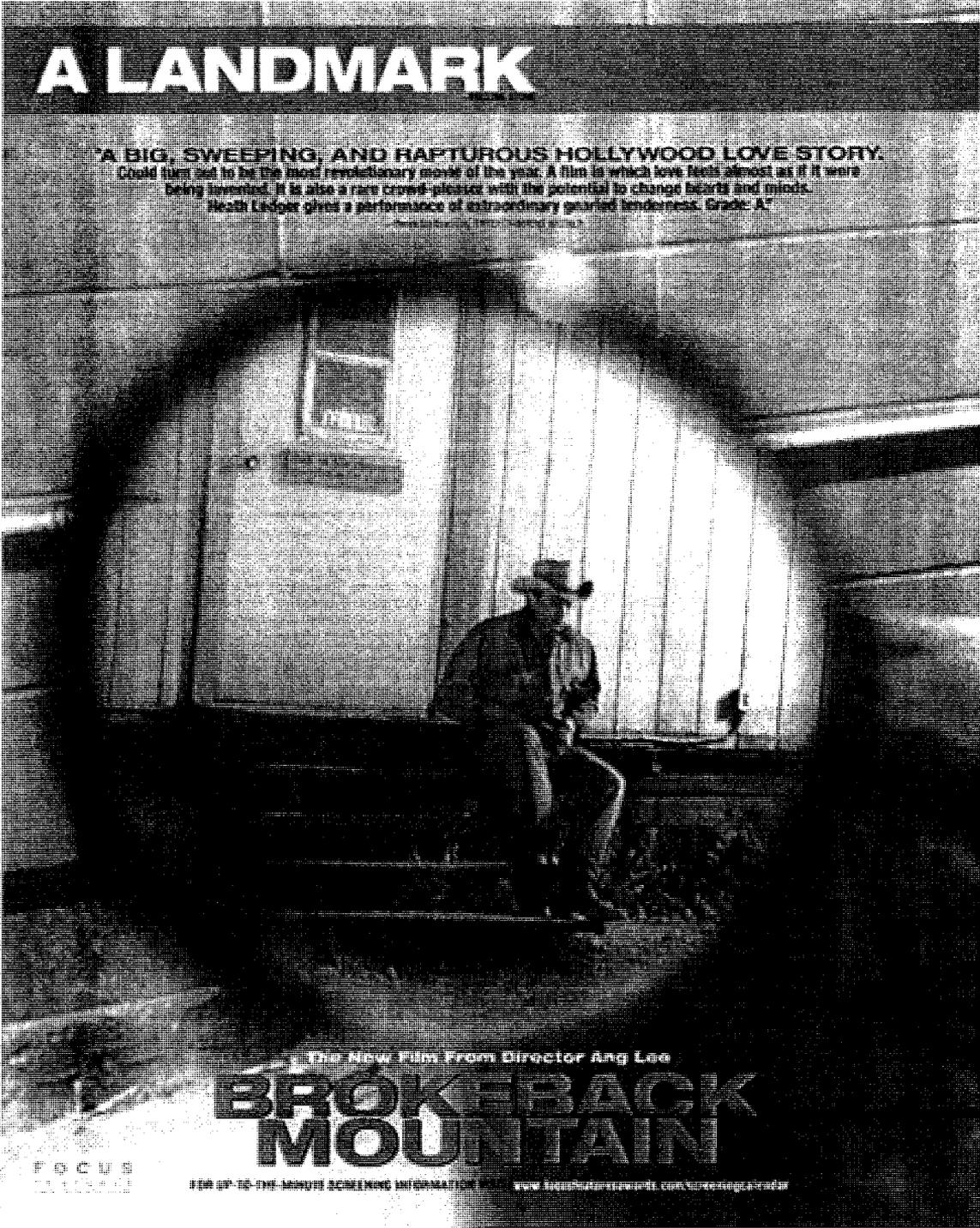
**BROKEBACK
MOUNTAIN**

The New Film From Director Ang Lee

FOR UP TO THE MOUNTAIN SCREENING AND MORE INFORMATION VISIT
www.brokebackmountain.com/screeningservice

FOCUS
PRESENTS¹⁰ The Hollywood Reporter; December 8, 2005

APPENDIX I

For Your Consideration Ad – *Brokeback Mountain*¹¹


A LANDMARK

A BIG, SWEEPING, AND RAPTUROUS HOLLYWOOD LOVE STORY.
 Could turn out to be the most revolutionary movie of the year. A film in which love feels almost as if it were
 being invented. It is also a rare crowd-pleaser with the potential to change hearts and minds.
 Heath Ledger gives a performance of extraordinary grained tenderness. Grade: A*

The New Film From Director Ang Lee

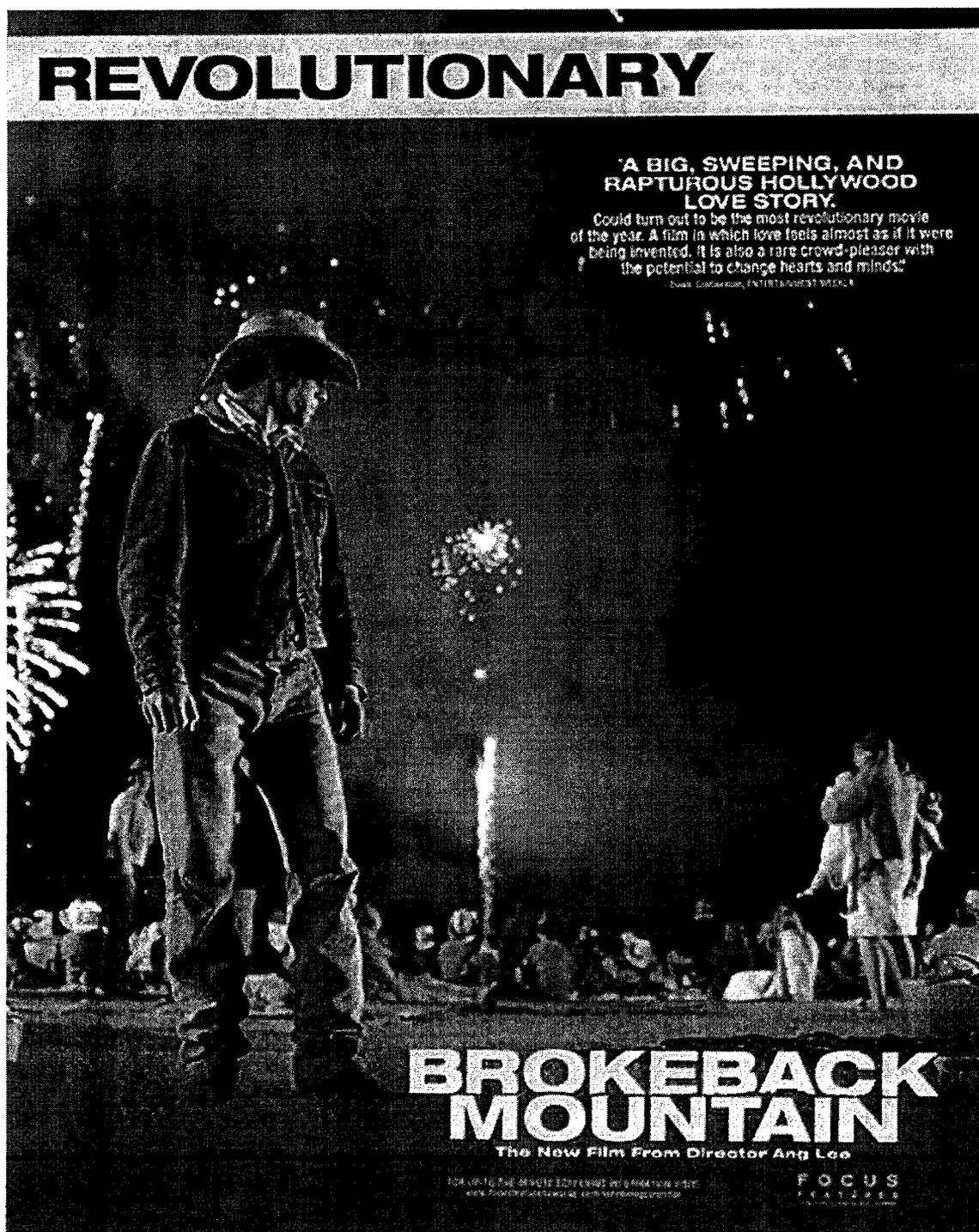
**BROKEBACK
MOUNTAIN**

FOCUS
ENTERTAINMENT

FOR UP-TO-THE-MINUTE SCREENING INFORMATION VISIT www.brokebackmountain.com OR www.fox.com

¹¹ Variety Magazine; December 29, 2005

APPENDIX J

For Your Consideration Ad – *Brokeback Mountain*¹²


REVOLUTIONARY

A BIG, SWEEPING, AND RAPTUROUS HOLLYWOOD LOVE STORY.
 Could turn out to be the most revolutionary movie of the year. A film in which love feels almost as if it were being invented. It is also a rare crowd-pleaser with the potential to change hearts and minds.
Dwan, CONFERENCE, ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN
 The New Film From Director Ang Lee

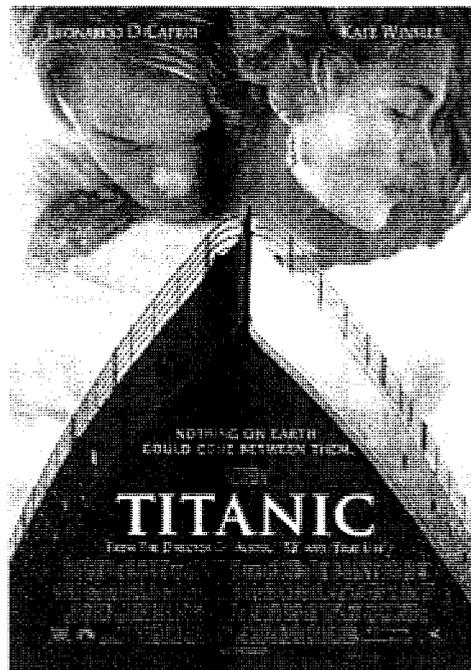
FOR UP TO THE MOST EXPENSIVE PERMANENT LIST
 WITH BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN, GO TO WWW.BROKEBACKMOUNTAIN.COM

FOCUS
 FEATURES

¹² Variety Magazine; December 8, 2005

APPENDIX K

Posters – *Brokeback Mountain* and *Titanic*¹³



¹³ Courtesy of The Internet Movie Database

APPENDIX L

Variety Thank You Ad – *Brokeback Mountain*¹⁴

FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2006 DAILY VARIETY VARIETY.COM

THANK YOU

Ang Lee, Annie Proulx, Diana Ossana, Lorry McMurtry, James Schamus, Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal, Michelle Williams, Anne Hathaway, Gus Santaolalla, Rodrigo Prieto, Geraldine Peroni, Dylan Tichenor, Focus Features, the entire cast & crew, and two people who don't even exist, Jack and Ennis.



Thank you for transforming countless lives through the most honored film of the year

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN

We agree with everyone who named *Brokeback Mountain*

BEST PICTURE

- British Academy of Film & Television Arts
- Venice Film Festival
- HFPA - Golden Globe Awards
- Film Independent - Spirit Awards
- Golden Satellite Awards
- Producers Guild of America
- Directors Guild of America - Best Director
- Writers Guild of America - Best Adapted Screenplay
- Broadcast Film Critics Association
- New York Film Critics Circle
- Los Angeles Film Critics
- British Film Institute - Sight & Sound
- London Film Critics
- San Francisco Film Critics
- Southeastern Film Critics
- Boston Film Critics
- Vancouver Film Critics
- Online Film and Television Assn.
- Cinephile Society
- Internet Entertainment Writers Assn.
- Florida Film Critics
- Dallas-Fort Worth Film Critics
- Las Vegas Film Critics
- Iowa Film Critics
- St. Louis Film Critics
- Utah Film Critics
- *an unprecedented consensus*

Donated by members and friends of the Ultimate Brokeback Forum, thousands of admirers from around the world, drawn together by the power of your film.

www.brokeback.davecullen.com

¹⁴ Variety Magazine; March 10, 2006